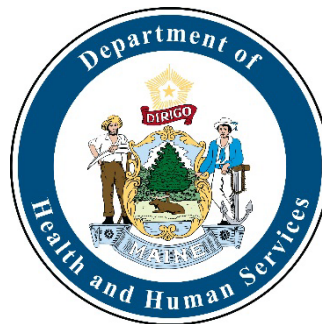


Annual MCWAP Update

June 7, 2024

Bobbi Johnson, LMSW
Director, OCFS



Office of Child and Family Services

“Practice Model and North Star”



All Maine Children & Families

**SAFE, STABLE,
HAPPY, HEALTHY**

- Child safety is **first and foremost**
- Parents have the **right and responsibility** to raise their children
- Children deserve to live in a **safe and nurturing** family
- All children deserve a **permanent** family
- How we do our work is **as important** as the work we do

Previous Recommendations

- Engage individuals with lived experience (2022)
 - While this recommendation was directed to a broad group of stakeholders OCFS has engaged parents with lived experience as part of the work done within our Cooperative Agreement with the Cutler Institute and is continuing to support CPS 101 and 201. We are also a part of the significant work being done by the New England Association of Child Welfare Commissioners and Directors (NEACWCD) related to engaging with individuals with lived experience.
- Establish peer support opportunities within Child Welfare (2022)
 - OCFS has now established Peer Recovery Coaches in Maine's Family Recovery Courts, utilizing Opioid Prevention Treatment Funds (OPTF) to provide this valuable resource for parents involved with the Family Recovery Courts.

2023 Recommendations

2023 Recommendations Directed Outside OCFS



Establish an Office of Parent Counsel

Maine should establish a certification for “Child Welfare Law Specialist” through the National Association of Counsel for Children

Amend Title 22 to require automatic assignment of client-directed attorneys to youth aged 10 or older in Protective Custody cases

Report of Children in Hotels or District Offices

The Department should report to the Panel quarterly on the number of children in Department custody who are staying or have stayed in hotels during the previous quarter. This should include the age of each child and how long each child remained in a hotel and in which district. This report should also include how many children are being held at DHHS offices for more than 6 hours at a time while awaiting placement or because DHHS staff is providing child-care in lieu of that being available through the child's placement, the ages of these children, how many hours they were held or being cared for at a DHHS office and in which district. The Department should include this information in its quarterly report made to the Maine Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee. To give all case participants the ability to help problem solve these issues, the Department should create a policy and practice whereby all case participants are notified within 3 days of the child experiencing one of the above circumstances.

- OCFS is focused is on seeking solutions that eliminate the need to utilize hotel settings overnight and district offices during the day for children awaiting placement / access to child care services. OCFS now employs a dedicated Child Welfare Coordinator responsible for helping coordinate coverage and match youth to potential resource homes. OCFS is also working with a contracted provider to actively recruit prospective resource parents and regularly engages with existing resource parents to explore opportunities to retain current resource parents and attract new placement resources.

Ongoing Review of Homebuilders Program Implementation

The Department should review the implementation of the Homebuilders Program, with particular attention to contract compliance, understanding of the program amongst OCFS staff who are making referral of parents to the program, and the extent to which the program is able to fully meet the needs of all referred parents, including that services of the program are being provided without bias or discrimination. The Department should report to the Panel as to how the Department is engaged in ongoing monitoring of this program around the above referenced points. The Panel asks for a report on this to be provided to the Panel by March 2024. In addition, the Panel requested in the June meeting to be provided with a copy of the contract for the Homebuilders Program.

- The Department continues to fulfill its responsibilities under the contract and meet contract management expectation with regard to all contracted providers, including Bethany Christian Services which is the provider for Homebuilders.
- OCFS has provided the panel with a copy of the contract and coordinated a presentation on the program by the provider's staff.
- OCFS recently provided a copy of the BCS Homebuilders Annual Report 2023.

Review and Alignment of Available Economic Supports

The Department should identify areas in which economic support for parents and custodians are not aligned with economic supports provided to foster/resource/kinship placements, as well as uncompensated visit supervisors, and take steps, including updating any necessary formal or informal policies and practices, to align them.

- OCFS continues to provide transportation reimbursement, fund services not otherwise covered by MaineCare, and provide financial support for parents during trial home placement.
- The Child Welfare Contingency Funds also provide an opportunity for OCFS to provide temporary assistance to families during investigations or trial home placements to ensure they are able to safely care for their children.

Evaluation of Family Team Meetings

OCFS should engage outside technical assistance to develop a system of evaluation for Maine's Family Team Meeting (FTM) model, to include: 1) establishing and implementing a process for ongoing data collection and analysis that includes case review and FTM participant input; 2) use of data to evaluate the extent to which current practices reflect state policy requirements; and 3) plans for the continuous quality improvement of the FTM model. Progress on the data collection system, evaluation findings, and plans for improvement should be reported to the Panel by June 30, 2025.

- Unfortunately, the bill related to the evaluation of Family Team Meetings was not funded in the last legislative session.
- OCFS is continuing to explore opportunities to use data to evaluate and improve FTM practice. Given the current demands on frontline staff, OCFS is carefully considering how to implement this type of continuous quality improvement effort related to FTMs in a manner that minimizes the impact on staff and maximizes the opportunities for training and improvement that can be integrated into existing training efforts.

Contingency Funding Update

January through June of 2023

- 18 families
- Average expenditure of \$1,291.42 per family

July through December of 2023

- 27 families
- Average Expenditure of \$1,005.28 per family

January through May 2024

- 41 families
- Average expenditure of \$1,210.90

Examples of Expenditures:

- Housing-related costs
- Utility bills
- Auto repairs
- Life/safety improvements to homes
- Safe sleep accommodations and furniture
- Heating costs

OCFS Organizational Redesign

Goals:

- Streamline and clarify roles
- Provide greater support for professional development
- Improve connections between the Central and District Offices
- Increase opportunities for consistency in decision making and policy implementation
- Continue our focus on serving Maine children and families.

Key Changes:

- Finalize the movement of Children's Behavioral Health Services (CBHS) to the Office of Behavioral Health to align behavioral health services across Mainers' lifetimes
- Redesign of the Associate Director position within Child Welfare to focus on strategy and services
- Consolidation of the Regional Associate Director positions into three managers who oversee Field Operations, Statewide Programs, and Strategy and Policy Implementation
- Embedding the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) work within the Strategy and Policy unit of child welfare to ensure alignment between prevention efforts and other initiatives
- Creation of a new Deputy Director position within OCFS

OCFS Executive Management Team

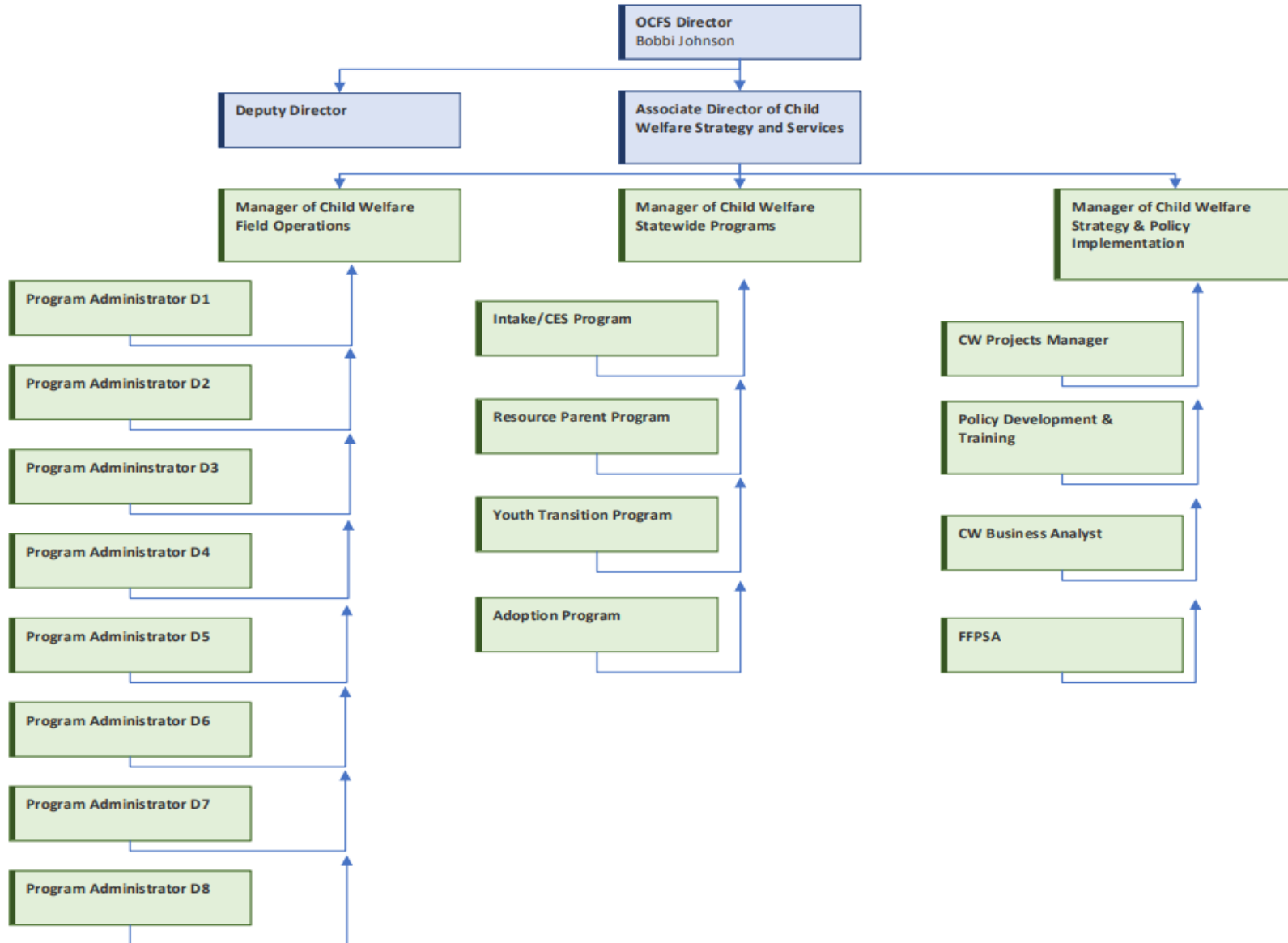


The OCFS Executive Management Team also includes a contracted Medical Director and 2 Program Financial Officers and will be hiring a Deputy Director over the next few months.

Previous Child Welfare Structure



Child Welfare Structure Redesign



Child Welfare Priorities

Staffing and Workforce

- Minimize vacancies
- Retain existing staff and recruit new staff
- Adequate staffing will allow proper focus on other priorities

Improvement of Organizational Management

- Support leadership
- Improve culture
- Internal and external communication
- Decision making practices

Focus on Strategic Priorities

- Improve quality
- Strengthen consistency
- Increase outcomes for children and families

Office of Child and Family Services

Child Welfare: Strategic Priorities 2023-2026

Safety

Improve the Consistency and Quality of CPS Intake Screening Decisions

Improve the Consistency and Quality of Child Protective Investigations

Permanency and Well-being

Improve the Consistency, Quality, and Timeliness of Permanency for Children in Care

Improve the Quality of the Health and Well-being of Children in Care

Consistency

Achieve the Goals Outlined in the CFSR/PIP Measurement Plan by January 2024

Strengthen the Child Welfare Workforce Through Efforts to Improve Recruitment, Retention, and Support

Foundational Principals

Family, Youth, and Resource Parent Engagement

Race, Equity, Diversity, and Accessibility

Collaboration with Internal and External Partners to Identify and Address Systemic Barriers

Child Welfare Strengths and Challenges

Strengths

- Workforce
- Support for leadership to promote changes and improvements
- Reorganization creates opportunities to increase effectiveness in management and district practice
- Strong community partnerships help advocate for a systemic approach to child safety and family wellbeing
- Implementation of Safety Science principals in child welfare operations

Challenges

- Workforce – vacancies, recruitment and retention
- Lack of services and supports across the continuum of care for children and families
- Hotel/Emergency Department stays for children
- Substance Use Disorder/Opioid Epidemic
- Public narrative (e.g., media, advocates, legislature) related to child welfare and the impact this has on the public's perception

Looking Forward

What is OCFS currently most focused on with respect to the child welfare system?

- Ensuring child safety through improving quality and consistency in practice
- Strengthening management structure and office culture
- Staffing

What changes have been made?

- Completed management audit and redefining roles within child welfare
- Joining the National Partnership for Child Safety
- Hired significant number of staff

What is still to come?

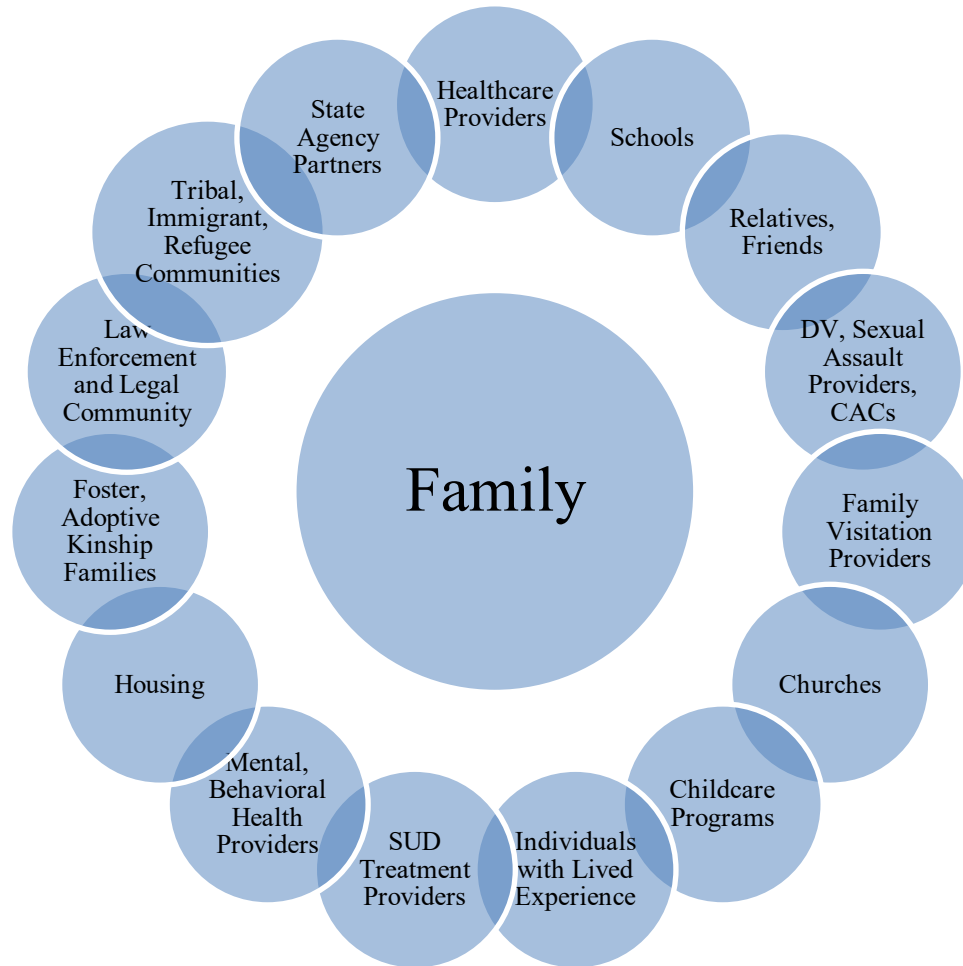
- Increased work with Collaborative Safety
- Implementation of Alia Innovations
- Expanded efforts to address substance use

How will OCFS use new positions?

- Assistant Program Administrator (D3-Lewiston)
- CPS Supervisor Trainer/Coaches
- Legal Support Staff

System Collaboration

Collaborations within OCFS and across state and community partners is critical to successfully support families.



Resources

- Governor Mills directed [recruitment and retention payments](#) for child welfare staff in her State of the State address which began in February. Between January and May 24, 2024:
 - Casework vacancies dropped from 84 to 46 (-45%)
 - Case aide vacancies dropped from 13 to 7 (-46%)
- The Office has [joined the National Partnership for Child Safety](#), a quality improvement collaborative with a mission to improve child safety and prevent child maltreatment fatalities.
- The Department posed a review of work during the 131st Legislature: [Maine Takes Further Action to Improve Child Welfare System](#)
- Blog posts about efforts to expand the availability and accessibility of services include:
 - [April 2024: Supplemental Budget Summary](#)
 - [January 2024: DHHS Reorganizes Behavioral Health to Better Serve Children and Families](#)
 - [January 2024: MaineCare Implements Cost of Living Adjustments as Part of Rate Rerform](#)
 - [July 2023: Major Policy Advances for Maine Children and Youth](#)
 - [July 2023: Biennial Budget Summary](#)

Questions

Director Bobbi L. Johnson, LMSW
Office of Child and Family Services

