

Child Welfare Priority Reform Recommendations

December 5, 2018

Janet Mills

Governor-Elect

Address

City, ST ZIP Code

Dear Governor-Elect Mills:

We are a group of organizations who are deeply committed to the safety and well-being of all children, youth and families in Maine. As we approach the anniversary of two child deaths within the child welfare system, and face the continued problem of children staying in hotels, hospitals and shelters due to a lack of appropriate foster care settings, we believe there is an urgent need to address systemic reforms.

Our state child welfare services touch the lives of children during critical periods of physical, emotional, and cognitive development. There were **7,288** reports involving **10,119** children assigned to a caseworker for a child protective assessment during 2017. Children cannot continue to wait for adults and state systems to get things right.

Our state currently has a mandate and an opportunity to engage in effective, educated reform of our child welfare system. It's our core belief that the system responsible for protecting and promoting the welfare of children includes all of us, in partnership with our state's executive leaders, and true reform will be achieved only with concerted, coordinated efforts.

Based on our experiences, research and promising practices, we offer the following **five priority reform recommendations** for making immediate and long-term improvements to the systems of protection for children and families:

1. Establish Measurable Outcomes for Child Safety and Well-Being

- Implement a statewide framework and indicators for child and family well-being
- Establish protocol for DHHS to collect data and report on these measures to the public and legislature annually, and use outcomes to set policy and budget priorities.

2. Invest in Supportive Services

- Utilize state and federal funds (including Families First Prevention Services Act and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) to improve basic safety-net resources and expand the availability of preventive, supportive, and treatment services for families.
- Maintain Mainecare coverage for parents after child removal, through the duration of the reunification process.

3. Address Child Welfare Workforce Issues

- Improve the role of schools of social work in training and support, and re-establish the Child Welfare field instruction unit.
- Codify a formula for caseload limits to lower caseload burdens for front-line child welfare case workers, and increase the number of workers as needed to ensure caseload limits are met.

4. Improve Cross-System Collaboration and Public Reporting

- Delegate a continuous quality improvement position within OCFS to establish procedures that will improve cross-sector collaboration in the field, and re-establish the Governor’s Children’s Cabinet to accomplish cross-system planning and leveraging of resources.
- Bolster the authority and role of the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel and the Child Welfare Ombudsman to review and publish data, research, and policy and appropriation recommendations to the Governor, Legislature, and public.

5. Prioritize Permanency and Prevention Interventions

- Improve recruitment, licensing, training and support processes for foster and kinship families.
- Develop a transparent, data-based funding process for allocation of all prevention funds.

These recommendations reflect collective expertise that has been informed by many years of research and implementation of promising practices, along with successful public and private partnerships with DHHS and OCFS. Our organizations serve the same children, youth and parents, and we share the same cares and concerns. We want to be part of the solution.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you soon, and to work with you and your administration to improve the ways we protect children and promote family well-being throughout Maine.

For more information, please contact Debra Dunlap debra.dunlap@cppcmaine.org (207) 632-7737.

Sincerely,

Lead Organizations:

Debra Taylor/James Martin
President & CEO
Sweetser

Michael Tarpinian
President & CEO
The Opportunity Alliance

Debra Dunlap
Regional Director Southern Maine
Community Partnerships for Protecting Children

Richard A. Hooks Wayman
President & CEO
Volunteers of America Northern New England

NAME
Title
Organization

NAME
Title
Organization

Supporters: