

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

January 7th, 2022 / 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: Heidi Aakjer, Esther Anne, Donna Bailey, Betsy Boardman, Kathryn Brice, Travis Bryant, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Susan Denoncour, Deb Dunlap, Lanelle Freeman, Bobbi Johnson, Jim Jacobs, Todd Landry, Andrea Mancuso, Libby McCullum, Deb McSweeney, Kris Pitts, Erika Simonson, Erin Whitham

Membership Updates: The Executive Committee thanked the members who will be leaving MCWAP in the coming month, as well as the new members who are joining the Panel. The Executive Committee will be working on filling some critical roles on the Panel (law enforcement, adult mental health and substance use treatment services, etc.) and will be asking for the Panel's assistance in recruiting.

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

9:30 a.m.- New Business

Updates:

OPEGA. In the fall, representatives from each Citizen Review Panel were interviewed by members of the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) to provide information about the Panels, including how they collaborate with one another and interact with OCFS. Deb recently received a draft of the OPEGA report that was mostly redacted to read through MCWAP's section for accuracy. The next Government Oversight Committee meeting is scheduled for January 21st, around which time the finalized OPEGA report will be released. The hearing will be recorded and available to view online- Kathryn will send the link when it becomes available.

Stakeholder Sessions. At an earlier Panel meeting, members voted to convene stakeholder sessions to facilitate conversations about how the child welfare system, as a whole, is operating. A proposal was put forth to the Panel with a tentative guest list, and members provided feedback to the Executive Committee for consideration. Since then, the Panel shifted its focus to the recommendation process and writing the report. When those two tasks are completed, the Executive Committee will be considering next steps in the stakeholder sessions and reaching out to the Panel with updated information. Members were encouraged to email Kathryn if they were interested in participating in designing these sessions over the next few months.

Future Survey Design. The Executive Committee will be working to find an external evaluator who can look at the parent and provider surveys to bolster the next round of surveys both in content and in response rates. Members were encouraged to email Kathryn if they wish to be part of the work on this.

Workgroup Meetings: Subcommittees broke out into workout groups and then rejoined the full Panel. During committee reports, groups were asked to share highlights about their current activities, list the Panel members who participated today, and identify the level of OCFS participation that is needed.

1. Family-Centered policy and practice

*Andrea, Betsy, Sen. Bailey Erika, Heidi, Kelly, Lanelle, Susan
Absent: Annette, Christine*

The group is in the process of hosting a training series. The next training is scheduled for the end of January and will focus on the intersection of child welfare, domestic violence and best practices. Members would appreciate regular OCFS membership in this subcommittee, specifically from OCFS' training unit. In the interim the group will provide a detailed outline and summary to OCFS for feedback and input. The Parent Curriculum, a Justice for Children Taskforce initiative that has been informed by conversations in MCWAP, will be launching this month. This initiative provides 2x monthly information sessions for parents who are involved in the child welfare system; it is being delivered by former Parent Partners. Information includes pre-recorded videos by caseworkers, AAG, judge, GAL, and a parent attorney. The flyer has been distributed to the Panel.

2. Effective Communication/Coordination (and Citizen Engagement)

*Ahmen, Deb M., Esther, Kris, Jim
Absent: -*

Members of the Citizen Engagement subcommittee joined the Effective Communication and Coordination subcommittee to discuss how to utilize and communicate parent survey results. The group has created a one-page overview and will be sharing with the Panel when the draft is complete. Response rates were lower this year than the last time the survey was distributed, but themes are similar to previous results, including parents not fully understanding their rights or the child protective case process. The group discussed other questions that could be asked, as well as the presentation of information. The group also discussed ways that MCWAP can continue to gather citizen input, noting that both numbers and stories are important to understanding the full picture of family experience. It would be valuable to have an OCFS representative at meetings regularly.

3. Father Engagement

*Bobbi, Erin, Libby, Travis and guests Anthony, Karen, Saige
Absent: Ashley, Chris, Jean, Tammy*

The group was joined today by the consultants who are providing technical assistance for the upcoming listening sessions. The group has secured philanthropic funding to provide stipends to fathers who participate and is working on selecting dates for the sessions. Representatives from OCFS have been working collaboratively with this group and plan to continue doing so.

OCFS Updates: Bobbi Johnson, OCFS Associate Director of Child Welfare, provided the following updates to the Panel:

- The new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS), Katahdin, is rolling out this month. This system will include online reporting capacity for reports of child maltreatment from law enforcement, medical staff and schools, and a resource parent portal. The platform framework was designed to allow OCFS to build additional capacities over time, including a place for caseworkers and resource parents to connect.
- Following the work with Casey Family Programs and Collaborative Safety, OCFS is developing an internal safety science process. Eventually, the safety science process will likely intersect with the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel.
- Maine is part of the New England Association of Child Welfare Directors, where colleagues from across New England meet monthly to learn from and with each other (they met weekly during the early days of the pandemic). The topic of the last meeting was Family Engagement, and former Parent Partner and former MCWAP member Jamie Brooks accompanied Bobbi to the meeting. There are discussions about how to move forward with a new family engagement initiative in Maine. More to come on this.
- OCFS is reviewing the process Children's Emergency Services (CES)/after hours coverage on nights, weekends, and holidays. Child Welfare staff have participated in peer-to-peer meetings with staff from other states (Oklahoma, Connecticut, Ohio) to learn about how other states structure their coverage systems.
- OCFS believes that the responsibility for investigating reports of suspected child abuse and neglect belongs with the Department. The Alternative Response Program (ARP) contracts are scheduled to end on June 30, 2022. (They were originally scheduled to end in December 2021, but the deadline was extended by the legislature). One ARP recently gave notice of early closing, due to a 90% staff vacancy rate in the program. Ten additional casework lines have been added to OCFS to address the ARP workload; 8 of these 10 lines have already been filled, and 7 of these staff have begun working. The legislature allocated an additional 5 lines effective July 1, 2022. The current child protection caseworker vacancy rate is 8.8%.
- Bobbi provided updates on the Collaborative Safety/Casey Family Programs recommendations. OCFS is working to strengthen relationships between law enforcement, hospitals, and the medical examiner's office. The Regional Associate Directors (RADs) have been identified as point people with the OCME. OCFS staff recognize collaborating strengthens their ability to make informed decisions and been working with staff from the Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) to develop discuss a guidance document to share with providers regarding how to most effectively collaborate with OCFS to serve families involved with child welfare.
- The new Family Team Meeting policy was finalized in November, and OCFS will be training staff through February. OCFS is also developing a webinar for community stakeholders on this topic.
- A workgroup that includes OCFS staff and the Ombudsman's office are examining investigation timeframes and looking for ways to eliminate unnecessary, redundant tasks. This process includes a scan of other state investigation processes.
- OCFS staff have been busy preparing and presenting reports. This month includes the Annual Child Protection Report; a Children's Behavioral Health Report; Responses to the Ombudsman's Report and MCWAP's recommendations; a workload report; and the Family First Prevention Services Act Report.

- Maine's Performance Improvement Plan (PIP) for the federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) continues to be implemented and all but two of the key activities have been completed. Due to the pandemic, OCFS was recently granted an extension through January 2024 to achieve the goals established in the PIP Measurement Plan.

11:00 a.m. – Adjourn and Next Steps

Kathryn to send GOC meeting link out ahead of 01/21 meeting.

Next Panel Meeting: Virtual Meeting, February 4th, 2022, 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.