

*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**

**December 2, 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, Jenna Joeckel, Erika Simonson, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Maura Keaveney, Tammy Roy, Susan Denoncour, Betsy Boardman, Adrienne Carmack, Kris Pitts, Senator Donna Bailey, Travis Bryant, Bobbie Johnson, Andrea Mancuso, Melissa Martin, Heidi Aaker, Esther Anne, Debra McSweeney, Todd Landry

#### **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.

November Minutes: Unanimous vote to approve November minutes.

Bylaw Updates: Additional updates to the bylaws are in the process of being drafted. The updates include a new, established process for reviewing citizen input. The panel's role does not include in depth case reviews. The panel's role includes analyzing system themes while being mindful of confidentiality. The panels that complete in depth case reviews are the CDSIRP and Domestic Homicide review panels. When citizen feedback is received, the role of the panel is communicated clearly to help promote understanding of systemic issues. The bylaws will be disseminated electronically to members prior to the next panel meeting for an electronic vote.

Annual Report: A subcommittee has been identified to work on the annual report. A draft will be distributed to panel members soon.

Update from the Fatherhood Subcommittee: An extension for the use of stipend funds from the John T. Gorman Foundation has been granted for an additional year and the panel has access to those funds. The funds need to be utilized for parent engagement and parent voice. They do not need to be father specific and can be used to compensate parents for providing input to further engage parents with lived experience in our work.

Membership Survey: As a result of the updated bylaws and term limits, the panel is updating membership roles and preparing to recruit new panel members. A survey link is being sent for completion to determine each member's start date and role on the panel.

**9:20 a.m.** Kelly Dell'Aquila provided a presentation on the Prepetition Workgroup including recommendations of the workgroup.

Members were encouraged to access and review the website and sign up to be on the listserv. The website can be found here:

<https://legislature.maine.gov/legal-representation-to-families-in-the-child-protection-system-study>

Members discussed the limited resources available and the dwindling number of attorneys that are able to be appointed. The region that was chosen to pilot the prepetition appointment was chosen because was one of the regions that had an adequate number of attorneys available.

**9:40 a.m.** - Bobbi Johnson, OCFS Associate Director of Child Welfare provided a presentation on the Family Team Meeting (FTM) Policy. The presentation highlighted when Family Team Meetings occur, preparation and engagement, FTM agendas, planning in the meeting, and special considerations. Within the next few weeks, the presentation and webinar will be posted to the public and the panel members will be notified of the posting.

Members discussed the steps that are taken when the well written policy is not followed in practice. When there is a procedural drift away from policy, there are a range of actions that may take place. Barriers are explored with staff such as engagement concerns or caseload challenges. Staff receive coaching and counseling from their supervisor and are supported with creating a plan to ensure they can complete Family Team Meeting's to the best of their ability. There are also times when disciplinary measures are taken because other interventions were not successful.

Members discussed the ongoing importance of communication in varying degrees as it related to Family Team Meetings. Preparation and engagement for FTMs is a key component and is the one of the most important factors to a successful meeting. Staff practice as it relates to preparation for FTMs varies. There are also logistical considerations that impact prep work. Efforts are being made to support staff in gaining an understanding about how the plan developed in the Family Team Meeting guides the work. For example, monthly contacts are guided by the plan so barriers can be identified during that time to minimize surprises during the FTM. Part of preparation is also ensuring that participants in the meeting are able to make decisions. Supervisors are not expected to attend all FTMs but try to prepare or have timely discussions with staff when supervisory level decisions need to be made. Staff work with the family to determine who will be invited to their Family Team Meeting. There are times when OCFS invites participants that the parents are resistant to attending. While practice is varied, the expectation includes staff trying to work with families to support understanding of why those participants are in the room. Being able to participate in FTMs virtually has increased participant attendance.

OCFS staff have an agenda that guides FTM practice. The agenda is not currently shared with participants but used as a guide for staff. The agenda is communicated verbally prior to meeting during the preparation work. The only time a surprise would occur is if there is an event that takes place and staff learn about it right before the meeting or the event takes place right before the meeting. Prior FTM models included the family sharing their family story. The current Family Team Meeting model focuses

more on the purpose of the meeting and the strengths and needs that are related to the goals. This change was made to work on building focus on the safety of the child and connecting back to the reason OCFS is involved with the family.

After the conclusion of the Family Team Meeting, parents receive a copy of the plan that was developed during the meeting within 10 days. The parents have the ability to determine if they are going to share it further. If the plan developed is a safety plan, it will be provided to the family sooner because of the content and nature of the plan. Members noted that the panel helped to identify safety planning practice changes, many of which were subsequently implemented. Safety planning policy and practice expectations have been identified as areas for review/evaluation by OCFS. After the first FTM with the family, the goals and action steps identified in the plan continues to be updated. OCFS will provide an update on the document is shared with the family following the meeting.

Panel members agree that Family Team Meetings are complex. Within DHHS, there are experts that have knowledge of how to most effectively support adults with developmental and cognitive needs. OCFS does not have experts in this field, however, there are educational components woven into OCFS staff training and resources.

Members were reminded of the Family Team Meeting panel goal: 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.

Member discussed possible survey questions related to the goal. Panel coordinator will keep a list of survey questions from Panel Members. Panel members are encouraged to contact panel coordinator with possible survey questions. Members note that the recommendation does not have a time frame. OCFS noted that there has not been an OCFS response to the recommendation yet and that there may be ideas that are different from what the original recommendation was that need to be explored further.

The link to the FTM policy can be found here:

[https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/FTM%20Policy%20-%202011.30.21%20Final%20Signed%20-%20Public%20-%20No%20Appendices\\_0.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/FTM%20Policy%20-%202011.30.21%20Final%20Signed%20-%20Public%20-%20No%20Appendices_0.pdf)

#### **10:50 a.m. – Open Q&A**

Panel member Senator Donna Bailey reminded members that new bills for the legislature need to be submitted prior to cloture. A concept draft is an acceptable bill to enter for MCWAP recommendation implementation. A concept draft can be withdrawn. Members propose waiting until the new HHS chairs are elected. OCFS will present OCFS legislative proposals to MCWAP in February.

#### **11:00 a.m. – Adjourn**

**Next Panel Meeting: January 6, 2023, 9a.m. -11a.m.**