

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

October 6, 2023; 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Co-Chairs: Ahmen Cabral; Deb Dunlap

Panel Coordinator: Jenna Joeckel

Minutes

9:00 a.m. 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.

9:05 a.m. - Welcome and Introductions:

Attendance: Maura Keaveney, Senator Donna Bailey, Ed Wiseman, Jenna Joeckel, Tammy Roy, Kathryn Brice, Erika Simonson, Michelle Westbrook, Jamie Brooks, Betsy Boardman, Debra Dunlap, Taylor Kilgore, Ahmen Cabral, Andrea Mancuso, Julie Smyth, Craig Smith, Bobbi Johnson, Travis Bryant, Heidi Aakjer, Adrienne Carmack, Christina Alberi, Esther Anne, Julian Richter, Kris Pitts, Brent Beaulieu, Todd Landry, Chelsea Peters

Guests of the Panel – Beth Gagnon, Amanda Hollander, Kaela Scott, Melissa Hackett, Michael Dixon

9:15 a.m. – MCWAP Values:

Members shared the MCWAP Values

9:20 – MCWAP Housekeeping Items:

Members vote to approve the September meeting minutes with the addition of one member name that was in attendance.

Annual meeting debrief: Members enjoyed meeting in person and thanked the prior panel chair for her service on the panel.

HHS Quarterly Update: MCWAP provided a brief quarterly update to the HHS Committee.

November Meeting: A discussion was held about attendance at the November meeting as there are multiple conferences occurring that week. A decision was made for the meeting to be held. The meeting is scheduled for November 3rd, 2023.

9:25 a.m. Recommendation Discussion:

Members were given the opportunity to review recommendations in preparation for the voting process. Discussions took place about the content and concept of recommendations being put forward.

Recommendation voting will take place through electronic vote after the panel meeting.

10:05 Subcommittee Discussion:

Moving forward there will be three subcommittees including:

- Family Centered Policy and Practice Subcommittee – assesses the impact of current procedures and practices upon children and families in the community.
- Citizen Engagement Subcommittee – this committee advocates for parent and youth voice and reviews ways in which they can be shared. There is currently a focus on the parent and provider surveys to ensure citizens understand the process while engaging with OCFS.
- Family Team Meeting (FTM) Subcommittee – this subcommittee is exploring FTMs more in depth including collection of qualitative and quantitative data, of which some does already exist, and bringing recommendations back to the panel.

New members are encouraged to reach out to the following members to join a subcommittee work group:

- Family Centered Policy and Practice Subcommittee: Betsy Boardman or Andrea Mancuso
- Citizen Engagement Subcommittee: Ahmen Cabral
- Family Team Meeting Subcommittee: Kelly Dell'Aquila

Executive Committee will explore the following topics:

Membership in subcommittees including the addition of new members
What information from subcommittees will be included in the minutes
Invitations to non-voting members for participation on subcommittees.

10:15 Citizen Input Discussion

The information and concerns from the citizen input were shared with the panel. These concerns were centered around the improvement of trauma informed care.

Members discussed observed OCFS practice including having separate meetings for parents when there is known or suspected Domestic Violence within a family. Child welfare policy includes the expectation that separate meetings are convened when there is a concern for domestic violence. Training is occurring to support staff and improve practice. Members note that practice within child welfare varies across the state and that there is an opportunity to explore barriers to holding the meetings separately.

10:30 a.m. Survey

The citizen engagement subcommittee presented the parent survey to the panel. Members had an opportunity to view/review the survey and were encouraged to provide feedback. Members noted that individuals with lived experience had an opportunity to provide feedback for the survey. A suggestion was made to have the survey available in additional languages and to add additional content about safety during family team meetings.

OCFS Updates

Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) Associate Director Bobbi Johnson provided OCFS updates. OCFS continues work related to strategic priorities while being mindful about engaging people with lived experience. There is a focus on race equity and partnering with community members to build better solutions. Leadership also continues to look at vacancies in child welfare and explore for retention opportunities. Policies within OCFS continue to be updated and released on an ongoing basis.

Next Panel Meeting: November 3, 2023