

# **Justice for Children Task Force 2023 Annual Report**

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# Mission:

- Identify strengths that contribute to the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the State of Maine child welfare system;
- Identify systemic barriers which may have a negative effect on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the State of Maine child welfare system;
- Prioritize issues and develop joint solutions to remove identified barriers;
- Identify the training needs of stakeholders in child protective proceedings;
- Adopt a training curriculum for stakeholders in child protective proceedings;
- Monitor implementation of the Court Improvement Programs (CIPs);
- Encourage widespread participation in Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs);



# Mission cont.

- Sponsor regular local meetings involving all stakeholders which will provide training, foster collaboration at the local level, and identify issues which have statewide implications;
- Establish other goals for the Task Force, establish timelines for steps toward each goal, and monitor and evaluate progress toward the established goals;
- Address other topics, identified by the Task Force, that have an impact on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in the State of Maine child welfare system;
- Provide input and feedback regarding statewide performance standards for the timely resolution of. Matters involving children and families in the child welfare system; and
- Develop, establish, and operate programs designed to improve the assessment and investigation of suspected child abuse and neglect cases, including cases of suspected child sexual abuse and exploitation, in a manner that limits additional trauma to the child and the child's family.



# Meetings

- Met three times as a full task force throughout 2023.
- All subcommittees met on a monthly basis.
- Additional topics covered:
  - Sharing of other Citizen Review Panel's annual reports;
  - Data sharing with a focus on the number of children in care and new child welfare court filings; and
  - Implementation of Maine's Child Safety and Family Well-Being Plan.



# Strategic Plan Items

- Information sharing between citizen review panels and the legislature;
- Facilitation and expansion of a virtual child welfare parent curriculum;
- Race and equity data collection; and
- Parent attorney and guardian ad litem recruitment and retention.



# Information Sharing

- Maine Citizen Review Panel quarterly meetings.
  - Focus on effective communication among panels;
  - Data sharing;
  - Ensuring statutory functions are faithfully discharged; and
  - Identifying opportunities to support and collaborate on initiatives.
- All three panels met quarterly with the Health and Human Services Committee at the Maine State Legislature.



# Parent Curriculum: CPS 101

- Began in August 202.
- Voluntary class focused on understanding the child welfare process, court procedures, and suggested practices for parents to implement to be successful throughout a child welfare case.
- Two-hour information session that is led by a parent with experience in the child welfare system or a parent who has navigated multiple systems.
- CPS 101 includes:
  - An introduction to child protective service professionals;
  - Explanation of the court process;
  - Tip for parents on how to successfully engage in the child welfare process and how to respond to conflict; and
  - Contact information for helpful resources and information.



# CPS 101

- Judicial Branch funding was extended to June 30, 2024.
- Maine legislature, in the 131th session, provided one-time funding to DHHS for the program in the amount of \$200,000.
- The information session has been offered 39 times with 117 parent participants.
- Additionally, The Opportunity Alliance offered twenty CPS 101 information sessions to child welfare system partners.





# CPS 201

- Scope of CPS 101 was expanded in 2023 to include the development and implementation of CPS 201.
- CPS 201 is for individuals who have participated in CPA 101 and would like further information on how to be successful during a child welfare case.
- CPS 201 includes:
  - Information on family team meetings;
  - Effective communication strategies;
  - How to have successful visits with children; and
  - Skills for self-advocacy.
- Participants are provided with helpful tools including call and activity logs and sample family team meetings agendas.



# CPS 101/201 Data Collection

- Pre- and post- parent surveys;
- Time to permanency;
- Participation in family visitation;
- Participation and engagement in reunification services; and
- Attendance at court proceedings.



# Parent Surveys

Question	Pre-CPS 101 Average Score (on a scale from 1 to 5)	Post CPS 101 Average Score (on a scale from 1 to 5)
I have an understanding of how the child protective system works.	2.8	4.1 (46% increase in understanding)
I understand who is on my child protective services team and what they each do.	3.1	4.3
I have an understanding of what I need to do to reunify my family.	3.2 (113/113) (4 children in parents' care)	4.0 (110/110) (7 children in parents' care)
I feel hopeful about my child protective services involvement	3.0	3.7



# Race and Equity Data Assessment

- Began in March 2021
- Identified the need to assess data collection regarding race and other important markers of equity by the Maine Judicial Branch and the agencies that interface with the child protection system.
- Membership:
  - Maine Judicial Branch;
  - Department of Health and Human Services;
  - Department of Corrections;
  - Department of Public Safety;
  - Department of Education;
  - Maine State Legislature; and
  - Various other community organizations.



# Goal:

- Better understand what systems are in place for the collection and sharing of aggregated data on various data points to inform policy decisions, measure fairness and equity, and provide the courts and agencies with data about the people and populations they serve.
- Data Point Set:
  - Race;
  - Ethnicity;
  - Connection with tribe/band/nation;
  - Enrollment or eligibility for enrollment with a federally recognized tribe(s);
  - Sexual orientation;
  - Income;
  - Location;
  - Gender;
  - Gender identity; and
  - Disability.



# Public Consulting Group

- Hired in October 2021.
- Two outcomes:
  - Data mapping inventory
  - Final report with recommendations and findings.
- Conducted 15 interviews.
- Literature review of best practices and strategies for data sharing and data consistency among system partners.
- Interviewed six national experts in data sharing.
- Final reports were issued in September 2022.



# Race and Equity Subcommittee

- Continues to meet to discuss how to implement recommendations from the report.
- Focus on consistent data collection and storage.
- Internal efforts on implementation of collection strategies.
- Monitored statewide data collection initiatives to coordinate efforts without duplication.
- Current pending legislation to implement a statewide pilot project to collect and share child welfare data between agencies. (LD 1948- House Speaker is the sponsor. Public hearing on February 6<sup>th</sup> at 1:00 pm at the State and Local Government Committee.)



# **Parent Attorney and Guardian ad Litem Recruitment and Retention**

- Recommendation from the 2022 MCWAP Annual Report.
- Established this subcommittee in June 2023.
- Membership:
  - Maine legal service providers;
  - Maine Judicial Branch;
  - Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services;
  - Parent Attorneys;
  - Guardians ad Litem; and
  - Individuals representing juveniles in delinquency matters.





# Subcommittee Mission

- Identify and make recommendations for system improvements to increase the recruitment and retention of Maine child welfare parent attorneys and guardians ad litem.
- Identified issues for further examination:
  - Engagement of legal aid organizations to provide representation;
  - Use of law school interns in private/small firm practices;
  - Child welfare expert certification;
  - Statewide incubator programs;
  - Examination of court scheduling practices; and
  - Service availability to parents and children involved in the child welfare system.
- Anticipated that system recommendations will be released in 2024.



# Continuing Education Subcommittee

- Meets to help plan the Maine Judicial Branch's annual child protective conference.
- In 2023, the conference returned to in person.
- Title: *Let's Reconnect: A Lived-Experience Perspective of the Child Welfare System.*
- Sessions focused on the lived experience of both children/youth and parents who have been involved with the Maine child welfare system.
- Youth involved sessions included a film screening of "As We Are" by Smooth Feather youth and a session focused on how to partner with young people in decision making during the life of a child welfare case.
- Parent-led sessions included hearing from individuals in recovery with previous child welfare involvement with additional sessions on understanding substance use disorder and the interplay of the child welfare system and domestic violence.



# Continuing Legal Education Credits

- Opportunity to earn 10.5 general continuing legal education credits/continuing professional education credits.
- One ethics credit.
- One harassment and discrimination credit.



# Questions?

