

Maine Justice for Children Task Force
March 12, 2024, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Via Zoom
MEETING NOTES

In attendance: Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill, Justice Rick Lawrence, Chief Judge Brent Davis, Michelle Ardabily, Caroline Jova, Betsy Boardman, Bette Hoxie, Chris Bicknell, Christine Alberi, Annalee Bloom, Mark Moran, Liam Shaw, Ariel Piers-Gamble, Andrea Mancuso, Sarah Branch, Clint Boothby, Esther Anne, Bobbi Johnson, Travis Bryant, Darcy Fisher, Jim Billings, Mary Bonauto, and Joanna Davis.

Welcome - Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill

Introductions:

- Michelle Ardabily, Chief of Court Operations at the MJB
- Annalee Bloom, Esq.

Review of minutes from December 2023:

- Unanimously approved.

Citizen Review Panel Updates:

- **Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel (MCWAP):** Andrea Mancuso, MCWAP Co-Chair, Public Policy Director, Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and Ahmen Cabral, MCWAP Co-Chair, Senior Policy Associate, Catherine Cutler Institute, University of Southern Maine
 - Currently meeting monthly.
 - Annual report should be distributed by the end of the week. Betsy will distribute it to this Task Force.
 - MCWAP revised its parent survey with the help of Dr. Alicia Summers to improve the questions. MCWAP is required to solicit feedback from parents every three years. However, MCWAP has decided that it will provide the survey to parents on an ongoing basis and the results will be analyzed and reported on periodically as required by CAPTA.
- **Maine Child Death and Serious Injury Review (CDSIRP):** Dr. Amanda Brownell, Child Abuse Pediatrician, Medical Director, Spurwink Center for Safe and Healthy Families, CDSIRP Co-Chair and Mark Moran, LCSW, Manager, Social Services, Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center, Coordinator, Pediatric Forensic Clinical
 - Recently undertook thematic reviews of snowmobile-related incidents and window falls.
 - CDSIRP is coordinating with the Domestic Abuse Homicide Review panel to review a some cases.
 - There are a number of cases still needing review but that have pending criminal cases, which limits the Panel's ability to review.
 - Upcoming review will be incidents involving substance ingestion through breastmilk.
 - Moving the issuance of annual reports from a calendar year period to the state fiscal year period.

Updates

- **Maine Supreme Judicial Court-** Chief Justice Valerie Stanfill
 - Maine eCourts:
 - Successful rollout in Lewiston/Auburn for civil, family, and child protection cases. Will be rolling out the same dockets in South Paris, Rumford, and Farmington at the beginning of April. Later in the year, Augusta and Waterville will roll out. Concurrently working on the rollout for protection orders and criminal cases. The plan for protection orders is a rollout in Region 3 in June. Some of this delay is due to the criminal justice agencies needing resources to do proper integration programming.
 - Upcoming eFiler Virtual Training opportunities:<https://www.courts.maine.gov/news/article.html?id=12431660>
 - MJB is asking the Legislature for appropriate funding for technological needs to make this transition successful.
 - There are 61 individuals on the child protection parent attorney roster statewide.
- **An Organizational Update from the Maine Judicial Branch-** Chief Judge Brent Davis
 - Child Protection Filings
 - The following data points represent child protection data from January 1, 2024 to March 8, 2024. There has been a total of 195 new child protection filings statewide. For the same period last year, there were 207 new filings. This represents a 6% decrease in filings.
 - Guardians ad Litem
 - The Maine CASA team is busy this week training new CASA GALs.
 - It is anticipated that the next GAL core training dates will be announced within the next month with the hope of getting more attorneys on the GAL roster.
 - MJB Child Welfare Conference
 - The child welfare conference is right around the corner on April 4th and 5th at Sunday River in Newry, Maine. Some highlights of the conference include:
 - Three national speakers focusing on concrete and economic supports for children and families, the importance of conducting quality hearing reviews, national data collection efforts and findings, and how to incorporate youth voice into child welfare court proceedings.
 - In addition to national experts, we have over 40 panelists, including judges, from across the state who will discuss litigation best practices for each stage of a child welfare case.
 - Day two of the conference will also include the voice of system involved Maine youth.
 - There are currently just over 200 registrants for each day.

- New District Court Judges: We have welcomed four new judges this year: Honorable David Hathaway, Honorable Katherine Dufour, Honorable Jon Haddow, and Honorable Heather Seasonwein
- **An Organizational Update from the Office of the Attorney General-** Ariel Piers-Gamble, Assistant Attorney General, Chief of the Child Protective Division
 - Have been successful in recruiting to fill positions - Angela Thibodeau and Richard Thackery are joining the OAG. Still open position in Skowhegan, which is a court with one of the largest caseloads.
 - In addition to litigation responsibilities, the AAGs are participating in a number of upcoming trainings.
 - OAG has also been participating heavily in the legislative session, particularly in the conversations about problems surrounding court-appointed counsel.
 - AAG Hunter Umphrey has been teaching a course at Maine Law and has also been hosting externs from the Law School.
 - Voiced that it would be helpful to receive some statewide guidance as to what happens when the court is unable to find parent counsel.
- **An Organizational Update from the Office of Child and Family Services at DHHS-** Bobbi Johnson, Director and Gina Googins, Acting Associate Director
 - As of January 18, Bobbi Johnson is the Director of OCFS. She has been focused on connecting with their workforce and hearing their challenges. She also just finished a tour of all the district offices. Largest takeaway is that the public and media's perception of the agency's work is having a large effect on staff morale.
 - OCFS has been working with the Government Oversight Committee and Public Consulting Group (PCG) to get feedback on OCFS management structure.
 - Gina Googins is filling the role of the Acting Associate Director. After the completion of the OCG audit, OCFS roles will be further defined and established.
- **An Organizational Update from the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services (MCILS),** Jim Billings, Executive Director
 - MCILS has been at the legislature seeking funding and statutory changes.
 - There is a standalone bill expected to come out of Judiciary asking to take the 22 positions in the Governor's budget so that MCILS can open the Aroostook County and Bangor public defender offices as soon as possible, rather than having to wait until 90 days after the close of session.
 - Will be offering feedback to Maine Law to focus more on child protection law as part of their family law studies to try and increase interest in this field. Upcoming Lunch and Learn at the law school—Darcy will inquire as to whether members of the public can also attend.
 - 55 cases needing attorneys on the "ask for help" list published as of 3/11/24. As of same date, there were 30 attorneys rostered statewide, which is about half of the number available in December. Jim has been calling attorneys who came off the roster who cited being too busy/personal reasons as to why they wouldn't re-roster/accept caseload waivers.

- MCILS's plan is to start the Rural Defender Unit positions for parent attorneys but does not have an identified quick solution to the lack of available counsel.
- Upcoming MCILS Protective Custody Defense Conference will be held April 1-3. The conference will also be open to law students. The members voiced regret that this conference is being held the same week as the MJB's longstanding CIP conference, and how that may be hard for the parent bar. Jim and Darcy have had some initial conversations with Betsy about a joint conference next year that would allow for MCILS to offer specialized breakout sessions for the parent attorneys.

Strategic Plan Updates

- **Race and Equity Committee:** Mary Bonauto & Regina Phillips
 - LD 1948, as amended, has received an ought-to-pass vote, which will help build a data governance project. DAFS would be responsible for developing a wider range of demographic factors to look at.
 - The Committee recently met to discuss what its ongoing focus will be. Will it work on a parallel track as DAFS? Meeting again in May but will continue those discussions.
- **Parent Curriculum Workgroup:** Kelly Dell'Aquila, Jamie Brooks, and Karen Tompkins
 - Now offering CPS 101 and 201, which is a session for those who already attended 101.
 - To date there have been 171 attendees in 101 and 12 in 201.
 - OCFS has received funding to continue this program.
- **Continuing Education Subcommittee:** Betsy Boardman
 - The Committee has been focused on planning the upcoming CIP conference.
 - The MJB is utilizing a new registration platform created internally by OIT staff that also has a portal with conference materials available electronically.
 - The theme is taking participants through the life of a PC case and providing best litigation practice tips for each stage.
- **Parent Attorney/GAL Retention and Recruitment Subcommittee:** Betsy Boardman
 - This subcommittee is having a lot of discussions to help alleviate the parent counsel issue, including possible internship and externship opportunities.
 - Talked to several practitioners across the state to get feedback.
 - Continuing to look at the NACC Child Welfare Expert designation program that is utilized by a lot of states. It is expected that the subcommittee will make a recommendation as to whether Maine should offer the program.
 - A survey went out to GALs and the results of that survey will be provided to the subcommittee for review.
 - There has been messaging about ensuring the clerks are not appointing GALs to cases without first communicating with them.
 - Discussion about exit interviews with attorneys coming off the roster to gathering information.

Miscellaneous/Open Discussion

Remaining 2024 Meeting Dates: June 11th, September 10th, December 12th.

Subcommittee Meeting Schedule:

- Race and Equity Subcommittee: First Thursday of the month from 3:00 to 4:00 p.m.
- Parent Curriculum Subcommittee: Quarterly on the second Monday of the month from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.
- Continuing Education Subcommittee: Second Thursday of the month from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.
- Parent Attorney/GAL Retention and Recruitment Subcommittee: First Monday of the month from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m.

ADJOURN (11:05 a.m.)