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Overview of Child Welfare Citizen Review Panels Government Oversight Committee September 8, 2021

Good morning Senator Libby, Representative McDonald, and Members of the Joint Standing Government Oversight Committee. My name is Bobbi Johnson and I am the Associate Director of Child Welfare Services within the Office of Child and Family Services. I am here today to provide an overview of the legislation which requires the Department of Health and Human Services to convene the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel, the Justice for Children Taskforce and the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panels of which I am a member. My colleagues who either chair or coordinate the Panels will speak more specifically about the mission and function of each individual Panel.

FEDERAL LEGISLATION

- Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act
 - o The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), first enacted in 1974, is the primary federal legislation which addresses child abuse and neglect and defines these matters, federally. Through CAPTA, states receive federal funding and direction related to areas of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution and treatment of child abuse and neglect.
 - o Since its enactment in 1974, CAPTA has seen many amendments and reauthorizations. Notably, in 1996, states were required to establish citizen review panels (CRPs) to review their state's compliance with its CAPTA plan and federal child protection standards. Reauthorizations in 2003 and 2010 further defined the roles of CRPs as entities that both evaluate practice, policy and procedures, and develop means for public outreach and comment. Also through these reauthorizations, child welfare agencies were mandated to respond to their CRP's annual reports in writing, and membership expectations were further defined (for example, the reauthorization of 2010 highlighted that adult former victims of child abuse and neglect may sit on the Panels).
 - o FY20 Funding Amount: \$344,927
- Children's Justice Act
 - o In addition to CAPTA, the Children's Justice Act (CJA) requires states to establish or designate and maintain a state multidisciplinary task force on children's justice, composed of professionals with knowledge and experience relating to the criminal justice system and issues of child physical abuse, child neglect, child sexual abuse and exploitation, and child maltreatment related fatalities.
 - o FY21 Funding Amount: \$97,911

- Citizens Review Panels (CRPs)
 - o By July 1999, most states were required to host 3 separate Citizen Review Panels. While each panel holds the responsibility to review compliance of their state's CPS agencies, the panels are also authorized to review other areas that the panels consider important.
 - o Membership of the CRPs must include volunteers who are broadly representative of the state's community, including individuals with expertise in the areas of prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect.
 - o Panels are mandated to meet at least quarterly and must produce annual reports which describe the panel's activities and recommendations to the state or local CPS agency.

CRPs IN MAINE

- In Maine, the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel, the Justice for Children Task Force and the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel comprise the required (3) Citizen Review Panels. While these panels are mostly composed of community stakeholders, each also have several staff from the Office of Child and Family Services as members, which is required through legislation, by-laws or charter.
- While mandated to meet quarterly, Maine's CRPs meet monthly throughout the year, barring a 2-month recess for July and August.
- Historically, Panel meetings were held in-person, typically in Augusta. In March 2020, the Panels were forced to pivot their approach due to the pandemic and began hosting virtual meetings. The Panels have seen success with this format, reducing members' commutes and cancellations due to inclement weather, as well as improving member's ability to participate more frequently in meetings.
- In addition to the CRPs themselves, each Panel has subcommittees tasked with specialized areas of focus. These groups typically meet outside of Panel meetings, and report back to the larger group during the monthly meetings.
- Representatives from each of Maine's panels have recently begun meeting as a group, in part to coordinate efforts, but also to keep the other panels apprised of initiatives or recommendations. The panel appointees have agreed that inter-panel partnership is paramount; and plan to begin meeting quarterly, at a minimum.
- While the CRPs write formal reports on an annual basis, recommendations are discussed on an ongoing basis during meetings. Oftentimes, members who sit on the panels are in positions to implement recommendations within their agencies without having to wait for a formal report. The recommendations yielded from the meetings not only consider the work of OCFS, but also the broader child welfare system.

COLLABORATION

- In addition to the partnership between panel representatives, the panels collaborate in a variety of other ways as well:
 - o For example, there is some crossover in membership amongst the Panels - a few members who sit on one panel also sit on another. This allows for increased awareness and discussion related to the other panels' efforts, ensuring that the work that is being produced by each panel complements the work of the others, and that efforts are not being duplicated.
 - o Additionally, members from each of the three panels sat on a subcommittee tasked with developing a shared CRP website. This website includes information about each panel's mission, provides the public with access to meeting minutes and annual reports and lists a variety of statewide resources available to Maine citizens.
- The CRP website that was developed also includes a contact form in which citizens, including families engaged with the Department or providers who work within the child welfare system, may share feedback with the panels about their experiences. This has allowed for greater engagement with the public and for panel members to stay apprised of areas of strength or challenge that Maine's citizens have highlighted.
- In addition to citizen engagement, the panels also collaborate with OCFS in a variety of ways. For example, MCWAP members have been included in the development of new OCFS policies; this allows the valuable feedback of community stakeholders to be considered before a policy is finalized.
- Maine's CRPs also collaborate with other statewide panels, including the DV Homicide Review Panel and the Maternal, Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Panel.
- Lastly, members from Maine's CRPs have had the opportunity to network and collaborate with national partners, including through participation in the national CRP conference which is held annually.

Thank you for the opportunity to share information about the Citizen Review Panels with you today. Next, Deb Dunlap will discuss the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel.