

*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 1, 2024; 9 a.m. - 11 a.m.**

**Co-Chairs:** Ahmen Cabral; Andrea Mancuso

**Panel Coordinator:** Jenna Joeckel

### **Minutes**

#### **9:00 a.m. 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.

#### **9:10 a.m. – MCWAP Values and Federal Mandated:**

Members shared the MCWAP Values

#### **9:15 a.m. - Welcome and Introductions:**

Attendance: Andrea Mancuso, Ahmen Cabral, Jenna Joeckel, Tammy Roy, Michelle Westbrook, Ed Wiseman, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Maura Keaveney, Kathryn Brice, Heidi Aakjer, Julie Smyth, Christine Alberi, Beth Gagnon, Melissa Hackett, Julie Smyth, Betsy Boardman, Chelsea Peters, Erika Simonson, Adrienne Carmack, Esther Anne, Travis Bryant, Taylor Kilgore, Melissa Martin, Bobbi Johnson

Guest of the Panel - \*Michael Dixon, Christine Hufnagel, Ashley Perry

#### **9:15 a.m. – MCWAP Housekeeping:**

The panel voted on and approved the February minutes

The Annual Report is in draft format and will be disbursed upon receipt of OCFS response

The April meeting is cancelled, and the May meeting will be extended as needed

According to poll responses, there is an insufficient number of members that are able to attend an in-person meeting prior to the September 2024 meeting so meetings will continue to take place on the Zoom platform.

#### **9:20 a.m. Presentation on the Ombudsman 2023 Annual Report**

The panel had the opportunity to review the Ombudsman's 2023 Annual Report and the Office of Child and Family Services Response to the Report prior to the meeting.

The Ombudsman 2023 Annual Report can be found here: <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/10525>

The OCFS Response to the Ombudsman 2023 Annual Report can be found here: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/OCFS%20Response%20to%20Ombudsman%202023%20Annual%20Report.pdf>

Christine Alberi, Child Welfare Ombudsman discussed the Ombudsman 2023 Annual Report. She included information about the history of the Ombudsman's office including staffing and their role within the child welfare system. The Ombudsman's office receives an average of 800 contacts per year. Case specific reviews are completed on an average of 100 cases and reports with recommendations are drafted specific to those cases. The presenter discussed trends that were outlined within the report and recommendations made as a result of those trends including ongoing support of the Safety Science Model, funding to increase availability for services for children, and statute changes.

The 2022 Maine Safety Science Report can be found here: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/Maine%20Safety%20Science%20Model%202022%20Report.pdf>

The Collaborative Safety Website can be found here: <https://www.collaborative-safety.com/>

An Orientation Session is taking place next month and panel members are invited to attend. Tammy Roy, Child Welfare Project Manager provided a brief overview of the Maine Safety Science Model.

The Ombudsman's office is hopeful to start working with district staff to create understanding around their report feedback and provide additional support.

#### **Panel Discussion:**

Members expressed appreciation for the focus on the recommendation for increased services for family. Members discussed national best practice standards related to statute changes. A recommendation was made to communicate with Casey Family Services about possible best practices and explore National best practices. Members noted that around 2009, Maine was nominated for a government award for the work that was taking place in the child welfare system and was recognized as a system that was working well.

<https://www.aecf.org/resources/fixing-a-broken-system>

Members discussed recommendations regarding older youth. The Ombudsman's office does not generally receive calls from older youth so that is not typically a focus of the office at this time. The Ombudsman's office does not track data about parent's who were formally in state custody.

#### **10:05 a.m. – Subcommittee Updates:**

**Family Team Meeting Subcommittee:** The subcommittee has been following [L.D. 857 "An Act to Improve Family Team Meetings in Child Welfare Cases to Ensure Better Outcomes for Children by Providing Adequate Funding"](#). It has not been scheduled for a work session at this time.

**Family Centered Policy & Practice Subcommittee:** The subcommittee will reschedule their monthly meeting times. Members are asked to come to the meeting having read reports in advance to discuss

trends and recommendations. Members are encouraged to email the Subcommittee chair with reports for exploration.

**Citizen Engagement Subcommittee:** The Subcommittee has been working on the parent survey. A meeting took place with OCFS to explore platforms for the survey dissemination and data collection. The subcommittee is hopeful for the survey to be operational in the month of March.

Panel members are encouraged to participate in a subcommittee if they are interested and able.

**10:15 a.m. – OCFS Updates:**

Office of Child and Family Services Director Bobbi Johnson provided OCFS updates. She has been completing district visits with staff to discuss her new role and share the ongoing vision of OCFS. The mission and the practice model are part of the foundation to the work that is done within the OCFS. Commitment to the system includes the following:

- Staff voices being reflected in OCFS strategies and the work that is being implemented
- That the office provides data to reflect outcomes
- An expectation of accountability at all levels
- Advocacy for resources
- Clear pathways for staff to share ideas
- Strong partnerships with partners and families
- Strong relationships withing the OCFS culture.

In addition to meeting with staff, Director Johnson is creating time to meet with Family Engagement Specialists, Parents, Youth, and Resource Parents in an effort to continue to build connections.

A management audit is taking place within the OCFS system. The Public Consulting Group is supporting the audit, and a report is expected by the end of March. The workload of staff is also going to be analyzed utilizing a workload analytic tool that is in development. Workload is different from caseload and includes analysis of risk, geographical location, and other factors within the cases.

Multiple positions have been requested through the legislature. Eight child welfare supervisor training positions that will be in each district office and act as training mentor to staff have been requested. There are also five legal secretaries included in the budget. An Assistant Program Administrator has been requested for the Lewiston office. A recruitment and retention incentive payment for staff has been implemented. Furthermore, Children’s Behavioral health will no longer be part of the Office of Child and Family Services and will be part of the Office of Behavioral Health. Connections between both offices will continue to be a priority. There is a bill before the legislature to create a pilot program for case aids. This is a step to create additional support for caseworkers.

One member shared that Children’s Behavioral Health is helping primary care providers meet the behavioral health needs of children and families, gain resources, training, and access to consultation through a Maine Pediatric & Behavioral health Partnership. <https://www.bhpartnersforme.org>

Members are reminded to register for the Judicial Conference.

**Next Panel Meeting: May 3, 2024, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.**