

*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**

**September 13, 2024; 9 a.m. – 3 p.m.**

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

**Panel Coordinator:** Jenna Joeckel

### **Minutes**

#### **9:30 a.m. - Welcome and Introductions:**

Attendance: Andrea Mancuso, Ahmen Cabral, Jenna Joeckel, Senator Donna Bailey, Abbie Rohde, Erika Simonson, Travis Bryant, Taylor Kilgore, Kelly Dell'Aquila, Betsy Boardman, Jim Billings, Esther Anne, Beth Gagnon, Jean Haynes, Julian Richter, Chelsea Peters, Christine Hufnagel, Melissa Hackett, Michelle Westbrook, Adrienne Carmack

#### **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 and the Federal Mandates.

#### **9:10 a.m. – MCWAP Housekeeping:**

The panel voted on and approved the June minutes. Panel members unanimously voted to approve the June minutes

Panel members are reminded that voting on panel recommendations will take place at a later date and final recommendations will be discussed in the October Panel meeting.

Julian Richter was welcomed to the Panel Executive Committee

The Panel welcomed Jean Haynes, Associate Director of the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) to the Panel.

The Provider and Parent Survey results have been live and survey results are in the process of being collected and analyzed for the October meeting. Members are encouraged to join the Citizen Review Subcommittee.

### **10:20 a.m. - OCFS Updates:**

Jean Haynes, Associate Director of Child Welfare Services with the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) provided OCFS Updates to the panel. Updates included information about decision making framework, meeting structures, and communication plans. OCFS has received 206 recommendations from community partners and is in the process of reviewing and responding to those recommendations. Julie “Jill” Hunter was hired as the Manager of District Operations. Foundations training for new staff are now taking place in person. The vacancy rate is currently at 10%, which is a decrease from the beginning of the year. Members inquired about turnover within certain districts, particularly in D3, and the efforts that are being made for staff retention. Panel members observed that the high turnover, particularly in this district, is having a destabilizing effect on families and their progress. OCFS is taking on an individualized approach to explore staff retention within each district and is really closely at both D3 and D4. Training supervisors are also being hired in each district to support child welfare staff.

A discussion took place regarding the process for children to receive permanency after the Termination of Parental Rights including the paperwork process and timeline. Panel members noted that some cases they are aware of have had legal clearance for adoption or permanency guardianship for approximately a year and expressed that this seems to be something that contributes to the high number of children that are in the Department’s care at any given time. OCFS is currently reviewing the process to explore opportunities to strengthen it and decrease the timeline. Panel members asked whether court processing/scheduling contributes to the backlog and observed that court backlogs for permanency proceedings seem to have improved over the last six months.

### **10:45 a.m. - Family Centered Policy & Practice Recommendations**

Panel members reviewed and discussed draft recommendations from the Family Centered Policy & Practice subcommittee for potential inclusion in the Annual Report that will be released in January 2025. These included recommendations regarding data collection and reporting, law amendments, evaluating and improving policy implementation, and economic supports.

#### Next Steps:

Subcommittee members will reconvene to further work on this recommendation, including discussion of question raised, incorporating some suggested language updates, reviewing additional data. discuss the recommendation further and edit some of the language utilized in the recommendation.

Members requested to review prior recommendations that have been presented by the panel.

### **Family Team Meeting Recommendation:**

The Panel reviewed and discussed a recommendation from the Family Team Meeting subcommittee for potential inclusion in the Annual Report that will be released in January 2025 including data collection and reporting.

Members noted that the FTM policy is a strength, but implementation challenges continue and these challenges have significant impact on families. Panel members made suggestions for some language changes in the recommendation.

### **Panel Strategic Goal Recommendations**

Panel members reviewed and discussed draft recommendations for panel strategic goals from subcommittees. The topics covered included aftercare services, education around Title IV-E funding, and family team meetings. Subcommittees will discuss feedback provided at today's meeting and will finalize recommendations prior to the October panel meeting.

Panel members discussed that the state's recovery council will be making recommendations over the next several years about distribution of settlement money. Child welfare needs to be more present in that conversation. Panel members agreed to engage in additional conversation around how the Panel might be supported to participate in those conversations.

### **Next Steps:**

Subcommittees will present redlined recommendations for panel members to review.

**The Panel adjourned at 3pm.**

**Next Panel Meeting: October 4, 2024, 9 a.m. – 11a.m.**