

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

March 7, 2025; 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, Jenna Joeckel, Beth Gagnon, Maura Keaveney, Taylor Kilgore, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Jean Haynes, Abbie Rohde, Betsy Boardman, Molly Owens, Julie Smyth, Melissa Martin, Bobbi Johnson, Michelle Westbrook, Melissa Hackett, Esther Anne, Christine Hufnagel, Sarah Heald, Heidi Aakjer, Adrienne Carmack,

*Guest of the Panel – Sophie Levenson, Intern at OAG; Robert Blanchard, OCFS.

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.

9:15 a.m. – MCWAP Housekeeping:

A recommendation was made at the March Panel meeting to change Chelsea's role on the Panel from Attorneys involved in both civil and criminal court proceedings related to child abuse and neglect to Individuals experienced in working with children with disabilities. An electronic vote regarding role change was sent to members after the Panel meeting. As a result of the vote, Chelsea Peters will be remaining on the Panel in her new professional role.

Kelly Dell'Aquila is resigning from the Panel, and this is her last Panel meeting

Betsy Boardman is resigning from the Panel, and this is her last Panel meeting.

There will be two vacancies on the Executive Committee. Members are encouraged to connect with the Panel Chairs or Panel Coordinator with any interest in participation in the Executive Committee.

The panel voted on and approved the March 2025 minutes.

The Panel reviewed the current plan for Panel review of OCFS policies and discussed barriers to the review process. A suggestion was made to schedule future meetings related to policy review adjacent an Executive Committee. Panel members discussed concerns related to the current timeframe given by OCFS for feedback. The Panel timeframe is aligned with OCFS staff feedback timeframe. A suggestion was made to create a process that allows members to let the Panel Coordinator know when the policy is reviewed and the Panel member has no feedback. Members were reminded that Policy Review is an important role and responsibility of the Panel. Members are encouraged to continue to provide feedback and ideas on how to make this process of reviewing new and revised policies work better.

The MCWAP Annual Retreat will be taking place on September 12, 2025, from 9a.m. - 3p.m. The tentative meeting place is the Capitol Judicial Center in Augusta, ME. Members are invited to connect with the Panel Coordinator to express interest in the Annual Retreat Planning Committee. The Panel Coordinator will be sending timeframes to the Panel electronically for recommendations and agenda items to be submitted prior to the Annual Retreat.

9:45 a.m. Title IV-E Funding Presentation

Bobbi Johnson, Director of the Office of Child and Family Services and Robert Blanchard, Associate Director of the Office of Child and Family Services provided a presentation to the Panel about Title IV-E Funding including the purpose and implementation including:

- Foster care and adoption maintenance
- Funding and administrative activities
- Funding for Training Activities

Maine does not currently claim for Funding for Allowable Administrative Costs of Legal Representation. Presenters noted that Title IV-E funding covers a limited percentage of specified costs that has been predetermined by the Federal Government. This has been identified as a challenge in multiple states. A copy of the presentation is attached to the minutes.

Panel Discussion:

To implement additional Title IV-E Funding around the Funding for Allowable Administrative Costs of Legal Representation, additional infrastructure is needed on the Commission level. The Panel discussed barriers related to implementing the infrastructure and data collections. This is currently being explored. Public Defense Services reports that the staff have assessed current information reporting/billing detail from parent attorneys, and the current tracking system sets them up well to be able to provide the needed data.

When a child leaves a placement and returns home to their parents, including trial home placement, eligibility for the Title IV-E claim is no longer met. While the child may be eligible, the ability to draw federal funds under Title IV-E funds changes based on placement eligibility. OCFS reports approximately 40% of the children in care are eligible for Title IV-E reimbursement, and OCFS is covering approximately 60% of the costs for those cases with Title IV-E reimbursement. Title IV-E reimbursement has been increasingly less applicable (15% drop in last several years) because the threshold is connected to 1980 TANF amounts, federally.

10:15 a.m. OCFS Updates

Jean Haynes, Associate Director of the Office of Child and Family Services and Bobbi Johnson, Director of the Office of Child and Family Services provided an annual OCFS update presentation to the Panel. The presentation included information about the 2024 MCWAP recommendations made to OCFS and the

progress that has been made on those recommendations. [LD 1544](#) “An Act to Support Families by Improving the Court Process for Child Protection Cases” is a bill that is related to the recommendations that were discussed. Director Johnson recently provided a presentation to the Health and Human Services Committee regarding the reporting of child deaths and a copy of Director Johnson’s presentation will be attached to the minutes.

Director Johnson highlighted Legislation that OCFS has brought forward and provided background information for each bill.

Jenny Hinson has been hired as the Deputy Director of OCFS has been hired. Jenny joins OCFS with over 25 years of experience with children and families, leading strategic initiatives and fostering change, most recently within the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Jenny will join the OCFS team on July 14, overseeing Children’s Licensing and Investigation Services and Violence Intervention and Response Program, and supporting OCFS’ mission to create a future where all Maine children and families are safe, stable, happy, and healthy

Director Johnson discussed the OCFS Strategic Plan process and provided information as to how OCFS is responding to Public Consulting Group (PCG) recommendations. The Strategic Plan will be based on Federal and State measures with two addendums including over 200 recommendations. A Dashboard is also being implemented to reflect performance progress and outcomes.

The importance of relationship building, collaboration, and communication was emphasized as part of a common goal including partnering with family members and community partners. A copy of Director Johnson’s presentation is attached to the minutes.

Panel Discussion:

The Panel discussed efforts that are being made to support Family Team Meeting Practice including the implementation of FTM Facilitators and data collection by the CQI team. OCFS notes FTM facilitators are being explored within existing resources, but these will be identified staff. Data collection will include surveys being sent to OCFS staff to inquire as to what they see as strengths and challenges as it relates to FTMs. OCFS has been engaged with peers in other northeast states to discuss what other states are doing responsive to family team meeting challenges, including considered removal meetings.

The timeframe for the rollout of the strategic plan is not completely developed but OCFS is tentatively looking at July 1st. The Panel will be updated as they are made available.

To learn more about the YLAT Teen Conference for youth in care in Maine, click here <https://www.ylat.org/>

The National Center for Fatality Review and Prevention website can be found here: <https://ncfrp.org/>

Next Panel Meeting: September 12, 2025, 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.