

The mission of MCWAP is to assure that the state system is meeting the safety, permanency, and well-being of children and families through assessment, research, advocacy and greater citizen involvement. Our goal is to promote child safety and quality services for children, youth and families.

Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel

June 4th, 2021 / 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.

Virtual: Meeting held over Zoom

Co-Chair: Bobbi Johnson

Co-Chair: Deb Dunlap

Panel Coordinator: Kathryn Brice

Minutes

9:00 a.m.- Welcome and Introductions

Virtual attendance: Esther Anne, Betsy Boardman, Chris Bicknell, Kathryn Brice, Jamie Brooks, Travis Bryant, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Lyn Carter, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Deb Dunlap, Jim Jacobs, Bobbi Johnson, Annette Macaluso, Ashley McAllister, Deb McSweeney, Tammy Roy, Kelly West, Erin Whitham

Approval of May Minutes: Members voted unanimously to approve the May minutes.

Addition to the Executive Committee: Members voted unanimously for Ahmen Cabral to join the Executive Committee.

Membership Updates: Jamie and Kelly D. were thanked for their work on the Panel through their roles affiliated with the Parents as Partners program, which will be coming to an end in June.

9:15 a.m.- New Business

NCRP Conference: Deb M. and Kathryn attended the two-day NCRP Conference hosted by Ohio and held virtually due to the pandemic. The conference kicked off with a keynote from Jeffery Van Deusen, the Deputy Director of the Office of Families and Children at the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, and participants had the opportunity to hear about Ohio's child welfare initiatives. Participants also heard from speakers in Michigan and California, attended focused workshops on various topics and had the opportunity to collaborate with members of other states' CRPs during breakout sessions.

Many of the conference's themes and discussions appeared to be closely related to the ongoing conversations in Maine, including a focus on kinship care, racial equity in child welfare, initiatives related to citizen involvement (including youth involvement) and advancing prevention services. Conference participants suggested that the group meet more frequently- quarterly, rather than annually- to discuss shared challenges or successes and be kept apprised of the work of CRPs in other states.

Following the conference, the organizers emailed participants a link with the agenda and materials from each presentation and workshop. This material can be found here:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1u1a2NRSC__w957YAyZj-mBZrVQvgBNAU.

Citizen Engagement: Members were reminded that a Citizen Engagement subcommittee was formed two years ago, but that group has since split off into other subcommittees. The Executive Committee is hoping that members will reconvene to continue concerted efforts to incorporate more citizen voice in the Panel's meetings and activities. Esther, Ahmen and Lyn volunteered; this group will meet outside of the MCWAP scheduled time.

Membership: The group discussed inviting a parent attorney and a GAL or CASA volunteer to join the Panel. Ideas were shared around how best to identify said individuals, including by tapping into the recently formed Child Welfare Parent Attorney group; inquiring at the monthly meetings held by OCFS for parent attorneys; asking Nora Sosnoff, Assistant Attorney General, Chief, Child Protection Division, if she might recommend someone; or inquiring at the Justice for Children Task Force, where parent attorneys and GALs participate as Panel members.

Citizen Input: In May, the CRP website received approximately 140 visits and a handful of contact form submissions were received by Kathryn and Tammy. While most of these submissions were spam, some of the inquiries were from citizens wishing to report abuse or neglect. In addition, one individual used the contact form to express their desire to share feedback with the Panel regarding their family's recent involvement with CPS. In response to these inquiries, the Executive Committee met to discuss how best to proceed. It was decided that when citizens are using the form to report concerns of abuse or neglect, Tammy (or Kathryn) will respond to the individual and forward their information to Intake to gather more information. In contrast, when a citizen reaches out to provide child welfare-specific feedback, the citizen co-chair would follow up with the individual.

With that, Deb reached out to the parent who wanted to share feedback and explained the role of the Panel as well as its charge. The parent, who wished to remain confidential, compiled a list of their higher-level systemic concerns and asked Deb to disseminate the information to the Panel for consideration. Once received, Deb worked to further deidentify the feedback shared and, once approved by the parent, it was sent to the Panel via email. Deb reminded Panel members that though the information was deidentified, the feedback should remain with this group only and not be discussed outside of this meeting.

Members noted that many of the concerns highlighted by the parent were in line with the themes the Panel is currently exploring, especially around citizen voice and family-focused policy and practice. The group emphasized the opportunity that the feedback provides to explore OCFS policy as it relates to caseworker practice; the Panel committed to furthering these discussions in their subcommittee breakout groups. Members discussed their shared vision of child welfare being a system that promotes child safety and family-focused policy, while consistently demonstrating respect and empathy for the families served.

The group considered the use of the website as a means of leveraging citizen voice and suggested including a statement on the website's contact form that expresses the Panel's interest in hearing feedback from the viewer. The nuances of doing so were also discussed, in that the feedback received would likely include a limited scope of perspective (for example, hearing the parent's perspective without an understanding of the child's needs, the reasons behind the caseworker's decisions, etc.). Members highlighted the importance of seeking information from a variety of sources- parent attorneys, GALs, youth, fathers, etc.- to promote a well-rounded balance of the feedback shared for Panel consideration.

The group discussed whether a case review would be helpful in this situation but noted that the Panel was given specific feedback to explore, not invited to review case files. Members also noted that much of the feedback received was around OCFS practice (correspondence from caseworkers, for example) and less about the specifics of the case. The issues raised also highlighted the responsibilities and gaps in the larger child welfare system, outside of CPS. Members expressed that the primary charge of this group is to identify gaps in the system, or between policy and practice, and make formal recommendations to the Department. With that, the group asked OCFS to review the case internally and provide a report back to the Panel, along with the policies related to the practice concerns raised in the feedback.

Survey: The Panel was reminded that the parent/provider surveys will need to be distributed soon. The Family-Centered Policy and Practice subcommittee will be working on this, along with the Executive Committee.

Moment of Silence: In honor of the 215 indigenous children whose remains were recently discovered in British Columbia, the Panel observed a moment of silence following a reading of a poem written by Abigail Echo-Hawk.

Workgroup Meetings:

1. Family-centered policy and practice

Present: Esther, Betsy, Lyn, Kelly D., Annette,

Absent: Lanelle, Andrea

The group reported that they spent their breakout time discussing the citizen feedback received through the website. They suggested that the Executive Committee reach out to this individual to thank them for sharing their experience, and to assure them that the Panel will be exploring the policy/practice concerns that were raised. The group also decided that they would meet again soon to go through the feedback more thoroughly; they may ask for the Department to comment on the policies surrounding the practice areas that were raised.

2. Effective communication/coordination for the care of children entering the system

Present: Ahmen, Deb,

Absent: Jim, Cindy, Marie

The group reported that they spoke about one of the workshop sessions offered at the NCRP conference, 'The Power of Youth Voice in CRPs'. Members will also be asking to meet with Gretel Crocket, the Child Welfare Program Manager who focuses on well-being, to discuss shared goals and opportunities for collaboration.

3. Father Engagement

Present: Chris, Jamie, Travis, Ashley, Kelly W., Erin

Absent: Jean, Libby

Members reported that they plan to continue to meet over the summer to organize the listening sessions with fathers. At their next meeting, they'll begin drafting questions and will continue their discussion around the sessions' facilitation. They are hoping that Kathryn or Tammy can join their meeting in July to talk about the budget for a facilitator. Bobbi reminded the group that OCFS has access to a neutral facilitator and suggested this might be a resource for the group.

OCFS Updates: Caseworkers, over the next few weeks, are being asked to gather medical records- including immunization records- for all children in care and enter the information in MACWIS. By July 1st, all resource parents should have an updated portable health record and immunization report for the youth that they are caring for. The expectation moving forward is that this information will be provided to resource families at the time of initial placement or during any placement changes. This information will also be recorded in the child case plan. The Department is considering taking a similar initiative in August/September for records related to education.

OCFS also continues to do work around ensuring that children in care are receiving vaccinations, especially as the religious or philosophical exemptions for school will no longer be applicable come September.

Miscellaneous: The Panel's next meeting will be held in person at the annual retreat in September. There, the Panel will discuss whether to continue to hold meetings virtually or in person, moving forward.

Members were encouraged to volunteer if they'd be interested in helping plan the retreat; Esther offered to help.

11:00 a.m.- Adjourn and Next Steps

Kathryn to send out google drive from NCRP conference.

Kathryn to send Betsy the data related to the website visits.

Kathryn to take next steps in inviting parent attorneys/GALs to join MCWAP.

Deb to send follow-up email to parent who shared feedback.

Next Panel Meeting: Annual September Retreat, Date/Location TBD