

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

April 7, 2023; 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, Julian Richter, Adrienne Carmack, Andrea Mancuso, Penthea Burns, Senator Donna Bailey, Ed Wiseman, Melissa Martin, Susan Denoncour, Tammy Roy, Todd Landry, Travis Bryant, Deb McSweeney, Bobbi Johnson, Betsy Boardman, Esther Anne, Jenna Joeckel

Guests of the Panel: Brent Beaulieu, Abbie Rohde, Taylor Kilgore, Chelsea Peters

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.

March Minutes: Ten members voted to approve March minutes

Transition Planning: Andrea Mancuso has been elected as the next Co-chair of the panel. Current Co-chair Deb Dunlap will continue in her role until the end of December 2023. The panel notes that the Bylaws guide the transition process.

9:20 - New Business

Legislative Updates:

The panel engaged in discussion about the following legislative bills:

- [LD 1240](#) - **An Act to Develop a Pilot Program to Provide Legal Representation to Families in the Child Protection System** is a bill that is related to a panel recommendation made in 2021. The purpose of the bill is to promote meeting the family's needs and ensuring child safety prior to a petition being filed. The public hearing is scheduled for Monday April 10, 2023. The judiciary committee would benefit from any testimony in support of the bill. The panel coordinator will send an electronic poll to members for voting to determine if the panel will submit testimony. A

panel member has been asked to speak on the national level about the State of Maine's efforts to start implementation of pre-petition representation.

- [LD 1325](#) - **An Act to Make Permanent the Submission of Certain Reports to the Legislature Concerning Child Welfare** is a bill that requires all Citizen Review Panels and the Department to come in front of the Health and Human Services committee quarterly to present. This bill would make that reporting requirement permanent. The public hearing is scheduled for Friday, April 21, 2023. The panel coordinator will send an electronic poll to members for voting to determine if the panel will submit testimony.
- [LD 1229](#) - **An Act to Support Peer Mentors for Parents Involved in the Child Protective Services System** is also scheduled for public hearing on Friday, April 21, 2023.
- **ICWA LD** – The bill has not been printed yet and there is no scheduled hearing. The intent of the bill is to create a state law that mirrors the federal Indian Child Welfare Act due to concerns that there are cases before the Supreme Court that could overturn the federal ICWA law. During the recent State of the Tribes address, Chief Sabattus asked for support on the bill. OCFS offered and provided technical assistance but due to the separation of roles, have not taken a position.
- [LD 507](#)-**An Act to Improve Outcomes for Youth Transitioning from State Care by Reducing Barriers to Maintaining Health Care Coverage** is a bill that is intended to decrease the burden on former youth in care by recognizing that the annual renewal process is an administrative burden required in order to maintain MaineCare coverage. The bill did not pass, yet the department has a mapped a path forward through an administrative process that is being implemented by the Office of Family Independence in regard to former youth in care. Members are encouraged to refer to the website testimony.
- [LD 1200](#) - **Resolve, to Convene a Driver Education Working Group to Evaluate Hardships to Underserved Populations and Low-income Families** is a bill focused on relieving the financial burden for driver's education.
- [LD 857](#) - **An Act to Improve Family Team Meetings in Child Welfare Cases to Ensure Better Outcomes for Children by Providing Adequate Funding** is a placeholder bill to act as a concept draft for the panels work regarding Family Team Meetings. A request has been submitted to carry over this bill into the next session, to give the panel time to complete the FTM exploration. If there are items in any recommendations from this committee that requires legislation, the panel could utilize this bill to put the recommendations forward.

Subcommittee and Member Updates:

The **Family Team Meeting (FTM) Subcommittee** met prior to the previous panel meeting, and asked OCFS to collect survey tools utilized in the past to evaluate Family Team Meeting practice. Members are in the process of scheduling the next meeting.

The **Citizen Engagement Subcommittee** continues to focus on updates to the parent survey. Both the provider and parent surveys are being refined and will be sent to the contracted evaluator for feedback. The evaluator will also provide information about how to make the surveys statistically relevant. Following this work, the next step will be to discuss the process for administering the survey in 2024. The survey will be shared with the MCWAP Panel prior to administration.

The **Family Centered Practice Subcommittee** will be meeting in April.

The **Lived Experience Subcommittee** is in the process of finalizing questions for focus groups to gain feedback on training development. Members are meeting on Monday.

Member Updates:

- Several administrative orders were issued yesterday and can be found here: <https://www.courts.maine.gov/adminorders/index.html>
- April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. There are events occurring within the state to spread awareness. Members are encouraged to participate and contact the Prevention Council for participation information.
- Members note that a legislative resolve occurred declaring April Child Abuse Prevention Month
- Members also noted recognition of the Week of the Young Child
- On April 18, 2023, a group of young people will be attending a policy summit at the State House. They will participate in a tour, meet with legislators, and engage in activities to learn more about the legislative process.
- Part 1 of the budget that was passed included funding to continue to reimburse parents attorneys and GALs at the rate of \$150.00/hour for their services.

PIP and CFSR Presentation: Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) provided a presentation to the Panel highlighting the strategic priorities of OCFS, Bills and Budget Initiatives, the Program Improvement Plan (PIP), and the Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR)

*The slide deck presentation is attached.

Questions/Discussion:

Members engaged in a discussion about Court Ordered Diagnostic Evaluations (CODE). There are currently 3 providers in Maine able to conduct CODE evaluations. OCFS is working with the State Forensic Service to develop an infrastructure that maintains the integrity of the evaluations while building more capacity and availability. The rate of pay and how it compares to other types of evaluations is a barrier, in addition to the additional requirements for evaluators such as testifying in court.

Legislative initiatives include:

[LD 474](#) - **An Act to Improve Collaboration Between Mandatory Reporters and Law Enforcement in the Investigation of Alleged Child Abuse and Neglect**

[LD 463](#) - **Resolve, to Ensure Continued MaineCare Coverage for Persons Formerly in Foster Care Until They Attain 27 Years of Age**

[LD 507](#) - **An Act to Improve Outcomes for Youth Transitioning from State Care by Reducing Barriers to Maintaining Health Care Coverage**

Members engaged in a conversation about the Program Improvement Plan (PIP). When the Federal Children's Bureau complete their reviews, every state is required to implement a PIP. Some of the information in Maine's PIP comes from the Office of Program Evaluation and Program Accountability (OPEGA) Information Brief which can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/7924>. It was noted that states have engaged in the CFSR 3 times, and that as with other processes, it continues to change as new information is learned and/or practice evolves. OCFS has met all of the key activities and systemic factors that are outlined within the PIP and is working to meet the goals of the Measurement Plan.

Members discussed the Child and Family Services Plan (CSFP) and associated Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR). The CSFP is a strategic plan and the APSR is an annual report. Both are submitted by the state for Federal funding. The MCWAP Annual report is part of these larger reports.

Link: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/data-reports-initiatives/child-welfare-reports>

Members focused on the strategic goals and outcomes. Each district looks at their own performance and areas for improvement, including evaluating root causes to improve outcomes. Some examples of strategies used to improve practice include workgroups, policy changes, Quality Assurance (QA) activities, and Quality Improvement (QI) activities. After the PIP was approved, the first two years were focused on QA/QI activities, policy and practice improvement and items involving the courts. A strategy used for measurement is ongoing case reviews. OCFS highlighted changes in the child welfare system that have been taking place including reviewing FTM practice, improving training for staff, policy changes, consulting with the Capacity Building Center for peer-to-peer calls with other states, and work related to the Children's Emergency System (after hours coverage).

Members discussed the Affinity project and the focus on ensuring youth in care are attending their comprehensive health assessments. Members emphasized the importance of messaging about meeting the health needs of the youth in care and continued collaboration with community partners including the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT).

A member noted that the court also participates in the development of the PIP. The court has implemented a quality hearing pilot project. This pilot project is ongoing, and the final report will be released soon and shared with the panel upon its release.

The Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services (MCILS) will be attending the May meeting to present to the panel. Members noted that new members should also receive a copy of the OPEGA report when joining the panel.

Next Panel Meeting: May 5, 2023, 9a.m. -11a.m.