



Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel

2021 Annual Report Presentation to the
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 2, 2022

Panel Overview



CITIZEN REVIEW PANELS



MEMBERS



SCHEDULE



Federal Mandates

- Examine the policies, procedures, and practices of state and local child protection agencies, and evaluate the extent to which the agencies are effectively discharging their child protection responsibilities
- Provide for public outreach and comment to assess the impact of current procedures and practices upon children and families in the community
- Review and evaluate State investigative, administrative, and both civil and criminal judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect
- Make policy and training recommendations
- Prepare an annual report complete with a summary of activities and recommendations for the improvement of the child protective services system



2021 Activities

- Panel Development
- Citizen Engagement
- Parent Experience
- Communication and Coordination
- Policy Review
- Trainings



Panel Recommendations

2021 Annual Report



Recommendation: Family Team Meetings

OCFS should invest in Family Team Meetings as a framework for coordination and communication between child welfare and community providers. This should include designated staff to provide skilled meeting facilitation, investing in ongoing training and coaching for all OCFS caseworkers and supervisors, and providing training to educate and engage community providers in the Family Team Meeting model and promote best practices in team decision making.



Recommendation: Parent and Youth Engagement

OCFS should identify and invest in programs that support parent and youth engagement in the child welfare process and in quality improvement efforts, including membership on citizen review panels, by June 30, 2022, and provide the Panel with status updates at least every six months.



Recommendation: Domestic Abuse and Violence Response

By December 31, 2022, OCFS should update its domestic abuse and violence response policies and practices to prioritize efforts to decrease children from being removed, or threatened to be removed, from non-offending parents for “failure to protect” the child from exposure to domestic violence committed against the non-offending parent by the offending parent.



Recommendation: Discretionary Funds

By December 2022, the Maine Legislature should provide funding to OCFS to implement a pilot process whereby assessment caseworkers and/or designated external community partners have discretion to authorize up to \$1,000 per family to help cover expenses identified as necessary to help the family meet the needs of their child(ren) and/or the expectations of the Department. This flexible cash assistance should be provided to families at risk of having their children removed (any family for whom OCFS has an open assessment).



Recommendation: Legal Representation

By December 2022, Maine should provide adequate funding to the Maine Commission on Indigent Legal Services (MCILS) to create a pilot program in a selected region to provide legal advice and representation to all families as soon as the Office of Child and Family Services opens an assessment.



Recommendation: Guardians Ad Litem

By December 2022, in partnership with interested community stakeholders, the Guardian ad Litem review board and the Maine Judicial Branch should bring forward a proposal to better support guardians ad litem in developing their skills and expertise, and to bring a higher level of substantive oversight of their work. This process should include recommended mechanisms and metrics for identifying appropriate mentors within Maine's guardian ad litem community, opportunity for case consultation by guardians ad litem with their peers, and a process for periodic case review.



2022 Priorities

- Improving Citizen Feedback Processes
- Studying Caregiver Information Practices
- Reviewing Panel Process Outcomes
- Reviewing Recommendations Outcomes