

*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**

**November 4, 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: Deb Dunlap, Ahmen Cabral, Senator Donna Bailey, Erika Simonson, Adrienne Carmack, Bobbi Johnson, Debra McSweeney, Heidi Aakjer, Melissa Martin, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Libby McCullum, Maura Keaveney, Travis Bryant, Betsy Boardman, Julian Richter

\*Guest of the panel- Amelya Tibbets

#### **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.

October Minutes: Unanimous vote to approve October minutes.

Subcommittees: Historically, there have been three subcommittees. Last month, all panel members attended the Family Centered Policy and Practice Subcommittee. The Lived Experience subcommittee met November 3, 2022 and is scheduled for a follow up meeting on 11/28/2022 from 2PM to 3 PM. The Citizen Engagement Committee met in October. Citizen Engagement will focus on the parent and provider surveys. Historically, they have been focused on the parent survey and have added the provider survey. Members will determine which subcommittees they would like to participate in and contact the panel coordinator with their selections.

#### **9:20 a.m. - Updated Panel Meeting Format:**

The panel discussed the national movements and research related to child welfare. Panel members acknowledged that ideas shared with each other may express the diverse opinions of the various members. Members discussed the importance of acknowledging the national conversations that are taking place and how these conversations are being integrated into child welfare. OCFS shared the perspective from a child welfare professional role and reflected on the best intention that staff have to

support children and families. An example of a historical practice shift that is shared with new caseworkers is the transition from “team meetings” to “family team meetings” where family voice is respected and honored. This past year in particular has provided several opportunities for learning. OCFS, like other organizations implements best practice given the knowledge in the field at the time. One way to build solutions is by building them together (OCFS, individuals with lived experience and community partners). Members appreciate the diversity and perspectives within the panel and are mindful of the spotlight that the national movements have created on child welfare staff. Members agreed to have grace with one another. There are opportunities to have rich dialogue. Members appreciate each other’s work, perspectives, and collaboration. Additionally, members discussed challenges around systemic advocacy and having a counter voice for OCFS. Members discussed bias in the system based on the population that they are working with. For example, when a member is working with infants, there is often more advocacy from the infant’s perspective. There are many entities that advocate for different members of the family unit based on the work they are doing. Members discussed the challenges in ensuring all family members are a priority when involved with the child welfare system. Members discussed the need for the focus of community partners to be on communication to ensure child-centered goals are being acknowledged as well. There continues to be opportunity for growth and skill building over time. Advocacy from community partners and panel members is always appreciated within the child welfare system.

Members continued to discuss the overall need to take a community approach when addressing the safety of children. Members questioned how information gained from the community can be used to influence decision making. There is an emphasis on the importance of youth voice and knowing what the requirements are for their medical and well-being needs. Concerns were shared about some community partners not following through with provider recommendations. Members discussed the importance of continued resource sharing and the panel’s ability to have ongoing, productive conversation around tension points to build solutions. Resources can be sent to Executive Committee, which includes Debra Dunlap, Ahmen Cabral, Bobbi Johnson, Betsy Boardman, Deb McSweeney, Andrea Mancuso, and Jenna Joeckel.

#### **10:00 a.m. – FTM Topic Brainstorm**

Family Team Meetings continue to be a theme that interests panel members. A decision was made to have a larger group discussion regarding family team meetings.

Recommendation: MCWAP should examine the policies, procedures, and practices of Family Team Meetings. This should include partnering with OCFS to evaluate the extent to which FTMs are effectively engaging families and improving their ability to respond to the requirements of the rehabilitation and reunification plan. As part of this study, OCFS should develop and distribute post-FTM surveys to participants and develop the infrastructure for that data to be collected and accessible in the aggregate.

Panel members engaged in a discussion about the Family Team Meeting process. Members agree that the Family Team Meeting policy is strong, but practice does not always match the policy. Members are unsure if this due to a knowledge gap or procedural drift. Members agree that the content of the Family Team Meetings needs to focus more on substantive information including parent progress, child needs and services, and progress towards reunification. Members shared experiences in Family Team Meetings when more time has been spent on creating ground rules than discussion of needs and goals, and this has impacted the family’s ability to make decisions during the meeting. Decision makers should be present at Family Team Meetings so forward progression can continue in a case and team members feel that their time is valued by participation.

Additionally, members discussed the need for children to be present at Family Team Meetings. Children have a voice and when appropriate, that voice should be included. Members have observed recent meetings that have not included child voice and would like to have data about how many children attend, who gets invited to the meetings, and how they are invited. Furthermore, when a child is not able to be present in person, there are ways that the youth can be represented at the meeting including pictures and videos.

Members discussed how solutions can be built that will promote child welfare staff to utilize different strategies within the meeting to make it a productive meeting. Historically, OCFS has implemented different FTM models including Teaming and Facilitated Family Team Meetings. Facilitated Family Team Meetings were helpful, although due to limited staff resources, this practice ended. There was also a concern that facilitations skills varied across the state due to a lack of experience facilitating meetings. Members considered the availability of an alternative skills-based model including exploring models that other states are implementing. Members expressed an interest in exploring whether the judicial process could support the Family Team Meeting process. There is currently no judicial intervention related to FTM. Members questions whether this could be a role for the courts to pursue.

Members discussed the role the agenda plays in the family team meeting prep process. There is an existing agenda, and members would like to more information about the agenda. Members recognize the importance of prep work and how it relates to the work that is completed during monthly contacts between family members and child welfare staff. It is the responsibility of child welfare staff to talk about what the parents have not done in an effort to remove barriers to promote reunification, both in monthly contacts with the family and in Family Team Meetings. Members expressed an interest in the continued exploration of how child welfare staff interpret the agenda, how staff are trained to facilitate, and examining the prioritization of quality vs quantity of FTMs.

#### **10:50 a.m. – Bylaw Discussion**

Members engaged in a discussion about the pending By-laws. The proposed membership term in the By-laws is 4 years with the possibility to serve additional terms. Members discussed utilizing an application process for membership moving forward. Members also discussed the need to have a quick process to determine who is representing which role within the panel. Members are encouraged to email the panel coordinator with ideas. To serve on the Executive Committee, requirements include 2 years of experience on the MCWAP panel. Outstanding questions related to serving on Executive Committee include the process that will take place if more than one member is interested in serving on the Executive Committee and if those members are allowed to campaign for that seat. The Executive Committee will discuss these questions during executive session.

A suggestion was made for OCFS and the panel to seek legal advice from the AG's office related to citizen feedback and the mechanism used to take input back to the citizen. This will also continue to be explored and shared with the full panel after information is received.

A suggestion was made to consider adding remote options for attendance at meetings to the By-laws due to accessibility and the impact the remote options may have on a member's ability to commit to the Panel.

#### **11:00 AM p.m. – Adjourn**

**Next Panel Meeting: December 2, 2022, 9a.m. - 11a.m.**