

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, case reviews, 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

Annual Retreat / September 17, 2021 / 9 am- 3 pm

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, Chris Bicknell, Betsy Boardman, Kathryn Brice, Travis Bryant, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Susan Denoncour, Deb Dunlap, Jim Jacobs, Bobbi Johnson, Todd Landry, Andrea Mancuso, Libby McCullum, Deb McSweeney, Tammy Roy, Erin Whitham

Members were welcomed to the retreat, which centered around the theme of 'citizen engagement'. Appreciation was shared for those who helped plan the day- Ahmen, Esther, Erin, Deb, Tammy, Bobbi and Kathryn- and a member led the Panel in a grounding meditation.

9:15 a.m.- Updates from OCFS and MCWAP

MCWAP

Members were notified of various membership updates, including new members (Susan Denoncour), changes to member's representation (Kelly Dell'Aquila, who will now serve as a citizen volunteer rather than a representative from an organization), and resignations (Lyn Carter, Debbie Dembski and Jean Youde).

The Panel learned that two additional people have reached out to the Panel and will be joining the October meeting as guests. As such, members discussed MCWAP procedures around both becoming a member as well as the process for resignations. The group discussed the value of having interested individuals participate as a guest for one meeting before being voted in as a full member. Members also brainstormed how to handle lack of participation and suggested that if a member misses three consecutive meetings (without providing notice of absence or resignation to the Executive Committee), they would be considered to no longer be serving on the Panel. The Executive Committee will draft updated bylaws around these topics and distribute to the Panel for review.

The Panel heard about two recent opportunities that the MCWAP co-chairs have had to publicly discuss the work of the Panel: at the end of the summer, Deb was asked to participate on Maine Calling to discuss the role of CRPs/MCWAP. Not long after that, the Government Oversight Committee invited representatives from each CRP (Deb D., Bobbi, Mark Moran (CDSIRP) and Betsy Boardman (the Task Force)) to join their September meeting and provide a "CRP 101" presentation. Deb and Bobbi agreed that this presented an opportunity to showcase the work and growth of MCWAP, while also discussing

the collaborative nature of the Panels and OCFS. A recording can be viewed here: [GOC Meetings | Maine State Legislature](#)

MCWAP's Executive Committee has since had the opportunity to consider the structure of the Executive Committee and wondered about the current practice of having the Panel co-chaired by an OCFS representative. The Executive Committee is proposing that the Panel instead have two citizen co-chairs. Should members vote in favor of this change, OCFS would still have representation in the Executive Committee. Members discussed how the Panel has been structured historically and agreed that it is paramount to build an independent citizen-led structure that prevails, regardless of who is filling the OCFS seat. The group also discussed oversight of the Panel's budget and the importance of keeping the website up to date.

Lastly, the Panel discussed the process for receiving citizen feedback. In addition to capturing feedback through the website and the parent/provider surveys, and in light of the child deaths that occurred in June, the Executive Committee is proposing that MCWAP host listening sessions for external stakeholders and citizens to understand what others are seeing, doing, and decipher how the Panel can best partner with them. Members shared that this presents a great opportunity to highlight the role that the system- rather than just the agency- plays in keeping children and families safe, but wondered if guests would be asked to join as Maine citizens or as identified representatives from their respective professional fields. The Panel agreed that the Executive Committee should continue to move forward with this initiative. Once the Executive Committee has considered the feedback already shared via email, the Panel will have the opportunity to vote on the product before it is finalized and distributed. The Panel highlighted the importance of having a solid process for when feedback is received, so that citizens can be certain that the information they are sharing will be considered in the Panel's work.

OCFS

See attached PowerPoint.

The Panel heard from Dr. Todd Landry, OCFS Director, and Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of Child Welfare, regarding various OCFS updates, including the system-wide efforts that the Department is engaged in.

Data was shared with the Panel about the annual totals of CPS reports, investigations (OCFS and those referred to the Alternative Resource Program) and youth in DHHS custody; the statewide and national trends in rates of children entering care, safety in foster care, children in congregate care settings, placement stability and child fatalities; and Maine rates regarding placement types and outcomes for youth exiting DHHS custody.

The Panel heard about OCFS' initiatives in partnering with Casey Family Programs and Collaborative Safety, LLC to provide systemic/case reviews related to the child deaths that occurred in June. Using a safety science model, Casey Family Programs and Collaborative Safety worked with the Department to analyze factors from five levels, district to federal, that impacted decision making in June's child death cases. The multifaceted process first involved reviewing case materials to identify learning points. Once established, the OCFS staff who were directly involved with the cases were invited to share more information about their experience for 'human factors debriefing'. From there, the process of 'systems mapping' was initiated, whereby other district staff and external stakeholders (those who were not involved in the case) were invited to provide insight into the system. This phase of review, which lasted 3 days, included members from all levels of OCFS (caseworkers, supervisors, Assistant Program

Administrators, Program Administrators, Regional Associate Directors, and the Associate Director), as well as law enforcement, staff from the Alternative Response Program, Maine's child welfare Ombudsman and a representative from the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA). Participants reported that they learned from the opportunity to participate in systems mapping- a structured, supportive process- and left with a greater understanding of the roles of each agency and the barriers they may face independently or in collaboration with one another. The group reported feeling hopeful, described the experience as positive, and expressed eagerness to receive the recommendations yielded by the process.

OCFS may consider making changes to the child welfare strategic priorities and improvement plans, based on the recommendations received. The strategic priorities currently include the creation of a Field Instruction Unit, efforts to update all OCFS child welfare policies, and planning and preparing for implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Plan.

10:50 a.m.- Break

11:00 a.m.- Panel Discussion following Dawnland Viewing

Members of Wabanaki REACH joined the Panel for a discussion of the Dawnland film, which MCWAP had been provided access to for the weeks ahead of the retreat. Guests included Heather Augustine, Penthea Burns, Alivia Moore and Martha Proulx.

The Panelists discussed their experiences of participating on the ICWA Workgroup and in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process. Guests considered the catalyst for the work, what it was like when the process began, how the group worked together to create a safe space to allow the tribal communities to share their stories, whether Truth and Reconciliation processes from other parts of the world influenced the work done in Maine, and how the information landed amongst child welfare workers.

MCWAP members had the opportunity to ask questions to the panelists and the group discussed the idea of connecting individual stories to demonstrate systemic patterns. Members talked about the types of support offered for the listening sessions and how the collected information was distributed back to the individuals who had shared their stories.

Lastly, the group highlighted that ICWA had recently been ruled unconstitutional in federal district court. Panelists shared that the best way to support ICWA was through education about the law, its history and its need, in addition to why it is the gold standard in child welfare policy and practice. To that end, the panelists shared the following resources:

Wabanaki REACH Upcoming Events: https://www.mainewabanakireach.org/upcoming_events

Dawnland Signals Radio Show: <https://archives.weru.org/category/dawnland-signals/>

12:00- p.m.- Lunch

12:30 p.m.- Capacity Building Center for Tribes Video

Panel members viewed Answer to Prayer: Creating a Truth Commission Process

1:00 p.m.- Group Discussion: Citizen Engagement/Lived Experience

Members were reminded that a Citizen Engagement Subcommittee had been formed several years ago and a plan was developed for outreach in communities; unfortunately, COVID-19 impacted the Panel's ability to do so. With that, the retreat presented a good opportunity to recenter the Panel around citizen engagement.

Members were encouraged to journal for a few minutes and consider the following question: What would you need (optimal conditions, assurances) for you to share your story? While responses were not shared, the Panel was encouraged to consider their answers as the group broke into workgroups to answer two questions:

- What structures and/or processes are there now- do we have in our organizations/communities- to lift up the lived experience of children and parents?
- What do we need to bring this lived experience to MCWAP to inform our work?

The breakout groups returned to the main session and each had a chance to share the discussions their groups had had, including: lack of parent/youth voice on the panel; stipends for volunteer members; how feedback is obtained from children and families directly, rather than professionals working with families; how the Panel uses information that we already have access to (for example, feedback about the child welfare that has been sought from different agencies or organizations); and how to promote engagement from those who want to share without requiring folks to participate on monthly Panel meetings.

The group concluded is that the Panel does have an infrastructure in some ways (AFFM exit survey, Young People's Caucus, etc.) to gather this information in settings where trust has already been fostered. Despite this, MCWAP currently lacks representation from certain citizen voices (for example, there are no parent or family members on the Panel since the end of the Parent Partner program and resignation of the other family representative). This presents the Panel with an opportunity for growth. Either way, members agreed that there should be an element of reciprocity when soliciting information from citizens- folks who are willing to share their experience with the child welfare system have the right to know how the information will be shared and who has access to the information. In addition, MCWAP needs to demonstrate a commitment and follow-through with considering the experiences of individuals involved in the child welfare system so that those sharing know that their stories have made an impact.

2:00 p.m.- Break

2:10 p.m.- Subcommittee Updates

Father Engagement

The subcommittee has had a busy summer planning the father engagement listening sessions, as outlined in the 2020 Panel recommendations ("to engage in a concerted and sustained effort to improve the Department's ability to effectively engage the fathers of children involved with OCFS"). The group, which is working in partnership with OCFS, has decided to hold 4 virtual, regionally focused listening sessions with 10-12 participants each. Members have identified several needs for the sessions, including skilled facilitation to inform the process for developing the group, holding the sessions, and reporting the findings- Welcome 2 Reality, a national leader in child welfare and father engagement, have drawn up a proposal for the group to consider. Additionally, the group is seeking expertise of professionals in intimate partner violence (IPV)/domestic violence (DV) given the prevalence of DV in child welfare cases. Lastly, the John T Gorman foundation has agreed to support a \$3000 grant so that stipends can be offered to the fathers who participate in the sessions. The group will be continuing to review the

proposal and budget and plans to continue working with OCFS and the Executive Committee to determine the best path forward.

Family Centered Policy and Practice

The group reported that they have had multiple meetings over the summer to plan for the upcoming mini training series that will be offered beginning in October. The first two trainings will be focused on effective interventions when responding to families impacted by domestic abuse and violence. In addition, members spent time over the summer writing a summary of the previous three-year survey results as well as editing the current survey questions as well.

Effective Communication/Coordination

Members shared that they made progress with reaching out to various people before the summer but are still lacking information about the details that would help them refine where they can be most effective. As such, a representative from OCFS will be joining the subcommittee ongoing to answer any questions the group might have about current practices.

2:40 p.m.- Panel's Next Steps

Surveys. Members were encouraged to send or resend the parent and provider surveys to their networks before the surveys close on October 15th. To date, there have been 83 respondents for the provider survey (with a 75% completion rate) and 29 parent/caregiver respondents with a 100% completion rate.

Upcoming Meetings. In October, the citizen engagement conversation will be moving forward, and the Panel will consider the feedback received through the Maine Citizen Review Panels website. In November, the results of the survey will have been collected and the Panel will spend the meeting reviewing the results and drafting recommendations. By December, recommendations must be finalized.

Annual Report. Members were reminded that a report writing subcommittee needs to be formed to help with writing the 2021 report. Libby offered to edit the report, and Esther offered to help write.

3:00 p.m.- Closing Remarks

Members were thanked for their participation in this year's virtual retreat.

Kathryn and Executive Committee: Edit bylaws to include language around Panel membership, both in joining and resigning.

Next Panel Meeting: Virtual Meeting, October 1st, 2021, 9 am.- 11 a.m.