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# MAINE JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN TASK FORCE 2022 REPORT TO THE SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT

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*Submitted by the Maine Justice for Children Task Force*

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## Introduction

The Maine Justice for Children Task Force (the “Task Force”) is a collaborative multidisciplinary Task Force convened by the Maine Judicial Branch whose mission is to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for children in the State of Maine child welfare system. The members of the Task Force include representatives of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches, advocates for children and parents, foster parents, and other individuals involved in the child welfare system.

The Task Force is charged with identifying opportunities for systemic improvement within the child welfare system that could improve outcomes for children and using that information to develop joint solutions among child welfare system partners. Once opportunities for improvement are identified, the Task Force prioritizes those issues and develops joint solutions to help capitalize on those opportunities.

The Task Force is chaired by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court who also appoints members of the Task Force. Pursuant to its charter, the Task Force submits this report to the Supreme Judicial Court on the work of the Task Force from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022.

## I. Meetings

The Task Force met quarterly (March, June, September, and December) in 2022. All meetings were held virtually. Most Task Force meetings featured updates by its members, including leaders from the Maine Judicial Branch, the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), the Office of the Attorney General, and the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services. The updates focused, in part, on the current state of the child welfare system, data sharing on open child welfare

investigations, new child welfare court filings, and workforce statistics and needs. In addition to updates, Task Force meeting attendees received updates on action steps taken on strategic plan initiatives and provided recommendations for follow up as needed.

Additional topics discussed at the Task Force meetings throughout 2022 included: (1) continued communication about pandemic related struggles, processes, and guidance; (2) data sharing with a focus on the number of children in care as well as new child welfare court filings; and (3) discussion of various training opportunities. These discussion items are ongoing and will continue to be a focus of the Task Force in 2023.

## II. Strategic Plan

The Task Force's 2022 strategic plan focused on three projects: (1) information sharing between citizen review panels and the legislature; (2) implementation and facilitation of a virtual child welfare parent curriculum; and (3) a race and equity data assessment. A workgroup for each project was formed and convened approximately monthly throughout the year. All workgroups had Task Force members, nonmember individuals from stakeholder organizations, and interested community members.

### A. Information Sharing

The Task Force is convened as one of three citizen review panels required under CAPTA. The other two panels are the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel (MCWAP) and the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel (CDSIRP). The three panels aim to conduct complementary work without duplication. Therefore, information sharing among the panels is paramount for both collaboration of panel goals and outcomes. Throughout 2022, the Justice for Children Task Force meetings provided a collaboration space for all three Maine Citizen Review Panels. Both MCWAP and the CDSIRP regularly joined the Task Force to provide information on the individual panel's

work and to present on each panel’s annual reports and system recommendations. A representative from the Justice for Children Task Force provided similar updates to the other two panels.

A chair/designee from all three panels continued to meet throughout 2022 on a quarterly basis with a focus on effective communication among panels, ensuring that statutory functions are faithfully discharged, and identifying opportunities to support and collaborate on specific panel strategic plan items or efforts. All three panels have provided quarterly updates to the Government Oversight Committee at the Maine State Legislature.

**B. Development and Implementation of Curriculum for Parents Involved in the Child Welfare System**

In August 2020, the Task Force added the development of information sessions for parents involved in the child welfare system to the Task Force’s strategic plan. The goal of the curriculum is to offer optional classes focused on understanding child welfare agency processes, court procedures, and suggested practices for parents to implement to be successful throughout a child welfare case. A workgroup was created and began meeting in December 2020.

In late 2021, the committee secured funding for The Opportunity Alliance (TOA) to implement a one-year pilot project for information sessions entitled *Child Protection 101: For Parents, By Parents* (“CPS 101”). The workgroup, in collaboration with TOA, developed a work plan, created a curriculum outline, and engaged system partners for participation in pre-recorded video segments to be used at all sessions. Each two-hour information session is led by a parent with experience in the child welfare system or a parent who has navigated multiple systems and includes:

- An introduction to child protective service professionals;
- Explanation of the court process;
- Tips for parents on how to successfully engage in the child welfare process and

how to respond to conflict; and

- Contact information for helpful resources and information.

In 2022, TOA offered the information sessions to parents on 21 different occasions with 52 parent participants. In addition to parent information sessions, TOA offered CPS 101 information sessions to child welfare system partners including: (1) Cross Cultural Community Services; (2) Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence; (3) Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services; (4) Maine Chapter of American Academy of Pediatrics Foster Care Committee; (5) various OCFS district staff (approx. 200 staff); (6) provider specific sessions; (7) Portland Community Policing; (8) Maine Judicial Branch Child Welfare conference; (9) Southern Maine Women's Re-entry Center staff; (10) Supportive Visitation Programs; (11) Maine Children's Alliance; (12) Penquis Parent Education staff; (13) Colby College; and (14) Maine Behavioral Health Family Peer Services.

Data collection for this pilot project has been an important focus of the workgroup. Data collection instruments and data sets include: (1) pre- and post- parent surveys; (2) time to permanency; (3) participation in family visitation; (4) participation and engagement in reunification services; and (5) attendance at court proceeding. All the above data points will be collected for individuals who have participated in the information sessions. Additionally, at the end of the pilot project, the same data points will be collected for a random sampling of cases for parents who did not participate in the CPS 101 information sessions. All data will be deidentified and analyzed to determine if participation in the class influenced overall case participation, reunification rates, and timeliness to permanency.

The primary data collection to date has focused on the pre and post surveys that all parent information session attendees are asked to complete to gauge the participants' initial knowledge

base as compared to post participation. The below chart includes pre and post survey results for 37 of the 52 participants. The selected questions from the survey specifically address the participants’ knowledge and understanding of the child welfare process on a scale from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest score) before and after the information session.

<b>Question:</b>	<b>Pre-CPS 101 Average Score (on a scale from 1 to 5)</b>	<b>Post CPS 101 Average Score (on a scale from 1 to 5)</b>
I have an understanding of how the child protective system works.	2.7	4.2
I understand who is on my child protective services team and what they each do.	3.1	4.4
I have an understanding of what I need to do to reunify my family.	3.4 (35/35) (2 children in parents’ care; 1 no response)	4.2 (34/34) (4 children in parents’ care)
I feel hopeful about my child protective services involvement	3.5 (37/37) (1 no response)	3.9 (38/38)

### C. Race and Equity Data Assessment

In March of 2021, the Task Force identified the need to assess data collection regarding race and other important markers of equity by the Maine Judicial Branch and the agencies that interface with the child protection system. As a result, the Task Force formed the Race and Equity Data Collection Subcommittee (R&E Subcommittee). Members of the R&E Subcommittee include representatives from the Maine Judicial Branch, the Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Corrections, Department of Public Safety, and Department of Education (collectively referred to as “Project Partners”), the Maine State Legislature, and various other community organizations.

The goal of the R&E Subcommittee is to better understand what systems are in place for the collection and sharing of aggregated data on various data points in order to inform policy

decisions, measure fairness and equity, and provide the courts and agencies with data about the people and populations they serve. The data point set that is the subject of the assessment includes: race, ethnicity, connection with tribe/band/nation, enrollment or eligibility for enrollment with federally recognized tribe(s), sexual orientation, income, location, gender, gender identity, and disability (“data point set”).

In October of 2021, Public Consulting Group (PCG) was hired through the competitive request for proposal (RFP) process to create a data mapping inventory and produce a final report with findings and recommendations. Throughout 2021 and the first half of 2022, PCG conducted 15 interviews with leadership and staff of the Project Partners who have specific roles that relate to the collection, storage, reporting, and sharing of the ten identified data point set items. As needed follow-up contact was conducted via email. Additionally, PCG conducted a literature review of best practices and strategies for data sharing and data consistency among system partners. Finally, PCG interviewed six national experts in data sharing to gather information about barriers and challenges to sharing aggregate data, determinants to successful information-sharing collaboratives, and strategies for encouraging buy-in from necessary partners.

The PCG work product consists of two reports: the Data Mapping Inventory and the Final Report. Both reports were issued in September 2022 and distributed to Task Force members. An overview of both reports was provided to the R&E Subcommittee prior to release of the final reports and an overview of the two final reports was provided to the full Task Force by the subcommittee co-chairs at the December 2022 meeting.

The Data Mapping Inventory Report provides an overview of the current systems and processes for the collection of the data point set by Project Partners. The report provides a definition for all data point set items and notes where there is and is not consistency among



Project Partners in nomenclature, availability to collect and store the information, and existing requirements for data sharing and reporting.

The Final Report includes: (1) a review of the national landscape of data sharing including literature review and interviews with national experts; (2) identification of data-sharing models currently being used in other locations with a focus on strengths and disadvantages of each model; and (3) recommendations focused on two areas, including, increasing the availability of client-level data and evaluation of client-level data to ensure consistent data collection.

The R&E Subcommittee will continue to meet regularly to analyze the PCG reports and determine appropriate next steps.

### III. Continuing Education Subcommittee

In addition to pursuing the three projects identified in the Task Force's strategic plan, the Task Force also assisted in the planning of the Maine Judicial Branch's annual child protective conference through its Continuing Education Subcommittee (CES). The CES meets to help plan the annual child protective conference every year. With the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the CES again decided to host a virtual conference. The title of the 2022 conference was *The Effects of COVID-19 on the Child Welfare System and Trauma-Informed Practice*. The conference was held on Thursday, October 27, and Friday, October 28.

Sessions throughout the first day of the conference focused on how the entire child welfare system can better serve families based on experiences and practices that were developed because of the pandemic. For example, a panel of system partners discussed how the pandemic changed how they served families and what portions of the change proved to be beneficial and what changes raised challenges. In addition to focusing on pandemic related issues, throughout

the first day of the conference, system partners including the Maine Judicial Branch, the Office of Child and Family Services, and the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services provided systemwide updates.

The second day of the conference focused on trauma-informed practices. Sessions focused on what trauma looks like for the adults the child welfare system serves as well as the children. One session focused on how professionals engaged in this work can care for themselves to continue doing work in this important area. Finally, information on trauma-based treatment options currently available in Maine was shared with attendees.

Overall, the two-day conference provided attendees with the opportunity to earn 10.5 general continuing legal credits/continuing professional education credits, one ethics credit, and one and a half harassment and discrimination credits. The CES received very positive feedback on the conference and is in the early stages of planning the 2023 spring conference.

## Conclusion

Throughout 2022, the Task Force focused on systemic improvements including: (1) information sharing among Citizen Review Panels; (2) educating system involved individuals on processes and practices to help improve case outcomes and system knowledge; (3) multisystem data analysis to help Project Partners assess fairness and equity for system-involved families and children; and (4) continuing to gather all system partners to participate in learning opportunities focused on the interconnectivity of all parts of the system and how coming together to form joint processes and solutions makes the system stronger and ultimately benefits families. We would like to thank all the Task Force members for their past and ongoing meaningful collaboration and work to support the child welfare system.