

Maine Justice for Children Task Force
June 15, 2021 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Via Zoom

Present: Hon. Valerie Stanfill, Chief Justice, Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Ellen Gorman, Associate Justice, Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Jed French, Chief Judge, Maine District Court; Hon. Rick Lawrence, Deputy Chief Judge, Maine District Court; Hon. Eric Mehnert, Chief Judge, Penobscot Nation; Caroline Jova, Family Division Manager, Maine Judicial Branch; Betsy Boardman, Child Protective and Juvenile Process Specialist, Maine Judicial Branch; Kaela Jalbert, Coordinator, Guardian ad Litem Services; Colin O'Neill, Associate Commissioner, Maine Department of Corrections; Mike Sauschuck, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Dr. Todd Landry, Director, Office of Child and Family Services; Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of Child Welfare Services, Office of Child and Family Services; Mary Bonauto, Attorney, GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders; Ariel Gannon, Assistant Attorney General; Clint Boothby, Parent Attorney; Kelly Dell'Aquila, Opportunity Alliance; Regina Phillips, Cross Cultural Community Services; Liam Shaw, Maine General; Francine Garland Stark, Executive Director, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence; Christine Alberi, Child Welfare Ombudsman; Debra Bader, Clinical Director, Office of Behavioral Health; Elizabeth Ward-Saxl, Executive Director, Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault; Esther Anne, ICWA Workgroup Facilitator, Youth, and Families Program; Heidi Aakjer, Assistant Director, Maine Children's Trust; Cassie Rodgers, GAL; Travis Bryant, Executive Director, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & Kinship Program; Justin Andrus, Interim Executive Director, MCILS; Cassie Rodgers, GAL; Andrea Mancuso, MCEDV; Julian Richter, Parent Attorney; Erika Bristol, Parent Attorney/GAL; Shawna Lund, Family Violence Project; Chris Northrop, Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic.

I. Welcome Hon. Valerie Stanfill, Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court

Introduction of Attendees

Minutes from March 2021 meeting approved.

II. Presentation by Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV): Review of the Homicide Report and Statewide Resources- Francine Garland Stark

1. Overview of resources and services:

- Review of member agency locations.
- MCEDV's work: public policy, training and technical assistance, administration and resource development, public awareness and outreach, membership support, and monitoring for quality assurance.

2. Data:

- 2020: 12,516 individuals contacted MCEDV.
- Services provided: individual advocacy, court/legal advocacy, child protective liaison services, support group, shelter, and transitional housing.

3. Domestic Homicide Review Panel Report:

- Women who are strangled are 750% more likely to be murdered, by the same partner, with a firearm.

- Perpetrator's suicidality is a consistent sign of lethal danger to victims of domestic abuse (and to the perpetrators themselves).
 - At least 50% of DV homicide perpetrators engaged in stalking behavior.
 - Practically none of the domestic homicide victims in Maine reached out for help. Connecting for help is key.
4. Suggestion that the Wabanaki Women's Coalition be invited to present at a future Justice for Children Task Force Meeting.

III. Updates

1. Judicial Branch: Hon. Jed French, Chief Judge, Maine District Court

- Judge Carrie Linthicum was recently appointed to the District Court in Aroostook County.
- **Pandemic update:**
 - Post-Pandemic Management Order (PPMO-SJC-1) was issued on June 1, 2021. The PPMO rescinded many of the PMOs that were in effect, including PMO-SJC-10, which governed child welfare proceedings.
 - Under PPMO-SJC-1, each Region will now create and implement schedules tailored to the needs of that Region.
 - Though the email filing of most documents is no longer permitted under PMO-SJC-3, certain documents, including GAL reports may still be emailed to the court.
- **PC filings:**
 - 2021: (January 1st to June 11th) 429 PC filings;
 - 2020: (January 1st to June 11th) 538 PC filings;
 - This represents a 20% decrease in filings as compared to the same time last year.
- **Maine CASA:** Maine CASA is currently accepting applications for the next (virtual) training from August 24-27th. Maine CASA also continues to host brown bag lunch sessions.
- **Maine Judicial Branch Child Welfare Conference:** There will be six National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA) trainings from August through October. There will also be a one-day plenary session. Details will follow.

2. An Organizational Update from the Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS - Dr. Todd A. Landry, Director & Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director

- **Family First:**
 - Maine was the first state in New England to submit a Family First Plan to Administration for Children and Families (ACF).
 - OCFS is hoping to receive approval this month from ACF with an expected implementation date of October 1, 2021.
- **Data update:**
 - Total children in DHHS custody:
 - Since the fall of 2020, there has been a steady reduction in the number of children in care.

- The reduction since fall 2020 is the first sustained reduction since 2018.
- Number of reports received of suspicions or concerns of child abuse and neglect:
 - Overall decrease in reports during the first six months of the pandemic.
 - Since then, reports have increased to comparable levels to past years.
- Achieving timely permanency continues to be a focus:
 - Focus on entries into and exit from care.
 - Permanency reviews occur at six months and for those children in care over two-years.
 - OCFS has been collaborating with the court and the AAGs Office to look at any barriers to permanency and identify solutions.
 - Structured decision-making tools are now used throughout the life of a case.
- Staff Reassignments:
 - Two program specialists looking at the intake process;
 - One permanency specialist;
 - One position focused on well-being including medical, dental, behavioral and mental health. This individual supervises two nurse positions.
- OCFS continues to work with Muskie to review its policies from a race and equity lens.

3. An Organizational Update from the Office of the Attorney General – Ariel Gannon, AAG

- New training developed by the Office of the Attorney General, DHHS, and Pine Tree Legal Assistance regarding protection from abuse proceedings used by families who are involved in a child welfare assessment.
- Training provides a deeper understanding of PFA, PFH, and FM legal standards, and prohibition on child hearsay.
- Training was provided to DHHS Region 5 caseworkers and supervisors and will be provided to other areas of the state in the coming months.
- They are exploring a direct referral process from DHHS to PTLA, exploring the implementation of team planning with PTLA before filing a PC petition, and the establishment of routine meetings with PTLA and other stakeholders to identify what is working well and where there may be gaps.

4. An Organizational Update from Maine Commission for Indigent Legal Services (MCILS) Justin Andrus

- Working on getting funding for a training program for parent attorneys.
- Julian Richter- recently founded the Maine Parental Rights Attorney Association (MPRAA).
 - Has 100 members.

- They are having monthly meetings to strategize based on noted areas of need for parents involved in the child welfare system. Additionally, MPRAA determines where to prioritize training for parent attorneys.

Strategic Plan Updates (11:20 a.m.-12:00 p.m.)

- **Parent Curriculum Workgroup Update:** Betsy Boardman
 - Parent curriculum for parents involved in the child welfare system.
 - Goal is to provide virtual trainings on various stakeholder roles, court process, and successful engagement in a child welfare case.
 - Parents as Partners will end due to funding changes. However, The Opportunity Alliance will continue to look into the possibility of housing the project.
 - Kelly will continue to work on the project at The Opportunity Alliance.
- **Race and Equity Data Collection Committee:** Mary Bonauto and Regina Phillips
 - **Context:** Race and Equity Data Collection Committee was formed to assess the demographic data information that is collected, how it is collected, what is missing, and how to address those gaps.
 - The Committee met twice since the last plenary session of the Task Force.
 - As a first step, committee members conducted a preliminary self-assessment.
 - After the initial assessment, the Committee discussed putting out a Request for Proposals (RFP) to hire a consultant to conduct an in-depth assessment and make recommendations to the Task Force.
 - **Committee findings and recommendations:**
 - **Recommendation #1:**
Based on the initial self-assessment, the R&E Committee recommends to that an RFP be issued in order to hire a data consultant to undertake this initial assessment of data points through the court system and the various agencies that interface with the child welfare system as it relates to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, income information or proxy for income, location, gender, and gender identity. The project manager will communicate with the R&E Committee throughout the process, as well as write a final report that includes findings of an assessment and recommendations.
 - **Recommendation #2:**
The RFP is currently in draft form and therefore, the R&E Committee asks that the final content of the RFP be at the discretion of the R&E Committee.
 - **Task Force vote:** unanimous vote to accept
- **Other:**
 - Task Force agreed to consider more training for its members, including further training on race and equity issues.
 - Format of future meetings – TBD.

ADJOURN (12:00 p.m.)