

# Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel Quarterly Report

Report to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

June 8, 2022

Resolved: That the child welfare advisory panel...shall submit reports to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over health and human services matters at least every 3 months beginning in June 2022 and until June 30, 2024. Any presentations of the reports to the committee must be presented by the citizen members of the panels to the extent possible. Each quarterly report must contain, at minimum, the following:

1. A summary of generalized and anonymized observations in the prior 3-month period regarding efforts by the Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services to improve the child welfare system
2. A summary of the collaboration between the advisory panel and the review panel as well as the Justice for Children Task Force established in 2006 that reports to the Supreme Judicial Court; and
3. Any recommendations on how to further protect the State's children through Department of Health and Human Services policy and rulemaking and through legislation.

Summary of the  
collaboration  
between MCWAP,  
the Child Death and  
Serious Injury  
Review Panel, and  
the Justice for  
Children Task Force

- Joint CRP Chair meetings 1/24/22 and 4/25/22
- Shared reports via email across CRPs with all members as they were released
- MCWAP presented annual report at Justice for Children Task Force meeting on 3/15/22 and at CDSIRP meeting on 6/3/22
- CDSIRP presented annual report at MCWAP meeting on 5/6/22
- Justice for Children Task Force presented annual report at MCWAP meeting 6/3/22

Summary of  
observations in the  
prior 3-month  
period regarding  
efforts by DHHS-  
OCFS to improve  
the child welfare  
system

**March 2022:** Panel reviewed when and how information is communicated to parents working with Child Protective Services about their rights and responsibilities during their case.

**Panel Observations:** Importance of addressing parent comprehension barriers; need to develop strong Family Team Meetings for ongoing communication.

**OCFS Efforts:** OCFS and Panel members formed a group to continue the conversation about ways to improve family information sharing processes.

Summary of  
observations in the  
prior 3-month  
period regarding  
efforts by DHHS-  
OCFS to improve  
the child welfare  
system

**April 2022:** Panel reviewed the ways OCFS, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, and the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT) are collecting information from citizens with lived experience and how this information informs continuous quality improvement.

**Panel Observations:** Youth who have ongoing support are more likely to share their feedback about their experiences (e.g., education, mentors, GAL training).

**OCFS Efforts:** OCFS investment in YLAT for youth engagement supports and expansion of Cooperative Agreement to hire Family Engagement Specialist positions. OCFS co-hosted Father Listening Sessions with Panel members between April-May meetings.

Summary of observations in the prior 3-month period regarding efforts by DHHS-OCFS to improve the child welfare system

**May 2022:** Panel hosted CDSIRP Chair and Child Welfare Ombudsman to share data and trends in their annual reports.

**Panel Observations:** Data trends included safe sleep, initial investigation, the use of safety planning, supporting staff in the field, and ongoing contact with families.

**OCFS Efforts:** Panel members reviewing the new OCFS child welfare information system's portals reported the new portals as functional progress toward improving communication with mandated reporters and resource parents.

Recommendations on how to further protect the State's children through DHHS policy and rulemaking and through legislation.

## 2021 Annual Report Recommendations

- Invest in Family Team Meetings as a framework for coordination and communication between child welfare and community providers.
- Invest in programs that support parent and youth engagement in the child welfare process and quality improvement efforts.
- Update domestic abuse and violence response policies and practices to prioritize efforts to decrease children from being removed, or threatened to be removed, from non-offending parents.
- Improve support for Guardians ad Litem (GALs) to develop their skills and expertise and bring a higher level of substantive oversight of their work.