

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

June 2, 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: Tammy Roy, Deb Dunlap, Ahmen Cabral, Penthea Burns, Maura Keaveney, Ed Wiseman, Senator Donna Bailey, Erika Simonson, Dr. Adrienne Carmack, Abbie Rohde, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Susan Denoncour, Chelsea Peters, Kris Pitts, Heidi Aakjer, Brent Beaulieu, Bobbi Johnson, Dr. Todd Landry, Travis Bryant, Esther Anne, Betsy Boardman, Rebecca Richardson, Karen Dostaler, Michelle Westbrook

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.

Federal Mandates: Group briefly reviewed the federal mandates of the Panel. The federal Child Abuse Protection and Treatment Act and the Children's Justice Act require all states to establish Citizen Review Panels. MCWAP fulfills requirements from both mandates that instruct the panel to:

- Examine the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies, and evaluate the extent to which the agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities
- Provide for public outreach and comment to assess the impact of current procedures and practices upon children and families in the community
- Review and evaluate State investigative, administrative, and civil and criminal judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect (MCWAP shares responsibilities with the state's two other Citizen Review Panels; while MCWAP might receive high level information from citizens about cases, this panel does not conduct detailed reviews of individual child protective cases).
- Make policy and training recommendations
- Prepare an annual report complete with a summary of activities and recommendations for the improvement of the child protective services system

May Minutes: Fifteen members voted to approve the May minutes; one member abstained as they were not present in May.

Summer Schedule and Retreat Planning: The Panel will not meet in July and August. Subcommittees are encouraged to continue to meet during the summer months to finalize any recommendations they would like to present at the Panel retreat.

The annual MCWAP retreat will occur on September 15, 2023, from 9:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta. This retreat focuses on finalizing recommendations for the annual report, planning for the coming year's activities, discuss workgroup activities, and also educational opportunities. Any members that are interested in participating on the planning committee are encouraged to notify the panel coordinator. Taylor Kilgore, Esther Anne, Kris Pitts, and Susan Denoncour have volunteered to assist in the retreat planning.

Legislative Updates: **LD 1970: "An Act to Enact the Maine Indian Child Welfare Act"**. Public hearings for this bill occurred on May 31, 2023. During the public hearing, there was no testimony in opposition to the bill. A work session on this bill is scheduled for June 6, 2023. Associate Director Johnson shared that OCFS is finalizing the ICWA policy, and this policy is aligned with the language in LD 1970.

New Business

Citizen Input Discussion: A main role of the Panel is to receive input and feedback regarding the broader child welfare system, engage in Panel discussions regarding that feedback, and determine if any recommendations are warranted. Feedback and input is generally received through the Panel website, however, there are times when Panel members are contacted directly. During a previous meeting when citizen input was reviewed, Panel members asked the Executive Committee to take cautionary measures to ensure confidentiality of those who are reaching out to provide feedback about the child welfare system. As a result, citizen input is not emailed publicly, nor will it be included in these minutes.

Two separate constituents contacted the Panel Co-Chair directly in May to provide the feedback being discussed today. The input pertains to the Home Builders service that is offered to families involved with the child welfare system, and the contracted provider of that service, Bethany Christian Services. The feedback included concerns from a citizen and a family service provider. The first feedback was from a citizen conducting a local social work job search, who found one of the qualifications for a job in the Homebuilders program in the Portland area was "Subscription to and integration of the agency Statement of Faith." Panel members reviewed the link to the job posting and the Statement of Faith. The second feedback came from a service provider working with a mother who was receiving Homebuilders services. The service provider had concerns about a lack of professionalism they observed from the Homebuilders staff in the ways they were engaging with the parent, and additional concerns from a follow up conversation with the child protective caseworker, where it appeared the caseworker did not have sufficient information about the program and was unsure how they should use reports from the program to factor into their decision making about the family's child protective case.

OCFS representatives shared that Bethany Christian Services is the statewide provider for the Homebuilders program, and this agency was selected through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process. This service is part of the Family First Prevention Services Plan that Maine has implemented. The Homebuilders Model is an evidenced based program that is listed on the Title IV-E Clearing House. Bethany Children's Services is a national organization that provides this service across the country. Representatives from Bethany Christian Services are willing to speak with the Panel about the program.

The Homebuilders program has been implemented statewide over the past 9-12 months. They provide services to families to prevent removal of children and are soon expanding to provide reunification

services for children who are ready to transition back into their homes full time. The Family First Prevention Services Manager has facilitated trainings across all districts, however, there may be some staff who have less knowledge about the program due to limited use of the program.

Recognizing that language about faith and participation in faith-based activities may lead to barriers for families to receive services, OCFS engaged in discussions with the provider regarding the Statement of Faith early on in the contracting process, and this language is not included in the contract with OCFS. Additionally, it is not a requirement for parents to engage in discussions regarding faith, faith-based activities, or sign any statements of faith to qualify for the service. The Panel requested to review the state's contract with Bethany Christian Services for the Homebuilders program before the September retreat. The Panel also asked OCFS to share a description of any penalties for the contracted organization if they fail to comply with the agreements in the contract.

The Panel recommended that Bethany Christian Services be invited to speak to the panel, provide a presentation and engage in a Q&A session at a future Panel meeting. Some specific questions include: What is their Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) policy? Have other states had similar experiences navigating the fact that this is a faith-based organization? Panel members were encouraged to contact the executive committee with any additional questions they would like to discuss.

Outcome Review

Panel Goals: The Panel began developing Panel goals in 2016. The Panel recently established a process for annual review of progress on these goals. Goals that have been completed will be removed from the list in future annual reviews.

2022: Develop training on trauma informed practices for engaging with people who have lived experience- **In Progress** (There is a current workgroup for this topic)

2022: Examine policies, procedures, and practices of Family Team Meetings: **In Progress** (There is a current workgroup for this topic). Senator Bailey shared that she has submitted bill regarding this matter. It is currently a concept draft, that has no language in it, and it is anticipated to be carried over into the next legislative session. This bill provides a pathway for any statutory changes or funding if the Panel makes such recommendations.

2021: Engage outside evaluator to improve parent and provider surveys: **In Progress**

2021: Establish annual review of Panel recommendations outcomes: **Complete**

2020: Partner with OCFS to hold statewide listening sessions with fathers involved with OCFS: **Complete**. The final report from this project is located on the Maine Citizen Review Panel Website: [Welcome 2 Reality \(mecitizenreviewpanels.com\)](https://www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com)

2018: Include child welfare data as a standing agenda item at all panel meetings: **In Progress**

2018: Develop effective ways to share information and coordinate efforts between Citizen Review Panels: **Complete**

2017: Continue to define Panel role and structure: **Ongoing**

2017: Engaging in regular review of the strategic plan and child welfare data: **In Progress**

2017: Receive quarterly child advocacy center data updates to monitor the efficacy (*this has been modified to "annual" updates): **In Progress**

2017: Collaborate with CDSIRP and JCTF to request and incorporate data and measure outcomes: **In Progress**, Panel Chairs from all three panels meet quarterly

OCFS Updates to Panel Recommendations: Associate Director Bobbi Johnson presented updates on the Panel's recommendations. Please reference the attached PowerPoint Presentation for detailed information.

Panel members explored how stakeholders are being trained on the availability of the discretionary funds for parents involved in a child welfare investigation (LD 393). Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine (AFFM) serves as the fiscal agent for the distribution of these funds, which were made available over the last month. Information on how to access these funds was shared with all staff. The Panel asked for more information about ways other family support providers are being educated about the availability and use of these funds. OCFS and AFFM are tracking data related to use of the contingency funds. The Panel requested a report how these funds are being used in September. It was noted that the primary need thus far has been assistance with electric bills.

Subcommittee Updates:

The **Family Team Meeting (FTM) Subcommittee** has met three times with an additional meeting scheduled for June 2023. This subcommittee has reviewed FTM surveys that OCFS has utilized in the past and explored what the Department QA process is for FTMs. Subcommittee members discussed methods to update the surveys and create a new process to gain measurable data regarding how well the model is being implemented in the field. *Update: OCFS representative for this subcommittee will be Stephanie Wiken, OCFS Trainer, Stephanie.Wiken@Maine.Gov

The **Citizen Engagement Subcommittee** continues to focus on updates to the parent survey. Subcommittee members are seeking feedback from Dr. Somers who has been consulting during the process. Members will then seek feedback from individuals with lived experience before obtaining a final review by the Panel. June 2023 has been identified as the goal for presentation to panel members via email. Subcommittee members will also begin discussing methods to deploy the survey by December 2023. When the parent survey is complete, the subcommittee members will start work on the provider survey. Both surveys will need to be completed and implemented by March 2024. *Update: The OCFS representative for this subcommittee will be Amanda Hollander, OCFS Trainer, Amanda.Hollander@Maine.gov

The **Family Centered Practice Subcommittee** is exploring alternative dates and times to meet. Subcommittee members continue to focus on aftercare supports for parents, the Ombudsman reports, and the MCWAP Annual report. They are exploring partnering with the Lived Experience Subcommittee. This group has requested a date for when final draft recommendations are due. The executive committee will discuss a date and share with the panel members. Please forward recommendations to the Panel Coordinator. *Update: The OCFS representative for this subcommittee will be Vickie Brayall, Program Administrator-District 8, Victoria.Brayall@Maine.gov

The **Lived Experience Subcommittee** is developing system partner training and has finalized questions for focus groups they plan to convene in the coming months. Meetings are held on the first Monday of every month. They have requested OCFS representation on this workgroup. *Update: The OCFS representative for this subcommittee will be Judy Adams, OCFS Trainer, Judy.Adams@Maine.gov

OCFS Updates:

Todd Landry, Director and Bobbi Johnson, Associate Director of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) provided updates related to child welfare.

Dr. Landry discussed the roll out of the [Maine Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan](#) and thanked those partners who assisted in the development of that plan and participated in community sessions.

Associate Director Johnson provided panel members with an update regarding initiatives and activities OCFS is engaged in. Those initiatives include:

- Resource Parent Bill of Rights: There has been recent legislation regarding a Resource Parent Bill of Rights. OCFS will be convening a workgroup that includes the Resource Parent Advisory group to review the current Bill of Rights.
- Investigations Policy: This policy was finalized this week. MCWAP Members provided feedback early in the policy development. It was recommended to OCFS in the Casey Family Programs/ Collaborative Safety LLC Report to research national best practices with regards to investigation activities and timeframes. OCFS convened a workgroup, who provided a series of practice and technology recommendations that have been incorporated into the finalized policy. This will become effective on July 10, 2023 when the technology updates are incorporated into the Katahdin information system.
- Minimal Facts Interviews: OCFS partnered with MECASA to incorporate a minimal facts interview for staff and law enforcement for situations when a child has disclosed sexual abuse but cannot be immediately interviewed by a CAC. The purpose of the minimal facts interview is to ensure the immediate safety of the child and not expose that child to multiple interviews regarding the details of that situation.
- Safety Planning Policy: OCFS will be developing a standalone Safety Planning policy. Staff have initiated research into national best practices regarding safety planning. The Child Welfare Ombudsman has expressed interest in participating in this workgroup.

Next Panel Meeting: September 15, 2023, 9a.m. -3p.m. at the Capital Judicial Center in Augusta