

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

January 5, 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, Erika Simonson, Michelle Westbrook, Senator Donna Bailey, Maura Keaveney, Chelsea Peters, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Ed Wiseman, Betsy Boardman, Adrienne Carmack, Taylor Kilgore, Julie Smyth, Travis Bryant, Abbie Rohde, Gina Googins, Beth Gagnon, Kathryn Brice, Melissa Martin, Esther Anne, Heidi Aakjer

*Guest of the Panel - Michael Dixon

9:20 a.m. – MCWAP Housekeeping:

Members voted to approve the December minutes.

In December 2023, panel representatives were invited to present to the Health and Human Services Committee and the Government Oversight Committee. Representatives of the MCWAP panel attended and provided an overview of what to expect in the annual report including an overview of the 2023 panel goals and recommendations. Feedback was positive and members noted support for the recommendations around including child voice and appreciation for the legal system recommendations.

The Executive Committee is reviewing the rough draft of the annual report and the report is forthcoming. The panel goal is for the Annual Report to be published by the end of January 2024.

In February, the Child Advocacy Center and Ombudsman will be providing an overview of their annual reports to panel members. The Justice for Children task Force will also be presented on their annual report in an upcoming panel meeting.

The panel discussed the opportunity to have more panel meetings in person. Discussion took place around balancing desire to hold in person meeting and the capacity to do so. Members asked about consideration for a hybrid meeting. Panel coordinator will send a poll to panel members for feedback.

The April panel meeting is scheduled on the same day as the child welfare conference. The AFFM conference, the National Indian Child Welfare Association Conference, and the CWLA are also being held in April. Members note that school break is also in April. The panel coordinator will send a poll to members for a vote on possible dates for rescheduling the panel meeting.

9:35 a.m. – GAL Discussion:

Previously, members have expressed an interest in learning more about the roles and responsibilities of Guardian Ad Litem (GALs). The panel discussed the opportunity to explore options for education in 2024 and determined that members are still interested learning more including information about CASA volunteers and client directed attorneys. One member offered to invite National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) to an upcoming meeting to support the discussion about client directed attorneys.

9:45 a.m. – Public Hearing on LD 857, Family Team Meetings:

Panel members reviewed [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 public hearing is scheduled for January 16, 2023, at 2 P.M. The panel determined will provide supportive testimony for the bill. The Family Team Meeting Subcommittee met and had a volunteer that is willing to draft and present testimony on behalf of the panel. Members are encouraged to watch the public testimony.

Panel members are interested in learning more about providing testimony including training and coaching opportunities. A recommendation was made by a panel member to start an advocacy subcommittee. The advocacy subcommittee’s purpose would be to organize presentations, provide training to panel members and appear before the legislature on behalf of the panel.

9:55 a.m. Subcommittee Updates:

Family Team Meeting Subcommittee: The Family Team Meeting subcommittee met recently, and ongoing discussion will focus on L.D 857. An OCFS representative has joined the subcommittee and there are opportunities for additional OCFS members to join.

Family Centered Policy and Practice Subcommittee: The Family Centered Policy and Practice Subcommittee met in December to discuss the strategic plan for the upcoming year. The subcommittee has new members attending and is going to develop a new members orientation.

Citizen Engagement Subcommittee: The Citizen Engagement Subcommittee continues their work on the parent survey and has a goal of March 1st, 2024, to present it to the panel. The subcommittee members are focusing on a platform for data collections and dissemination of the survey. Interpretation of the survey is also being explored. OCFS has a translation survey contract and will be able to utilize the services within the contract to support panel members with translation of the survey. The subcommittee will be focusing on the provider survey next and encouraged panel members to provide feedback. Additionally, subcommittee members identified data sharing as a future agenda item.

Panel members discussed the applicability of the surveys to resource families. It was determined that an exit survey is provided to resource parents through Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine. Members

discussed the importance of gaining input from resource families and that resource parents may find value and joy knowing that MCWAP is asking for their input.

10:15 - Adjourn.

Next Panel Meeting: February 2, 2023