

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

October 7, 2022; 9 a.m.11 a.m.

Co-Chairs: Ahmen Cabral; Deb Dunlap

Panel Coordinator: Jenna Joeckel

Minutes

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

Attendance: Ahmen Cabral, Tammy Roy, Debra Dunlap, Susan Denoncour, Betsy Boardman, Erika Simonson, Libby McCullum, Senator Donna Bailey, Maura Keaveney, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Adrienne Carmack, Julia Casey, Heidi Aaker, Jenna Joeckel, Todd Landry, Bobbi Johnson, Erin Clough, Ashley McAllister

9:10 a.m. – MCWAP Housekeeping Items

Opening Statement: Members shared the opening statement

We are a federally mandated group of professionals and private citizens who are responsible for determining whether state and local agencies are effectively discharging child protective and child welfare responsibilities. The mission of the panel 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. Each of us brings to this table a different set of experiences and opinions. Every voice is valued, and all perspectives are needed. Our shared goal is to promote child safety and quality services for children, youth, and families. This is the task to which we continually commit ourselves, and we hold our relationships in trust.

September Minutes: Unanimous vote to approve September minutes.

Co- Chair Discussion: Current bylaws indicate that the term for the co-chair is a 3-year term; therefore, one of the current chair's terms would end in November. This co- chair is willing to continue in the chair role until a vote can take place on the revised bylaws. A motion was made to extend the co-chair role until December 2022. Unanimous vote to extend the current co-chair role until December 2022.

Bylaw Discussion: Bylaw revision is underway and will be completed before the November meeting. Bylaws will be received by panel members prior to the November meeting for review so voting can take place at the meeting.

9:20 a.m. – Retreat Follow Up

The panel discussed the incorporation of the grounding exercise being uniting and applicable to the work that the panel is doing. The panel members appreciated the transparency and honesty during the meeting and shared an appreciation for the rich dialogue, with great information from participants. Participants felt like they walked away with a lot of information. Members shared the value of coming together in person as this provided connection and meaning versus being online where there tends to be more caution about the online presence because body language and tone are more challenging to interpret over the screen. It can also be more challenging to start communication on an online platform .

The panel discussed the outcome of the recommendation voting. There was a total of 16 votes cast. Three recommendations received 15 votes and the others received 16 votes. The recommendations will move forward and will be incorporated into the annual report. If there are volunteers from the panel that would be willing to support with report writing, those members can contact the panel coordinator. The same group of volunteers have participated in the report writing subcommittee over the past few years, and additional panel members are encouraged to participate.

The Health and Human Services Committee of the legislature has requested to receive the recommendations after the full panel approved by vote, prior to the annual report being issued in January 2023. Members discussed concerns about the recommendations being shared with the public prior to the report being posted and available to the public. Clarification was provided about the request from the legislative committee, and it was noted that MCWAP information from meetings is available to the public. The MCWAP minutes are posted to the Maine Child Welfare Citizen Review Panel website. The website can be found here: <https://www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com/>

Panel members discussed the need for subcommittees based on the panel recommendations. A recommendation was made to include Family Team Meetings in subcommittees. Family Team Meetings ties into Family Centered Practice and can be included in that subcommittee work. Family Centered Practice can also continue to engage in supporting the development on policy and practice. Additionally, during the retreat, the Father Engagement subcommittee expressed motivation to continue. Based on the recommendations of the panel, there is also an opportunity for a Lived Experience Training subcommittee which focuses on trauma training. The subcommittee would involve research and coordination to determine a training that can be utilized as a new resource. A decision was made to end the Effective Communication subcommittee as it consists of a small group of members and many of the topics discussed are woven into other committees.

Based on the panel discussion, the subcommittees for the panel meeting were as follows:

Lived Experience Training

Family Centered Policy & Practice

10:00 a.m. – Citizen Feedback Discussion

The panel discussed citizen feedback that was received in August, the response, and the process with which the panel responds to feedback. The panel co-chair and another executive committee member were able to connect with the citizen in September and defined the role of MCWAP during that time. Members reflected on the Commission for the Prepetition Legal Representation and the benefits that it will provide to families. Members also discussed reoccurring themes that emerge when engaging with individuals who are survivors of domestic violence and have been involved in the child welfare system. These themes include: feeling lost in the system, challenges in navigating the child welfare system, and the need for referrals to local providers. Members shared the importance of continuing to impact ongoing policy changes and the need to examine and support practice as well.

Members discussed the possible avenues of support available to families if they are concerned about their child welfare involvement. Representatives from OCFS shared that there are multiple avenues that a family can seek support including the constituent process, utilizing their attorneys, and the Ombudsman's office. OCFS and the Ombudsman are not in a position to give legal advice to the families that they are working with but are in a position to provide education on policy, practice, and resources

when needed. It is important to remember to look at each case through all lenses when determining what the best support is.

10:30 a.m. - 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

Ahmen, Ashley, Betsy, Donna, Erika, Heidi, Julia, Kelly, Libby, Maura, Susan, Tammy

The group spent the breakout session discussing 2021/2022 recommendations and started a document of a watchlist:

2021- Family team meeting

review the commission report on prepetition filing – making sure feedback is provided

2022- close examination of report of expenditures on contingency report and looking at items for system improvement

Reviewing policy to access contingency fund

2022 family team meetings

Next Steps: Facilitate a conversation with the citizen engagement subcommittee and share with the full panel.

2. Lived Training Experience

No one joined- meeting will be set up another time

2:50 p.m. Panel's Next Steps

Executive committee will discuss and come back with suggestions for breakout groups including involvement in multiple groups and possible panel meeting format changes.

3:00 p.m. – Adjourn

Next Panel Meeting: November 4, 2022, 9a.m. -11a.m.