

Maine Justice for Children Task Force

December 12, 2023, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Via Zoom

In attendance: Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill, Justice Rick Lawrence, Chief Judge Brent Davis, Rebecca Millett, Regina Phillips, Melissa Martin, Dr. Amanda Brownell, Ann Marie Lemire, Jamie Brooks, Travis Bryant, Xi Chen, Andrea Mancuso, Chris Bicknell, Many Bonauto, Ariel Piers-Gamble, Mark Moran, Mariette Aborn, Gina Googins, Liam Shaw, Mike Sauschuck, Sarah Branch, Michael Dixon, Melissa Hackett, Darcy Fisher, Esther Anne, Cassie Rogers, Annalee Bloom, Bette Hoxie

Welcome (10:00 a.m.-10:05 a.m.)- Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill

- Minutes from the September 12, 2023 meeting unanimously approved.

Child Safety and Family Wellbeing Plan (10:05-10:35) Mariette Aborn, Special Projects Manager for Child & Family Well-Being, Maine Department of Health and Human Services and Melissa Hackett, Coordinator, Maine Child Welfare Action Network, Policy Associate, Maine Children's Alliance

- The Plan: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/programs-services/human-services/child-safety-and-wellbeing-plan>
- Coordination:
 - Connecting existing initiatives
 - Looking to partner with communities and the connections they are making in alignment with these goals.
 - Task force member inquired as to the funding for this initiative – the legislator gave support to the initiatives in the plan. The second version of the plan will identify the resources the system will need.
 - Task force member emphasized the need for DHHS to coordinate efforts and utilize groups and organizations that are already in existence providing services to families.
 - Task force member suggested building juvenile justice into the plan.
 - Task for member suggested that we would have navigators in each courthouse to help guide the public. This doesn't need to be a court employee, but someone on premises who could assist with a warm handoff to all of the services this group has talked about.

Citizen Review Panel Updates: (10:35 a.m.-11:05 a.m.)

- **Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel (MCWAP):** Andrea Mancuso, MCWAP Co-Chair, Public Policy Director, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and Ahmen Cabral, MCWAP Co-Chair, Senior Policy Associate, Catherine Cutler Institute, University of Southern Maine
 - Panel is wrapping up 2023 activities.
 - Retreat in September, and recommendations were voted on by panel members in October.
 - MCWAP's report will be finalized in January.

- Quarterly report to the HHS Committee on Thursday.
- Most subcommittees will continue their work into 2024.
- **Maine Child Death and Serious Injury Review (CDSIRP):** Dr. Amanda Brownell, Child Abuse Pediatrician, Medical Director, Spurwink Center for Safe and Healthy Families, CDSIRP Co-Chair and Mark Moran, LCSW, Manager, Social Services, Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center, Coordinator, Pediatric Forensic Clinical
 - In the last few months, looked at a number of issues in panel meetings.
 - September meeting was business-oriented, not case specific.
 - In October the panel looked at an unsafe sleep-related death involving an infant. Question identified in this case in particular was, how much sobriety is sufficient to be a safe caretaker of a child?
 - In November, joined Domestic Violence Homicide Review Panel.
 - In December, looked at a non-death serious injury case that involved generational involvement with the Department.
 - Mark Moran has been coordinating with the Government Oversight Committee in response to the OPEGA reviews. Mark also attended the oral arguments before the Law Court last week to hear arguments on the GOC's request for access to DHHS records.
 - Dr. Brownell advised that the panel has discussed barriers to mandated reports. The panel has discussed how to increase compliance with the law, what can be done, etc.

Updates (11:05 a.m.-11:35 a.m.) Maine Supreme Judicial Court- Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill

- **Maine Guardian ad Litem Review Board:** The Supreme Judicial Court is seeking a new member for the Maine Guardian ad Litem Review Board. Specifically, we are seeking a public member who is neither a lawyer nor a guardian ad litem who has an interest in public service on behalf of children and families.
 - The review board investigates complaints made against guardians ad litem.
 - The board makeup includes 8 guardians ad litem and 4 public members.
 - Meetings are held in Augusta and this is a volunteer position.
 - Interested individuals should send an application letter and resume to Matthew Pollack.
 - Applications are due by December 29, 2023.
- **Maine eCourts:** Maine eCourts, including eFiling, launched in the Lewiston District Court and the Androscoggin County Superior Court for most family and civil case types.
 - Attorneys, governmental agencies, and others who file more than six court cases in a calendar year are now required to electronically file in these courts.
 - Protection from abuse, protection from harassment, juvenile, criminal, and civil violations cases continue to be filed in paper.
- **An Organizational Update from the Maine Judicial Branch- Chief Judge Brent Davis**
 - As of December 8, 2023, there have been 937 statewide protective custody original filings. For the same period in 2022, there were 942 filings. This represents a 1% decrease in filings from last year.
 - The judicial branch is in the process of completing the 2023 GAL core training, which had to be postponed, in part, after the tragic events in Lewiston. Twenty seven professionals participated in the training to become rostered.
 - The annual judicial branch child welfare conference will be held at Sunday River on April 4th and 5th.

- **An Organizational Update from the Office of the Attorney General-** Ariel Piers-Gamble, Assistant Attorney General, Chief of the Child Protective Division
 - 27 trial attorneys, 1 appellate attorney, 16 support staff. Three new AAGs—Shannon Collins, Victoria Silver, and Matthew Kapley. Anticipated vacancy for Briana White, who is leaving the office on Friday to join the Kennebec County DA’s Office.
 - AAG Hunter Umphrey handled 77 appeals this year.
 - OAG’s office continues to do ongoing trainings.
- **An Organizational Update from the Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS-** Bobbi Johnson, Acting Director
 - Former Director Todd Landry resigned about three weeks ago, and Bobbi Johnson is serving as Acting Director. Focusing on ensuring that staff are receiving support in light of testimony before the GOC Committee.
 - Several reports are coming due in the next few months.
 - Also working on rolling out new policies.
- **An Organizational Update from the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services,** Jim Billings, Executive Director
 - Darcy Fisher, Training and Supervision Counsel.
 - Longterm plan to investigate MCILS paid employees to take PC cases.
 - On January 4th and 5th there will be a minimum standards training for PC cases.

Strategic Plan Updates (11:35 a.m.-12:00 p.m.)

- **Race and Equity Committee:** Mary Bonauto & Regina Phillips
 - Light meeting schedule, in part because a number of agencies have purchased new software for data collection.
 - Meeting with the speaker of the house to discuss data efforts on the state level.
- **Parent Curriculum Workgroup:** Kelly Dell’Aquila, Jamie Brooks, and Karen Tompkins
 - CPS 101 monthly sessions are continuing.
 - Developed CPS 201 in the fall of 2023. One session has been held. Hoping to offer 201 quarterly.
 - The team is also providing quarterly professional training and monthly meetings with OCFS staff.
 - Primary referral sources are Department staff, the courts, and parents themselves.
- **Continuing Education Subcommittee:** Betsy Boardman
 - This committee focuses on the annual MJB child welfare conference.
 - Next conference is being held on April 4th and 5th, 2024 at Sunday River.
 - The draft agenda is focusing on the life a of a child protection case, with a litigation focus.
- **Parent Attorney/GAL Retention and Recruitment Subcommittee:** Betsy Boardman
 - Reaching out to existing community stakeholders to inquire about interest/capacity for representation, particularly on juvenile cases.
 - An additional focus on court scheduling and resources needed to meet the needs of the child protection docket.
 - Also turning focus to researching models in other states—are there systems elsewhere that can be adopted in Maine?

- As part of this effort, Ariel Piers-Gamble is conducting a survey of the AAGs across the state.

Task Force Membership Discussion: Mental Health Professional

- Any panel members who want to nominate a mental health professional should contact Betsy, who will relay the nominees to the Chief Justice.

2024 Meeting Dates: March 12th, June 11th, September 10th, December 12th.

Subcommittee Meeting Schedule:

- Race and Equity Subcommittee: First Thursday of the month from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m.
- Parent Curriculum Subcommittee: Quarterly on the second Monday of the month from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Continuing Education Subcommittee: Second Thursday of the month from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.
- Parent Attorney/GAL Retention and Recruitment Subcommittee: First Monday of the month from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

ADJOURN (11:21 a.m.)