

MINUTES

Maine Justice for Children Task Force
December 13, 2022, 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

Attendees: Justice Lawrence, Chief Judge Davis, Betsy Boardman, Kaela Scott, Caroline Jova, Katharine Wiltuck, Melissa Martin, Andrea Mancuso, Xi Chen, Travis Bryant, Bobbi Johnson, Darcy Fisher, Liam Shaw, Bette Hoxie, Chris Bicknell, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Ariel Gannon, Clint Boothby, Karen Tompkins, Liz Stout, Todd Landry, Julian Richter, Christine Thibeault, Christine Alberi

Welcome (10:00 a.m.-10:05 a.m.) —Justice Rick Lawrence

- Chief Justice Stanfill is unable to attend today and send her regrets.

Review of September 2022 Minutes (10:05 a.m.-10:10 a.m.)

- Motion to approve minutes made; approved unanimously.

Presentation (10:10 a.m.-10:40 a.m.) Kinship Care and Legal Responsibilities: Who to Call and When

- Presented by:
 - Travis Bryant, Executive Director for Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM) and the Kinship Program
 - Bette Hoxie, Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM) and the Kinship Program
 - Liz Stout, Executive Director, Volunteer Lawyers Project (VLP)
- The Kinship Program and Volunteer Lawyers Project have partnered to help bring hope to the legal and personal relationships of kinship families. This partnership will provide information to attorneys and other professionals working with relative caregivers. Kinship care is highly fraught with emotions, divided loyalties, and an array of grief and loss. Though kinship caregivers often report a great deal of joy that comes with raising their kin children, it is not always easy, especially if they lack the legal authority to make important decisions.
- See attached PowerPoint for presentation details.
 - There is a big need for volunteer lawyers for kinship families, but VLP currently, cannot currently offer this service. Instead,

- “A Guide to Kinship Care and Minor Guardianship:”
<https://mainelaw.maine.edu/public-service/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/Guide-to-Kinship-Care-and-Minor-Guardianship-Final-June-2022.pdf>
- Thanks to this partnership, VLP can lean on AFFM to provide families emotional support when families reach out to VLP for legal assistance. AFFM can lean on VLP for legal connections.

Updates (10:40 a.m.-11:10 a.m.)

- **Maine Supreme Judicial Court- Justice Rick Lawrence**
 - The courts continue to work on case backlogs throughout all court dockets.
 - This backlog can be attributed to three major events that all happened at the same time:
 - The judicial branch needs more funding. Maine Judicial Branch is historically underfunded and an increase in funding has been requested;
 - The pandemic, while it did not close the court system it did slow things down; and
 - The lack of court appointed lawyers to take cases.
 - The hope is that with increased funding additional positions can be added to judicial branch staff and other court personnel to begin to move cases forward.
 - In terms of the lack of court appointed counsel, we will hear more about the Rural Defenders Pilot Project later in the meeting. System partners continue to work collaboratively in addressing this crisis.

- **An Organizational Update from the Judicial Branch – Chief Judge Brent Davis**
 - New child protective filings: Between January 1st and December 9th, there have been 942 new filings. As a point of reference, for the same period last year, there were 991 new case filings. This reflects a 5% decrease in filings.
 - The Maine CASA program continues to host lunch and learn sessions for CASAs every other month. In October the session focused on the intersection of child protection cases and criminal law cases.
 - Maine CASA is planning the next pre-service training for March 22nd through the 24th, which the program anticipates will be held in person, with a possible option to attend and present virtually.
 - The 2023 conference to be held in person during the spring admin week on March 30th and 31th .

- **A Panel Update from the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel- Debra Dunlap, Co-Chair & Ahmen Cabral, Co-Chair**
 - Presenters unable to attend and send their regrets. Betsy Boardman, who is also a member of MCWAP, shared updates on their behalf.
 - One of the three Citizen Review Panels under CAPTA.
 - In the process of completing the annual report to be shared in January. MCWAP will present their report to the Justice for Children Task Force next year, likely during the March meeting.
 - Working on revising bylaws.
 - MCWAP plans to explore family team meetings in depth next year. They will have full panel discussions and do a deep dive into the issue.

- **An Organizational Update from the Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS -Dr. Todd A. Landry, Director & Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director**
 - Copy of OCFS's presentation to the Task Force from the last meeting has been provided with the materials for today's meeting.
 - With the governor's re-election, actively preparing for 2023. Not in position to share legislative and budgetary initiatives. More on that during the next meeting.
 - Leadership Advisory Team is working on several projects:
 - Making sure caseworkers have knowledge of lived experience;
 - Information about the trauma of removal; and
 - Loss of relationships due to involvement in child welfare system.

- **An Organizational Update from the Office of the Attorney General- Ariel Gannon, Assistant Attorney General, Chief of the Child Protective Division**
 - 27 trial attorneys handling 2,400 cases.
 - 1 full time appellate attorney, averaging about 8-9 briefs per month.

- **An Organizational Update from the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services, Justin Andrus, Executive Director**
 - Darcy Fisher presented on behalf of Justice Andrus.
 - Decline in rostered attorneys continues. MCILS is working on recruitment, including by offering a couple of minimum standards training. Those have been focused on criminal law, but MCILS will be revamping child protection training soon. Hoping this will help recruit more PC attorneys.
 - MCILS is also working with a resource council statewide to promote social workers and connect parents with other resources.

Strategic Plan Updates (11:10 a.m.-12:00 p.m.)

- Race and Equity Committee Report Update: Mary Bonauto and Regina Phillips
 - See attached PowerPoint for details.
- Parent Curriculum Workgroup Update: Kelly Dell'Aquila, Jamie Brooks, and Karen Tompkins
 - Looking to future: hoping to continue the course in addition to expanding partnership with OCFS and providing opportunities for staff there. After the end of year, TOA should have more evaluation outcomes to inform data.
- Continuing Education Subcommittee Update: Betsy Boardman
 - The annual two day child welfare conference was held virtually at the end of October.
 - Next conference will take place during March admin week in 2023. Will be in person. The continuing education subcommittee will meet to start planning asap. RFP has been posted for the venue.

2023 Meeting Dates: March 14th, June 13th, September 12, December 12th.

ADJOURN (12:00 p.m.)