*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**

**March 4th, 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, Betsy Boardman, Kathryn Brice, Travis Bryant, Ahmen Cabral, Adrienne Carmack, Kelly Dell’Aquila, Susan Denoncour, Deb Dunlap, Lanelle Freeman, Ariel Gannon, Jim Jacobs, Bobbi Johnson, Todd Landry, Andrea Mancuso, Libby McCullum, Deb McSweeney, Kris Pitts, Julian Richter, Erika Simonson, Erin Whitham

**9:30 a.m.- Standing Agenda Items**

Confidentiality Statement: Given that MCWAP meetings are public- anyone can reach out to join as a guest- the Panel will no longer be asking its members to sign a confidentiality statement. If there’s a need for meeting confidentiality in the future, the Executive Committee will reassess then.

Panels Website: The MCWAP meeting schedule has been posted to the website with a prompt to contact the Panel Coordinator should they wish to join a future meeting as a guest of the Panel. The 2021 Parent Survey Summary has also been posted to the website in the ‘Documents’ tab.

January and February Minutes: Unanimous vote to approve January and February minutes.

**9:20 a.m.- New Business**

OCFS- Engaging with Families: In the 2021 Parent Survey, 72% of respondents reported that their rights *were not* fully and clearly explained by the caseworker who did the removal, while 64% of respondents reported that their rights *were* clearly and fully explained to them by their attorneys. While the group has acknowledged that the sample size for the survey was small- the data above was obtained from 11 respondents- MCWAP and OCFS have agreed to further explore the topic of when and how information is communicated to families working with Child Protective Services (CPS). With that, the Panel heard from Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of Child Welfare, regarding family engagement throughout the CPS process. *See attached PowerPoint*.

Information was shared with the Panel about how initial contact is made with families at the start of an investigation, including how and when a family is notified that a report has been received, who is interviewed and how home observations take place. The Panel also learned about the three pamphlets that parents are provided during their first meeting with a caseworker: *Child Welfare Practice Model*; *Maine Cares About Children and Their Families: A Guide to Child Protective Services*; and *Child Welfare Ombudsman Program*.

Additionally, members heard about how OCFS maintains regular contact and engagement with families throughout permanency cases. Specifically, three core permanency activities were identified as opportunities for caseworkers and families to partner, including during monthly caseworker contacts, at Family Team Meetings, and during case planning sessions (where Prevention Service Plans or Rehabilitation and Reunification Plans are developed). Lastly, members learned about how family engagement is supported in OCFS trainings and policies, many of which have recently been updated.

Following the presentation, the Panel participated in a discussion with OCFS about family engagement. The group learned more about the efforts that have taken place recently to collaborate with Public Health Nursing (PHN) around referrals for services, especially when a report was made to CPS that was screened out (deemed to not be appropriate for investigation). Dr. Carmack, Medical Director for OCFS, also described the collaboration between OCFS, the healthcare community, WIC, CDS, and other agencies, as the state has rolled out its Plans of Safe Care for infants born substance exposed. The group discussed two recently piloted programs, both which centered around building access to the visitation services available to families, statewide.

Members noted that there seems to be a discrepancy between the information that is presented to parents, and parents’ self-reports of the information that had been presented to them. The group recognized that families may have a strong emotional reaction to CPS becoming involved, which may prevent them from understanding and retaining information that is being delivered. Additionally, while pamphlets provide families with written information, literacy challenges might present a barrier to the family’s ability to understand the information contained in the pamphlets. Lastly, members highlighted that CPS is just one part of a very complex system of agencies that might be working with a family concurrently (law enforcement, the courts, etc.); parents may struggle to navigate the system as it relates to understanding each agency’s distinct roles, responsibilities and processes.

The Panel also considered how CPS staff engage with service providers. Members discussed the expectation that caseworkers invite providers to FTMs, highlighting the recently updated FTM policy and the newly created Collaboration Policy. OCFS discussed the ongoing efforts the Department has taken to encourage supervisors to work with caseworkers in building each family’s team. The Panel noted that providers and OCFS should collectively serve families, which ultimately requires interagency knowledge of community resources and the CPS process.

While members discussed the benefit to providers understanding the CPS process, the Panel also noted that a degree of risk is introduced if service providers are expected to provide clients with opinions about how their case should be handled by CPS or the court. The group again circled back to building a comprehensive team to participate in FTMs, which would allow for parents, their providers and their children (when appropriate) to hear information first-hand about the progression of a case.

Ultimately, a group of members (see below) volunteered to meet outside of Panel meeting time to continue the conversation had today and to consider the ideas that had been suggested thus far:

* Improvement of future Parent Survey
  + Define “understanding”
  + Gather more robust information about when parents feel that they have a better comprehension of the CPS process, in addition to exploring who delivered that information to them
* Include information related to appealing OCFS decisions in CPS pamphlets
* Designation of a peer support role that families may be offered at the earliest intersection of CPS involvement (as opposed to waiting for legal representation, at which point a removal may have already taken place)
* Creation of general FAQ videos that could be posted to the OCFS website for parents and providers to view as questions arise

*Volunteer Group: Andrea, Bobbi, Deb M., Erika, Julian, Libby*

MCWAP- Panel Tasks/Subcommittee Work: The Executive Committee will be sending out a survey about the format of MCWAP meetings, specifically as it relates to the balance between full group discussions and subcommittee work. Members will receive this poll via email in the coming weeks.

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, Erika, Heidi, Susan*

*Absent: Annette, Christine, Kelly, Lanelle*

The group spent the breakout session discussing their purpose and the work they’ve done so far, as a few new members had joined. The subcommittee is looking to host their third training in May. Members also discussed having a formal process for the subcommittee to review OCFS policy changes as a group, rather than individually.

1. **Effective Communication/Coordination**

*Ahmen, Andrea, Bobbi, Deb M., Jim, Julian, Kris*

*Absent: -*

The subcommittee discussed the FTM process and how improvements could be made, including returning to a facilitated model. The group explored how communication is understood by clients, and how the messages they receive can be better presented both in FTMs and outside of meetings.

1. **Father Engagement**

*Erin, Libby, Tammy, Travis and guests Chris Bicknell, Karen Wyman and Saige Weeks*

*Absent: Ashley, Jean*

The group identified that they have struggled with identifying fathers interested in participating in the proposed listening sessions. Members strategized how to overcome these barriers, including brainstorming additional organizations to reach out to in order to distribute the information, posting more information about the sessions on social media, and posting the flier to the ME CRP website. Erin plans to email the full Panel asking members to share contact information for partners or community providers who might be willing to share the fliers.

**11:00 a.m. – Adjourn and Next Steps**

**Next Panel Meeting: Virtual Meeting, April 1st, 2022, 9 a.m.- 11 a.m.**