

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

December 3rd, 2021 / 9 a.m.-11 a.m.

Virtual: Meeting held over Zoom

Co-Chairs: Ahmen Cabral; Deb Dunlap

Panel Coordinator: Kathryn Brice

Minutes

9:00 a.m.- Welcome and Introductions:

Virtual Attendance: Esther Anne, Senator Donna Bailey, Chris Bicknell, Betsy Boardman, Travis Bryant, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Debra Dunlap, Lanelle Freeman, Bobbi Johnson, Todd Landry, Andrea Mancuso, Ashley McAllister, Libby McCullum, Deb McSweeney, Julian Richter, Tammy Roy, Cindy Seekins, Erin Witham
Guest of the Panel: Sara Kinrade, OCFS

Approval of November Minutes: Unanimous vote to approve November minutes.

Co-Chair Nomination: The Panel voted 14-2 to accept the proposed changes to the Executive Committee bylaws. Deb Dunlap nominated Ahmen Cabral to take Bobbi's seat as co-chair of the Panel; unanimous vote in support of this.

9:30 a.m.- New Business

Debrief of Recommendation Process: Members discussed the need to clarify the distinction between recommendations and strategic plans for the Panel. Deb D. offered to send the results of the votes to members for review.

Report Writing: Deb D., Esther, Andrea and Ahmen offered to help with writing this year's report.

Survey Findings: The results were summarized in a document shared by Ahmen. Members noted that communication with families/parents was a theme that emerged from the parent surveys. Specifically, respondents of the survey reported that they did not consistently get clear explanations regarding the Department's involvement. Members suggested that this may be a topic for discussion with the judicial branch as well. The Panel wondered if it may be possible to change the timing of when information is delivered to parents- for example, rather than sharing information at the initial meeting with a family, it could be shared later in the process when the family may be more prepared to receive it.

The Panel was reminded that this survey will be re-administered in 3 years.

Workgroup Meetings:

1. Family-Centered policy and practice

Betsy, Kelly, Lanelle, Senator Bailey, Andrea

Absent: Annette, Christine, Susan

Members reported that they are continuing to work towards hosting 6 trainings. The group has already held one training- the intersection of child welfare, domestic violence and family law- and feedback from participants was favorable. The next training will be scheduled for the end of January and will cover a general introduction to the topic of domestic violence. The subcommittee also plans to host a third training in February related to working with survivors and is hoping to collaborate with Pine Tree Legal for this session.

2. Effective Communication/Coordination

Ahmen, Deb M., Esther, Julian

Absent: Jim

The group considered the Panel's website and wondered whether a summary of the survey results could be posted online. Members suggested that during the next round of surveys, MCWAP include information about where the results of the surveys will be posted. The group is also considering the use of an infographic, which they will continue to discuss in coming meetings.

3. Father Engagement

Ashley, Chris, Deb D., Erin, Bobbi, Tammy, Travis, Libby

Absent: Jean

The Father Engagement group is working on planning the listening sessions and has discussed extending their timeline from the end of January to the end of March. Members are hopeful that the extra time will allow for more thoughtful and effective recruitment of participants. Despite the extension, the group still plans to put forward findings and recommendations in time for inclusion in the CJA report that OCFS will complete in the spring. Members are hoping that a member of OCFS and a member of MCWAP will be able to participate in the listening sessions as well.

OCFS Updates: OCFS is proposing that an experienced staff member be delegated to each MCWAP workgroup moving forward. These staff would not sit on the Panel but would aid the workgroups as they continue in their efforts; Bobbi will also plan to attend workgroup meetings as possible.

Members were notified of the key findings identified in the work of Casey Family Programs and Collaborative Safety. These findings included the impact of the pandemic, staff turnover, OCFS timeframes, communication and coordination with providers and FTM coordination. OCFS has strategies in place to address many components of the findings identified.

OCFS is also working to build collaboration with partners statewide. For example, a meeting was held recently with staff from the Office of Behavioral Health to provide guidance around interacting with families involved with child protective services. In the coming week, OCFS will be meeting with the Maine State Police and the Maine Hospital Association to build joint protocols for when the three agencies are involved with a family, especially as it relates to information sharing. In addition, OCFS will be connecting with the OCME and the AAG's office to discuss sharing of information as well.

Lastly, the Department continues to examine its current policies and practices. Staff are being engaged to help improve standby/after-hours staffing, as well as additional areas of potential improvement, including the investigation process, timeframes and workloads. The FTM policy is being finalized shortly and will be provided to MCWAP.

11:00 a.m. – Adjourn and Next Steps

Deb D. to send out the tallies of votes for the recommendations.

Next Panel Meeting: Virtual Meeting, January 7th, 2022, 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.