

Maine Justice for Children Task Force
March 16, 2021 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Via Zoom

Present: Hon. Andrew Mead, Acting Chief Justice, Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Ellen Gorman, Acting Senior Associate Justice, Maine Supreme Judicial Court; Hon. Jed French, Chief Judge, Maine District Court; Hon. Rick Lawrence, Deputy Chief Judge, Maine District Court; Katharine Wiltuck, Director of Court Process, Planning, and Services, Maine Judicial Branch; Caroline Jova, Family Division Manager, Maine Judicial Branch; Betsy Boardman, Child Protective and Juvenile Process Specialist; Kaela Jalbert, Coordinator, Guardian ad Litem Services; Jamie Brooks, Parent Partner, Parents as Partners; Elizabeth Ward-Saxl, Executive Director, Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault; Mike Sauschuck, Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Travis Bryant, Executive Director, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & Kinship Program; Clint Boothby, Parent Attorney; Bette Hoxie, Kinship Supervisor, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine; Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of Child Welfare Services, Office of Child and Family Services; Francine Stark, Executive Director, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence; Kelly Dell'Aquila, Opportunity Alliance; Liam Shaw, Maine General; Xi Chen, Assistant Attorney General, Office of the Attorney General; Christine Alberi, Child Welfare Ombudsman; Debra Bader, Clinical Director, Office of Behavioral Health; Nora Sosnoff, Chief of the Child Protection Division, Office of the Attorney General; Dr. Todd Landry, Director, Office of Child and Family Services; Page Nichols, Chief Innovation Officer, Department of Education; Rep. Rebecca Millet; Mary Bonauto, Attorney, GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders; Jill Ward, Maine Center for Juvenile Policy and Law, University of Maine School of Law; Colin O'Neill, Associate Commissioner, Maine Department of Corrections; Chelsea Peters, Parent Attorney and GAL; Heidi Aakjer, Assistant Director, Maine Children's Trust; Cassie Rodgers, GAL; Shawna Lund, Court and Advocacy Director, Family Violence Project; Mary Zmigrodski, Commissioner, Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services.

I. Welcome Hon. Andrew Mead, Acting Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court
Introductions of Attendees
Minutes from December 2020 meeting approved.

II. Updates

1. Judicial Branch: Hon. Andrew Mead, Acting Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court

- **PMO-SJC-10:** Promulgated in response to a stakeholder meeting hosted by the MJB on January 11, 2021. Of note, witnesses, GALs, and other nonparties can attend proceedings remotely, unless otherwise ordered by the court.
- Suggestions for court procedures in the Post-COVID world can be submitted to chiefjustice@courts.maine.gov.
- **Data update:**
 - The MJB's case management systems have fields for race and ethnicity.
 - The information is not currently docketed in child protective cases or family matters because it is not captured in court pleadings or court orders.

- Further conversations are needed about how the various systems capture these data points.
- 2. Organizational Update from the Judicial Branch: Hon. Jed French, Chief Judge of the District Court**
 - **Overview of PC filings to-date:**
 - 2020 and 2021 Statewide Filing Comparison from January 1st to March 5th:
 - **2020:** 245 statewide filings
 - **2021:** 162 statewide filings
 - **CASA/GAL Update:**
 - Next Maine CASA training is scheduled to run from March 23rd through March 26th.
 - Maine CASA launched a statewide advertising campaign in late 2020 and early 2021 which has generated a great deal of interest in the program.
 - Maine CASA continue to host brown bag lunch session. Sessions have been well attended.
 - Next GAL core training is scheduled for the week of March 29th. Applications for this training are currently being accepted.
 - **CIP Conference**
 - Training subcommittee met and expressed an interest in a skills-based training for this year's conference.
 - MJB is currently discussing the option of contracting with the National Institute for Trial Advocacy (NITA) to provide two, four-hour the next couple of months.
 - **Four new judges were recently sworn in:** Judges Churchill, Gilbert, Martemucci, and Langner.

3. An Organizational Update from the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS): Dr. Todd

A. Landry, Director, and Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director

- Review of the Annual Child Welfare Update Report, issued on December 2, 2020.
- Children's Behavioral Health report is also available on OCFS's website.
- Family First: (Maine's FFPSA Website: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/family-first-act.shtml>)
 - OCFS continues to take steps toward implementation.
 - Maine's plan was submitted to the Administration of Children and Families (ACF) on February 1, 2021. (Link to full plan: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/Maine%20Family%20First%20Prevention%20Services%20State%20Plan%20FINAL%202.1.2021.pdf>)
 - A one-page executive summary of the plan was provided to task force members.
 - ACF can reject, accept, or request modification of the proposed plan.
 - Tentative plan is to implement October 1, 2021.
- Focus on Permanency

- Number of Children in Care:
 - Beginning of 2020: 2,213
 - Currently: 2,197
 - Overall, steady, consistent trend of exiting children safely to permanency.
- New Reunification and Rehabilitation Plans are being built into the new case management system.
- Undergoing an internal permanency review process. Looking at children who have been in care six months to address permanency early on and children who have been in care 2+ years.
- Structured Decision-Making Tool has been implemented.
- Family team meeting practices: Returning to holding family team meetings prior to removal.
- Alternative Care Plans have been implemented.
- Family Visit Coaching Pilot: Currently happening in District 6.

4. An Organizational Update from the Office of the Attorney General – Nora Sosnoff, AAG, Chief of the Child Protection Division

- Child protection AAGs:
 - The AAGs office has a 1.5 position to do all appellate work in child protection division.
 - 2020: 55 new child protection appeals.
 - In the first two months of 2021, 19 appeals have been filed.
 - There are 23 litigation AAGs. They handle 2,200 children who are in DHHS custody and cases where the child has an extended care agreement.
 - Goal is to have 75 cases per AAG. However, each AAG carries 90-100 PC cases.
- Xi Chen, AAG: ICWA Update
 - Engaged in recruitment of qualified expert witnesses who would serve as expert witnesses for child rearing practices for tribes.
 - There has been collaboration with MJB and ICWA workgroup - allowing courtroom access and inviting ICWA workgroup to trainings.

5. An Organizational Update from the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services – Mary Zmigrodski, Commissioner

- MCILS is working on rules and requirements to demonstrate that bar members are in compliance with standards.
- Looking into various structures that allow for legal representation prior to a child protection petition being filed.
- There is a parent attorney and GAL attorney shortage statewide.
- Shortage of defense attorneys willing to take juvenile cases for juveniles in DHHS custody.

- MCILS recently held a minimum standards juvenile defense training with around 60 attendees.

III. Strategic Plan Updates

- **Website Housing Update: Bobbi Johnson and Betsy Boardman** -- The website is completed and now live. (<https://www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com/>)
- **Parent Curriculum Workgroup:**
 - Exploring the implementation of a two-year pilot project in Regions 1 and 2 for parents who have just become involved in the child welfare system.
 - Two-hour curriculum that would be held virtually two times per month.
 - Parents as Partners has outlined a curriculum. Topics may include an introduction to child welfare stakeholders, court events and timelines, and tips for being successful with child visitation and contact.
 - Biggest hurdle is funding but options are being explored.
 - The workgroup plans to have formal recommendations for the full Task Force next meeting.
- **Cross-Systems Discussion and New Strategic Planning Suggestions**
 - Court Improvement Program received additional funding for COVID-19 relief. Asking for suggestions from the Task Force for these funds.
 - Suggestions:
 - Upgrade courtroom microphones.
 - Technology for parents.
 - Task Force members recommended the creation of a committee to identify opportunities for better data collection on demographics of system involved families.
 - Discussed the possibility of investing CIP data funds to hire a consultant to lead the analysis and help develop recommendations.
 - Mary Bonauto and Regina Phillips designated as co-chairs of the committee.

ADJOURN