

131st Legislature
Senate
of Maine
Senate District 31

Senator Donna Bailey
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003
Office (207) 287-1515

Testimony of Senator Donna Bailey introducing
**LD 857, An Act to Improve Family Team Meetings in Child Welfare Cases to
Ensure Better Outcomes for Children by Providing Adequate Funding**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
January 16, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Donna Bailey, and I proudly represent Senate District 31, which includes Buxton, Old Orchard Beach, and Saco. Today I am pleased to introduce my bill LD 857, “An Act to Improve Family Team Meetings in Child Welfare Cases to Ensure Better Outcomes for Children by Providing Adequate Funding.”

This bill brings forward a 2023 recommendation from Maine’s Child Welfare Advisory Panel that was reviewed with the Health and Human Services Committee in December 2023. MCWAP has recommended that the Maine Legislature direct and support the Office of Child and Family Services to contract with an independent entity to develop a system for data collection and data analysis to support the ongoing evaluation of and quality assurance around the family team meeting model.

As a member of the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel for the last couple of years, I have been able to participate in and work with MCWAP’s subcommittee that was tasked with reviewing family team meeting policy and practice. The subcommittee has been looking at this issue since Fall 2022.

By way of background, OCFS first implemented Family Team Meeting (FTM) practice in 2002. In a child welfare case, family team meetings are the primary mode of collaboration between the state, community organizations, parents, and legal professionals involved in the case. Over the course of the last twenty years, there have been several revisions to policy and practice expectations.

Given this important role that FTMs play in the child welfare process, MCWAP determined that a deeper exploration over the course of a full year was warranted. This exploration began in Fall 2022 through several full Panel discussions and determined the Family Team Meeting policy is

strong, but practice in the field does not always match what is outlined in the policy. Eventually, MCWAP charged a subcommittee, in partnership with OCFS, to convene and conduct an in-depth analysis of policies, procedures and practices connected to Family Team Meetings, as well as look at quality analysis components that already exist. The Panel asked the subcommittee to report back to the full Panel with their recommendations, including proposals for further research and improvement.

MCWAPs FTM subcommittee convened monthly during Spring 2023 and conducted reviews of past and present data collection by OCFS as well as OCFS' quality analysis practices. Unfortunately, these reviews produced insufficient data on the implementation of the FTM model. In order to make recommendations for the improvement of Family Team Meeting practice, there is a need for the development of a system for data collection and analysis to ensure these recommendations are informed. As this is the primary model for collaboration amongst OCFS, families and community providers during the child welfare process, it is essential that the State has a mechanism for quality monitoring and improvement.

This proposal is in alignment with goals that the Office of Child and Family Services has set out for itself. As part of the most recent federal Child and Family Services Review process, OCFS has identified Family Team Meetings as an opportunity for growth, and a strategic priority for the 2023-2026 period. Investing in outside evaluation and technical support will provide the data needed to assess current practice strengths and gaps, and establishing a process for ongoing data collection and analysis will contribute to the success of this strategic priority in the coming years.

Thank you for your time, I would be happy to answer any questions.



Donna Bailey
State Senator, Senate District 31
Buxton, Old Orchard Beach, and Saco