

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

November 1, 2024; 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Co-Chairs: Ahmen Cabral; Andrea Mancuso

Panel Coordinator: Jenna Joeckel

Minutes

9:30 a.m. - Welcome and Introductions:

Attendance: Andrea Mancuso, Ahmen Cabral, Jenna Joeckel, Betsy Boardman, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Ashley Perry, Maura Keaveney, Beth Gagnon, Taylor Kilgore, Erika Simonson, Travis Bryant, Julie Smyth, Esther Anne, Jean Haynes, Heidi Aakjer, Melissa Hackett, Molly Owens, Julian Richter

*Guest of the Panel – Amanda Hollander

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.

Members participated in a review of the Panel Values Statement.

9:10 a.m. – MCWAP Housekeeping:

The panel voted on and approved the October minutes.

Members learned that the 2024 proposed recommendations were all approved by the panel via an electronic vote prior to the meeting. This included the change in the panel meeting schedule. The next panel meeting will take place in February 2025.

The Executive Committee will turn attention to the 2024 Annual Report, with the goal of completing that report prior to the February panel meeting.

9:20 a.m. Parent Survey Data Discussion:

The Data for the 2024 Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel Parent Survey Results were shared with Panel members.

Members discussed a recommendation that was made to include the number of participants that responded to each question within the charts and data outcomes report. A suggestion was made to highlight themes that can be found within the survey results and to include a representative quote. The Panel will continue to explore the best avenues and formats to share this information. Members are

encouraged to think about the places and community partners that would be beneficial to share the summary with.

The 2021 Survey Summary Results can be found here: <https://www.mecitizenreviewpanels.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2021-Survey-Findings-Summary.pdf>

The Citizen Engagement Committee will continue to work on this. The next Citizen Engagement Subcommittee meeting is on November 21st at 9:00 a.m. Members are encouraged to attend. Narrative responses to the survey questions are also available for review. Panel Coordinator will send a calendar invite with the link to the meeting.

9:40 a.m. Provider Survey Data Discussion:

The data from the 2024 Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel Provider Survey was shared with Panel members. A suggestion was made to restructure the graphs on the report. The Maine Children's Alliance has a visual associate that would be able to be a resource to the Panel to support the formation of the report. A suggestion was made to explore options and resources to support ongoing use and development of the surveys.

10:00 a.m. Prior Recommendation Discussion:

The Panel reviewed prior recommendations made by the Panel regarding Family Team Meetings. The Panel made recommendations relevant to FTMS in 2021, 2022, and 2023.

The Family Team Meeting subcommittee has recognized that, while the model and the importance of the FTM process continues to be a priority, progress has been slow to get to a place where the extent to which FTM practice is aligned with policy can be effectively evaluated. The most recent recommendation from 2023 is intended to provide support to OCFS to engage in ongoing evaluation.

The Family Team Meeting Policy was revised on November 30, 2021. The panel continues to see this as a strong policy. There are continuing concerns about practice and the extent to which practice aligns with policy.

The Panel will continue to discuss prior panel recommendations in upcoming meetings. A suggestion was made to look at prior recommendations annually in the future.

10:15 OCFS Updates:

Jean Haynes, Associate Director of Child Welfare Services with the Office of Child and family Services (OCFS) provided OCFS Updates to the panel. Updates included:

1. Information about building relationships between OCFS staff and family engagement specialists and recommendations that were made to update and improve information provided to families about the supports that the family engagement specialists provide.
2. A Mandated Reporter Convening is taking place in December to focus on the providing information about the difference between poverty and neglect to support professionals in distinguishing between the two and aligning supportive resources, how to better support mandated reporters, and to provide education to mandated reporters.
3. OCFS currently has 49 vacancies. Some staff have had to resign because they have not been able to pass the LSW test. OCFS is in the process of brainstorming strategies to support staff with this barrier. Conditional LSW licenses are active for 2 years and can be renewed one time prior to the test. Members discussed that, in addition to the absolute number of vacancies, the degree of turnover in positions is also deeply affecting response.

Members discussed the concerns about the number of placements that OCFS has access to including therapeutic foster homes and concerns that some high needs children that do not have a foster placement are temporarily placed in a hotel with OCFS staff. There are currently 2,435 children in state care and 6 are residing in hotels. This is point in time data. Though MCWAP made a request to the Department in its 2023 recommendations to receive aggregate data about children in hotels, hospitals and district offices, that information continues to be unavailable for the Panel to review. OCFS is exploring strategies to combat this ongoing placement challenge, including possibly hiring security guards. Panel members expressed concerns about the strategy of using security guards with children and requested notification prior to any implementation of this strategy. A suggestion was made to assign each child a specific person that can be a lead in the child's care.

There was a workgroup that was recently developed as a result of legislation. A report will be issued in November and will be shared with the Panel.

<https://legislature.maine.gov/backend/App/services/getDocument.aspx?documentId=105834>

Resources about Regional Care Teams can be found here: <https://placemattersmaine.org/regional-care-teams/>

Information about upend can be found here: <https://upendmovement.org/>

10:45 Panel Member Updates:

MEPRA is holding a conference on Friday November 8, 2024

The Maine Judicial Branch Child Welfare Conference is on April 3rd and 4th 2025.

New England Fathering Conference is taking place on March 19-21, 2025. <https://www.nefatheringconference.org/>

December also marks the Anniversary of the Chafee Reauthorization Act.

The Panel adjourned at 10:53 a.m.

Next Panel Meeting: February 7, 2024, 9 a.m. – 11a.m.