

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

February 6, 2026; 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.

Co-Chairs: Ahmen Cabral; Andrea Mancuso

Panel Coordinator: Jenna Joeckel

Minutes

9:00 a.m. - Welcome and Introductions:

Attendance: Jenna Joeckel, Melissa Hackett, Andrea Mancuso, Ahmen Cabral, Christine Alberi, Maura Keaveney, Julie Smyth, Taylor Kilgore, Jamie Brooks, Erika Simonson, Christine Hufnagel, Heidi Aakjer, Sarah Langevin, Senator Donna Bailey, Abbie Rode, Kathryn Brice, Adrienne Carmack,

Guests of the Panel- Kristina Famolare, Rebecca Richardson, Kaela Scott, Chelsea Peters, Michael Dixon, Anastasia Quimby,

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.

9:05 a.m. MCWAP Housekeeping:

The panel voted on and approved the December minutes

The annual report is in the development process, and a draft will be shared with the Panel soon.

The Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee Update recently took place. MCWAP shared information about collaboration with the OCFS policy team, the anticipated annual report content as well as additional collaboration efforts with OCFS.

Carlie Fisher has been participating in Panel meetings and is interested in becoming a Panel member. She will replace Melissa Martin for MECASA. After the Panel meeting, the Panel coordinator will send an electronic vote for membership and will include her statement of interest.

OCFS would like to connect with MCWAP as a focus group to explore work on the CFSR. The goal is for the focus group to take place prior to the end of April and is anticipated to take 90 minutes. The Panel coordinator will send possible dates to vote on after the Panel meeting.

9:25 a.m. Presentation on the Ombudsman 2023 Annual Report

The panel had the opportunity to review the Ombudsman's 2025 Annual Report and the Office of Child and Family Services Response to the Report prior to the meeting.

The Ombudsman 2024 Annual Report can be found here: [2025 Annual Report of the Child Welfare Ombudsman](#)

The OCFS Response to the Ombudsman 2024 Annual Report can be found here: [Final Ombudsman Response for 2025.pdf](#)

Christine Alberi, Child Welfare Ombudsman discussed the Ombudsman 2024 Annual Report. She included information about the history of the Ombudsman's office including staffing and their role within the child welfare system. The majority of the time is spent on two tasks including information and referral calls and reviewing cases. The presenter clarified that the system is a complaint driven, collaborative process and when a case is opened, it is as a result of a complaint being made. The Office of Child and Family Services also has an opportunity to respond to a case review. Case specific reviews are completed on an average of 80-100 cases and reports with recommendations are drafted specific to the findings from those cases. In addition, the Ombudsman grades the cases after a request was made from OCFS about 5 years ago and the report reflects that the quality of casework has improved in 2025 to reflect that more cases were graded with a higher level than not. The presenter discussed trends that were outlined within the report and recommendations made as a result of those trends including an ongoing focus on the serious shortage of children's mental health and behavioral health services, the importance of collateral contacts, the ability to access information from collateral contacts, and the definition and impact of educational neglect. There are multiple recommendations within the report related to truancy, educational neglect, and family risk factors. The presenter recommended that members review page 11 of the report to view the details of these recommendations. Also, the presenter recommended that members review page 15 of the report to include positive findings within OCFS districts.

Discussion: When a child is truant, school will often send a letter home to families explaining the truancy process. These letters are often worded with language that could be perceived.

[Count ME In! Attendance Help for Maine Schools, Teachers, Principals and Students | Everyone Counts!; Maine Engagement and Attendance Center | Department of Education](#) is a non-profit that is explore root causes behind absences. The Department of Education has started an initiative, the Maine Engagement and Attendance Center, to explore ongoing barriers around school attendance. The truancy rule is being revised to be more similar to a wraparound model. [Title 20-A, §5051-A: Truancy](#)

The Maine Child Welfare Action Network (MCWAN) has also been partnering with the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) on the new Mandated Reporter Training and considerations with educational support and training as it relates to truancy and educational neglect are included in those conversations.

In addition, Clinicians need access to documentation from OCFS that outlines their concerns to support families that are involved with OCFS. Releases of Information are often received for anything and everything. There are challenges around what documentation and record sharing look like and how it impacts the availability of service providers. The Panel discussed the possibility for this to become a deeper discussion and consideration for a recommendation. The Family Centered Policy & Practice Subcommittee will be working towards the development of a recommendation on this topic.

10:10 a.m. Subcommittee Updates:

Family Centered Policy & Practice – The subcommittee is reviewing prior recommendations, identifying the status and bringing the unresolved recommendations back to the Panel. A recommendation was made to do this annually. The subcommittee is also going to explore information and record sharing after the recommendation review is complete. The next meeting is Wednesday the 11th from 12-1pm.

Citizen Engagement Committee – The subcommittee has been working on engaging individual that have been involved with the child welfare system, both professionals and families.

10:15 a.m. OCFS Updates:

Rebecca Richardson, Manager of Child Welfare Strategy and Policy Implementation from the Office of Child and Family Services, provided an update regarding training and policies. OCFS is in the process of evaluating the Family Team Meeting process. Each district has hired a Family Team Meeting facilitator. Focus groups have been completed with staff, attorneys, YLAT, and the family engagement team.

OCFS has a policy plan in place that will be shared with MCWAP once it is approved.

OCFS has been partnering with Casey Family Programs to improve Permanency Reviews.

The Panel took time to schedule the Family Team Meeting focus group and agreed to schedule it for March 4, 2026, from 1:00-2:30.

10:30 a.m. OCFS Data Dashboard Update:

Director Bobbi Johnson, Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), delivered a presentation on the OCFS Data Dashboard. Director Johnson addressed a recent public statement claiming that 143 children in state custody have died in the last 10 years, noting that this statement is inaccurate and harmful to children and families. She emphasized that her mission is to ensure the dissemination of accurate information to community partners.

The presentation provided an overview of the Data Dashboard, including the types of circumstances that are included and excluded, common misconceptions, manner-of-death data, and information related to abuse and neglect fatalities. Director Johnson reported that the majority of the recorded deaths were attributable to unsafe sleep practices. She also noted that in 2024, Maine joined the National Partnership for Child Safety and the National Child Case Reporting System. A visual demonstration of the Data Dashboard was presented to the Panel.

Discussion: The Data Dashboard reflects data current through 2025. Cases that remain under criminal investigation or are awaiting final autopsy reports may not yet be reflected in the dashboard.

The Maine Children’s Trust has offered to support and collaborate on infant safe sleep.

Next Panel Meeting: March 6, 9 a.m. – 11 a.m.