

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

February 2, 2024; 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.

Co-Chairs: Ahmen Cabral; Andrea Mancuso

Panel Coordinator: Jenna Joeckel

Minutes

9:05 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.

9:10 a.m. – MCWAP Values and Federal Mandated:

Members shared the MCWAP Values and Federal Mandates

9:15 a.m. - Welcome and Introductions:

Attendance: Kelly Dell-Aquila, Ahmen Cabral, Tammy Roy, Jenna Joeckel, Andrea Mancuso, Melissa Hackett, Beth Gagnon, Betsy Boardman, Brent Beaulieu, Michelle Westbrook, Taylor Kilgore, Abbie Rohde, Kathryn Brice, Gina Googins, Maura Keaveney, Melissa Martin, Chelsea Peters, Julie Smyth

Guest of the Panel - *Michael Dixon, Jennifer Needham, Kaela Scott

9:20 a.m. – MCWAP Housekeeping:

Members voted to approve the January minutes.

The Annual Report is in draft format and an anticipated draft will be ready for the panel prior to the next meeting, pending responses on the annual recommendations from OCFS.

The April MCWAP meeting is cancelled, and the May meeting will be held on May 3, 2024, from 9a.m. to 12p.m.

Members completed a poll regarding participation in future in-person meetings. The results of the poll will be delivered at the March meeting.

The panel discussed [L.D. 2078 “An Act to Increase Participation by the Department of Health and Human Services Regarding Federal Benefits for Which Children in the Custody of the Department Are Eligible.”](#)

Members noted that a public hearing was recently held. Members discussed how the legislative proposal is slightly different from the recommendation that will appear in our 2023 report, as our

recommendation was for information to support further discussion, as opposed to directing the Department to change practice at this point. Members can update the Panel as the legislation moves forward. No other follow up required.

9:30 a.m. Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) Presentation by Kaela Scott, Esq

Kaela Scott, Esq GAL Services Coordinator provided a presentation with information about Guardian Ad Litem including the role of the GAL during involvement in a case with Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) involvement. The presentation included information about the differences between attorneys and court appointed special advocates (CASA) and the trainings that are administered for those individuals. Additionally, Ms. Scott included information about the duties performed by a GAL that are outlined in Maine statute including the communication of the child's wishes. There is a GAL review board that is comprised of 12 members including 4 public members. This GAL review board oversees GALs and CASAs.

Maine Statute, Title 19 can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/statutes/19-A/title19-Asec1653.html>

Members questioned whether Ms. Scott was aware of any discussions that would align the frequency of visits required by GALs (once every three months) with that required of appointed CASAs (once every month) given that they make recommendations to the court. Ms. Scott indicated there would be a fiscal cost to modifying the GAL visit frequency requirement. This is something that the Panel could explore further. Members asked if there was any available data on the frequency that GALs were exercising their authority to ask the court to appoint an expressed interest attorney. Data was not readily available, but Ms. Scott noted that these requests are commonly associated with cases that intersect with the need to navigate education issues or the juvenile justice system. In addition, clarification was provided regarding engagement with parents. GALs are expected to engage parties in their investigation including having conversations about the GAL role, their responsibility to the court, and how their role is different from that of OCFS.

Ms. Scott noted that there has been an increasing trend of children attending court proceedings. Conversations are occurring about the benefits of having children present during court proceedings and considerations that can occur within the court room to encourage a more child friendly environment. Members noted that there is no data available regarding youth participation and/or the relationships that they have had with their GALs. Members expressed an interest in exploring issues related to GALs more and Ms. Scott offered to be a continuing resource to the Panel in future discussions.

10:05 a.m. - Justice for Children Task Force Report Presentation by Betsy Boardman, Esq

Betsy Boardman, Esq provided an update on the 2023 Annual Report for the Justice for Children Task Force. The presentation included information about the mission, the structure and content of meetings, strategic plan items including information sharing, parent curriculum: CPS 101 & CPS 201, the Race and Equity Data Assessment, Parent Attorney and GAL Recruitment and Retention, and Continuing Education.

The 2022 Maine Interagency Data Report can be found here: <https://www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/2022-ME-Interagency-Data-Assessment-Final-Report.pdf>

The CPS 101 data is in the process of being collected and will be available in the upcoming months.

[L.D. 1948 An Act to Amend the State's Data Governance Program Regarding Proprietary Data](#) was discussed by the panel as part of the presentation.

A member provided additional information for research and opportunities related to economic support for families:

<https://www.chapinhall.org/research/economic-supports-child-welfare/>

8:40a.m. Subcommittee Updates:

Family Team Meeting Subcommittee: The FTM committee is in the process of collecting data. A member of the subcommittee was approved to provide testimony on [L.D. 857 "An Act to Improve Family Team Meetings in Child Welfare Cases to Ensure Better Outcomes for Children by Providing Adequate Funding"](#). The work session on the bill has not been scheduled at this time. The testimony that was given can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=10026220>

Family Centered Policy and Practice Subcommittee: The Subcommittee is exploring a new recurring meeting date for subcommittee members to meet.

Citizen Engagement Subcommittee: A draft of the parent survey was sent out to panel members. The next step that has been identified by the subcommittee includes identification of a platform to collect the data outcomes. Subcommittee members will continue partnering with OCFS to explore possible platforms. Panel members offered to utilize professional contact for dissemination of the survey.

10:50 a.m. – OCFS Updates: Acting Associate Director Gina Googins shared OCFS updates. Governor Mills released her state of union address regarding the annual budget that included creating positions for legal secretaries and case aides throughout the state, specifically in District 3. This is to support recruitment and retention in conjunction with monetary support being provided to workers. In addition, Ms. Googins notes that there are several legislative bills that are being followed by OCFS at this time.

A member noted that the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA) reunification brief is expected on February 23, 2024.

11:00 - Adjourn.

Next Panel Meeting: March 1, 2024