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MAINE JUSTICE FOR CHILDREN TASK FORCE 2024 REPORT TO THE SUPREME JUDICIAL COURT

Submitted by the Maine Justice for Children Task Force

January 15, 2025

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Introduction

The Maine Justice for Children Task Force (the “Task Force”) is a collaborative multidisciplinary Task Force convened by the Maine Judicial Branch (MJB) whose mission is to improve safety, permanency, and well-being for children in the State of Maine child welfare system. The members of the Task Force include representatives of the legislative, judicial, and executive branches, advocates for children and parents, foster parents, and other individuals involved in the child welfare system. The Task Force is one of three citizen review panels required under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). *See* 42 U.S.C. § 5106a(c). The other two panels are the Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel (MCWAP) and the Child Death and Serious Injury Review Panel (CDSIRP).

The Task Force is charged with identifying opportunities for systemic improvement within the child welfare system that could improve outcomes for children and using that information to develop joint solutions among child welfare system partners. Once opportunities for improvement are identified, the Task Force prioritizes those issues and develops joint solutions to help capitalize on those opportunities.

The Task Force is chaired by the Chief Justice of the Maine Supreme Judicial Court who also appoints members of the Task Force. Pursuant to its charter, the Task Force submits this report to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court on the work of the Task Force from January 1, 2024 to December 31, 2024.

I. Meetings

The Task Force met in March, June, and September in 2024. The meeting scheduled for December was postponed to January due to scheduling conflicts. All meetings were held virtually.

Most Task Force meetings featured updates by its members, including leaders from the MJB, the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS), the Office of the Attorney General (OAG), and the Maine Commission on Public Defense Services (PDS). The updates focused, in part, on the current state of the child welfare system, new child welfare court filings, and workforce statistics and needs. In addition to updates, Task Force meeting attendees received updates on action steps taken on strategic plan initiatives and provided recommendations for follow up as needed.

II. Strategic Plan

The Task Force's 2024 strategic plan focused on four projects: (1) information sharing between citizen review panels and the Maine State Legislature; (2) facilitation and expansion of a virtual child welfare parent curriculum; (3) race and equity data collection; and (4) parent attorney and guardian ad litem recruitment and retention. A subcommittee for each project was formed and convened approximately monthly throughout the year. All subcommittees had Task Force members, nonmember individuals from child welfare focused organizations, and interested community members.

A. Information Sharing

CAPTA requires, as a condition of funding, that each state establish three citizen review panels. See 42 U.S.C. § 5106a(c). In Maine, the panels are: the Task Force, MCWAP, and CDSIRP. The three panels aim to conduct complementary work without duplication. Therefore, information sharing among the panels is paramount for collaboration of panel goals and outcomes. Throughout 2024, the Task Force meetings provided a collaboration space for all three Maine Citizen Review Panels. Members of MCWAP and CDSIRP regularly joined the Task Force to provide information on each panel's work, annual reports, system recommendations, and discussion about major themes and trends being shared in other panel

meetings. A representative from the Task Force provided similar information to the other two panels.

A chair/designee from all three panels met quarterly throughout 2024 with a focus on effective communication among the panels, pertinent data sharing, ensuring that statutory functions are faithfully discharged, and identifying opportunities to support and collaborate on initiatives. All three panels have provided quarterly updates to the Health and Human Services Committee at the Maine State Legislature. The Task Force anticipates that such quarterly updates to the Legislature will continue throughout 2025.

B. Development and Implementation of Curriculum for Parents Involved in the Child Welfare System

1. Formation and Establishment of Parent Curriculum

In August 2020, the Task Force added the development of information sessions for parents involved in the child welfare system to the Task Force’s strategic plan. The goal of the curriculum is to offer optional classes focused on understanding child welfare agency processes, court procedures, and suggested practices for parents to implement to be successful throughout a child welfare case. A subcommittee was created and began meeting in December 2020.

In late 2021, the subcommittee secured funding for The Opportunity Alliance (TOA) to implement a one-year pilot project for information sessions entitled *Child Protection 101: For Parents, By Parents* (“CPS 101”). The subcommittee, in collaboration with TOA, developed a work plan, created a curriculum outline, and engaged system partners for participation in pre-recorded video segments to be used at all sessions. Each two-hour information session is led by a parent with experience in the child welfare system or a parent who has navigated multiple systems and includes:

- An introduction to child protective service professionals;

- Explanation of the court process;
- Tips for parents on how to successfully engage in the child welfare process and how to respond to conflict; and
- Contact information for helpful resources and information.

MJB funding for CPS 101 was extended through June 30, 2024. During the 131st legislative session, the Legislature provided one-time funding in the amount of \$200,000 for FY25 to OCFS to contract with an entity to continue to provide the free virtual classes, mirroring the CPS 101 model currently being implemented. Specifically, the legislation requires that the class be “facilitated by parents who have experience with the child protective services system or have navigated multiple complex systems.”¹

2. Session Information

As of June 30, 2024, TOA has offered the information sessions to parents on 46 different occasions with 142 parent participants. In addition to parent information sessions, TOA offered 35 CPS 101 information sessions to child welfare system partners. There were approximately 188 participants in the system partner sessions. The scope of CPS 101 was expanded in 2023 to include the development and implementation of CPS 201. CPS 201 is for individuals who have participated in CPS 101 and would like further information on how to be successful during a child welfare case. CPS 201 includes information on family team meetings, effective communication, how to have successful visits with children, and skills for self-advocacy. Participants are also provided with helpful tools such as call and activity logs, and sample family team meetings agendas. The inaugural CPS 201 session was conducted in late 2023 and as of June 30, 2024, there were three sessions conducted with 17 participants.

¹ <https://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0777&item=5&snum=131>

3.Data Collection

Data collection for this pilot project has been an important focus of the subcommittee. Specifically, participants in all sessions, CPS 101 (parent and provider) and CPS 201, were provided with pre- and post-surveys to complete. (See *Appendix A: CPS 101 & 201: 2022-2024 Training Evaluation Findings*). The purpose of the surveys was to answer the following three questions:

- (1) To what extent did participating in the CPS classes change participants' knowledge and attitudes?
- (2) What about CPS classes did participants find helpful?
- (3) How might the CPS classes be improved in the future?

Survey results indicated that parents and providers who participated in CPS 101, left the training with a greater understanding of how child protection services work, an increased knowledge of the various roles that individuals play in the system, and parents specifically noted an increase in hope about their involvement in the child welfare system.

a. CPS 101, Parent Data

Below are select survey results where a statistically significant increase in knowledge was noted by parents in the child welfare system. All respondents were asked to use a five-point scale with one indicating that the participant “Strongly Disagree” with the statement and five indicating that the participant “Strongly Agree” with the statement.

Statement: I understand how the Child Protective System works.

	Average of 139 respondents
Pre-Survey	2.71
Post-Survey	4.05
Total percentage increase	49%

Statement: I understand who is on my Child Protective Services team and what they each do.

	Average of 140 respondents
Pre-Survey	3.13
Post-Survey	4.23
Total percentage increase	35%

Statement: I understand what I need to do to reunify my family.

	Average of 141 respondents
Pre-Survey	3.09
Post-Survey	3.79
Total percentage increase	23%

Statement: I feel hopeful about my Child Protection Services involvement.

	Average of 140 respondents
Pre-Survey	2.89
Post-Survey	3.69
Total percentage increase	28%

In addition to the above survey results, parents noted various aspects of the curriculum that were particularly helpful and made recommendations for improvement. Participants were asked to provide the above information using an open-ended format that allowed for free-text answers to be inputted. Pervasive themes included:

Helpful Aspects:

Hearing the information and experiences from individuals with experience in child welfare system.
Videos explaining the roles of system partners.
Providing additional resources during and after the session.

Recommendations for Improvement:

Provide more information during the session.
--

Extend the time of the session
Include more stories and experiences by those with experience in the child welfare system.

b. CPS 101, Provider Data

Below are select survey results where a statistically significant increase in knowledge was noted by system providers who attended a CPS 101 session. Providers were asked to use the above five-point scale as well as respond either “Yes” or “No” to specific statements.

Statement: I would recommend this class to others.

	Percentage of Participants
Strongly Agree or Agree	91%
Strongly Disagree or Disagree	9%

Statement: The professional video presentations were helpful.

	Percentage of Participants
Yes	99%
No	1%

Statement: The information and tips section was helpful.

	Percentage of Participants
Yes	92%
No	8%

Statement: I understand the roles of the CPS team.

	Average
Pre-Survey	3.2
Post-Survey	4.16
Percentage Increase	30%

Statement: I understand how the Child Protective System works.

	Average
Pre-Survey	3.13

Post-Survey	4.23
Percentage Increase	35%

In addition to the above survey results, providers noted various aspects of the curriculum that were particularly helpful and made recommendations for improvement. As with parents, providers were asked to provide the above information using an open-ended format that allowed for free-text answers to be inputted. Pervasive themes included:

Helpful Aspects:

Tips for providers to support parents.
The lived experience of presenters and attendees.
Question and answer section.

Recommendations for Improvement:

Information on how to advocate when parents do not have an attorney assigned to them.
Statistics and success stories.
Examples of a case moving through the system.

c. CPS 201

Below are select survey results where a statistically significant increase in knowledge was noted by parents who took CPS 201 as a follow up to CPS 101. (Please note: All survey responses resulted in knowledge increase but only select answers are provided below.) Provider sessions were not offered for CPS 201, therefore, no data is being provided. As noted above, respondents were asked to use a five-point scale with one indicating that the participant “Strongly Disagree” with the statement and five indicating that the participant “Strongly Agree” with the statement.

Statement: I understand how to prepare for my Family Team Meetings.

	Average
Pre-Survey	3.29
Post-Survey	4.06
Percentage Increase	23%

Statement: I understand how to advocate for my family.

	Average
Pre-Survey	3.59
Post-Survey	4.29
Percentage Increase	19%

Statement: I understand what is expected as my visits with my children.

	Average
Pre-Survey	4.24
Post-Survey	4.53
Percentage Increase	1%

Statement: I understand how to communicate with my Child Protective Team.

	Average
Pre-Survey	3.29
Post-Survey	4.00
Percentage Increase	22%

100% of individuals who participated in CPS 201 agreed that the information and tips were helpful and that they would recommend this class to others.

Helpful Aspects:

Tips on communication with their team.
The templates, tips, and tricks to keeping track of information and communications.
Family Team Meeting information.

Recommendations for Improvement:

Individual meetings to answer specific questions.

How to handle dissatisfaction with your team or advocate against wrongdoing within the department.
Tips on agreeing to disagree.

It is anticipated that additional data will be collected as cases reach completion, including: (1) time to permanency; (2) participation in family visitation; (3) participation and engagement in reunification services; and (4) attendance at court proceeding. All the above data points may be collected for individuals who have participated in the information sessions as well as for parents from a random sampling of cases who did not participate in the CPS 101 information sessions. Any data collected and analyzed will be deidentified to determine if participation in the class influenced overall case participation, reunification rates, and timeliness to permanency.

C. Race and Equity Data Assessment

In March of 2021, the Task Force identified the need to assess data collection regarding race and other important markers of equity by the MJB and the agencies that interface with the child protection system. As a result, the Task Force formed the Race and Equity Data Collection Subcommittee (R&E Subcommittee). Members of the R&E Subcommittee include representatives from the MJB, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Corrections, the Department of Public Safety, and the Department of Education (collectively referred to as “Project Partners”), as well as the Maine State Legislature and various other community organizations.

The goal of the R&E Subcommittee is to better understand what systems are in place for the collection and sharing of aggregated data on various data points to inform policy decisions,

measure fairness and equity, and provide the courts and agencies with data about the people and populations they serve. The data point set that is the subject of the assessment includes: race, ethnicity, connection with tribe/band/nation, enrollment or eligibility for enrollment with federally recognized tribe(s), sexual orientation, income, location, gender, gender identity, and disability (“data point set”).

In October of 2021, Public Consulting Group (PCG) was hired through the competitive request for proposal (RFP) process to create a data mapping inventory and produce a final report with findings and recommendations. Throughout 2021 and the first half of 2022, PCG conducted 15 interviews with leadership and staff of the Project Partners who have specific roles that relate to the collection, storage, reporting, and sharing of the ten identified data point set items. As needed follow-up contact was conducted via email. Additionally, PCG conducted a literature review of best practices and strategies for data sharing and data consistency among system partners. Finally, PCG interviewed six national experts in data sharing to gather information about barriers and challenges to sharing aggregate data, determinants to successful information-sharing collaboratives, and strategies for encouraging buy-in from necessary partners.

The PCG work product consists of two reports: the Data Mapping Inventory and the Final Report. Both reports were issued in September 2022 and distributed to Task Force members. An overview of both reports was provided to the R&E Subcommittee prior to release of the final reports and an overview of the two final reports was provided to the full Task Force by the subcommittee co-chairs at the December 2022 meeting.

Following the issuance of the two PCG reports, legislation was passed in 2022 and then amended in 2023 to establish and fund Data Governance Program. Sponsors for this legislation indicated they relied, in part, on the PCG reports commissioned by the Task Force when

developing the legislation for this data governance program. Specifically, the Maine Secretary of State and the Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services were tasked with the establishment and implementation of a data governance program to, in part; (1) support decision making and improve citizen access to government services; (2) promote consistent collection of racial and ethnic demographic data; (3) use evidence-based strategies to improve data collection; (4) address technology barriers that restrict the ability of state agencies to share data between agencies; and (5) create models for sharing data with the public and for developing policies to reduce disparities and increase equity that take into consideration the norms and expectations of the diverse populations of the State. 1 M.R.S. § 547

Considering passage of legislation to formalize and fund statewide data governance efforts, the Race and Equity Subcommittee did not see a need to continue parallel effort to the work already underway at the State level, and therefore, determined that the subcommittee would meet on an as-needed basis. The subcommittee has offered its expertise to the Secretary of State and the Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services should they ever need feedback or comment as they establish and implement the program. Individual project partners continue to focus efforts internally on implementation and collection strategies.

D. Parent Attorney and Guardian ad Litem Recruitment and Retention

The 2022 MCWAP Annual Report made the following recommendation to the Task Force regarding legal representation for families involved in the child welfare system: “The Justice for Children Task Force should convene a working group to further explore and make recommendations for how to improve the retention and recruitment of parent attorneys.” MCWAP made a separate, but similar, recommendation for the retention and recruitment of

guardians ad litem. As a result of these recommendations, in June 2023, the Task Force established the Parent Attorney/Guardian ad Litem Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee. Members of the subcommittee include: Maine legal services providers, MJB staff, PDS, parent attorneys, guardians ad litem, and individuals representing juveniles in delinquency matters.

The mission of the subcommittee is to identify and make recommendations for system improvements to increase the recruitment and retention of Maine child welfare parent attorneys and guardians ad litem.

The Parent Attorney/Guardian ad Litem Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee began meeting in August of 2023. The subcommittee met 13 times between August 2023 and August 2024 and presented draft recommendations to the full Task Force at the September 2024 meeting. (*see Appendix B*). The subcommittee's recommendation suggest action by three system partners: MJB, PDS, and the University of Maine School of Law. Leadership from all three system partners have been invited to the January 2025 meeting (postponed from December 2024) to discuss the subcommittee's recommendations, identify any concerns or barriers to implementation thereof, and consider opportunities for collaboration.

The Parent Attorney/Guardian ad Litem Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee intends, with the guidance of the full Task Force, to continue meeting throughout 2025 to facilitate implementation of any adopted recommendations and to identify additional opportunities within the child welfare system to strengthen the number and quality of attorneys and guardians ad litem who engage in this difficult and rewarding work.

III. Continuing Education Subcommittee

In addition to pursuing the four projects identified in the Task Force's strategic plan, the

Task Force also assisted in the planning of the MJB’s annual child protective conference through its Continuing Education Subcommittee (CES). The CES meets to help plan the annual child protective conference every year. The 2024 conference was held on Thursday, April 4, and Friday April 5 at the Sunday River Resort in Newry, Maine. The title of the conference was *Child Welfare Litigation: Courtroom Strategies and Best Practices*.

Sessions throughout the conference focused on litigation best practices throughout the life of a child welfare case. This included information on: (1) Maine’s Quality Hearing Pilot Project; (2) litigation best practices by case phase (i.e. Summary Preliminary Hearing, Jeopardy, contested Judicial Reviews, and Termination of Parental Rights.); (3) incorporating youth voice in the courtroom; and (4) identifying economic and concrete supports for families.

The two-day conference provided attendees with the opportunity to earn 11.5 general continuing legal credits (CLE)/continuing professional education (CPE) credits and one ethics credit. Overall, there were approximately 820 general CLE and 475 CPE credits awarded as a result of the conference. The CES reviewed conference evaluation forms, which offered feedback that was generally very positive. The CES is currently planning the 2025 spring conference for April 3rd and 4th at the Sunday River Resort.

Conclusion

Throughout 2024, the Task Force subcommittees generated systemwide recommendations and helped to implement system change. Many Task Force projects have contributed, in some way, to statewide initiatives that have the potential to have a lasting effect on the child welfare system and the families of Maine. We would like to thank all the Task Force members for their past and ongoing meaningful collaboration and work to support the child welfare system.

CPS 101 + 201

2022-2024 TRAINING EVALUATION FINDINGS

AUGUST 2024



Analysis prepared for The Opportunity Alliance
CPS Training Program
by the Data Innovation Project
at the Catherine Cutler Institute
University of Southern Maine
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Introduction

The purpose of this visual report is to share evaluation findings from the *Child Protective Services 101 and 201: For Parents by Parents* classes that were delivered between January 2022 and June 2024 (a 30-month period). The CPS 101 class was conducted for both parents and providers separately, and the CPS 201 class was facilitated for parents.

This evaluation seeks to respond to the following questions:

- To what extent did participating in the CPS classes change participants’ knowledge and attitudes?
- What about CPS classes did participants find helpful?
- How might the CPS classes be improved in the future?

Methodology

For each class, participants were asked to complete a brief pre and post survey in order to learn about any changes in knowledge or attitudes that they may have experienced during the course of the class. In the post-survey, participants were also asked to describe what was helpful about the class and any recommendations they may have for improving the experience. Data was collected through Google Forms and program staff de-identified all survey data before analysis.

Class	Number of sessions	Number of participants	Number of matched pre/post surveys included in analysis
CPS 101 Parent	46	142	141
CPS 101 Provider	35	188	97
CPS 201 Parent	3*	17	17

*CPS201 sessions were held between November 2023 and June 2024.

Quantitative survey results were analyzed using a paired samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test to determine if there was a statistically significant change in participants’ knowledge or attitudes. Qualitative survey results were analyzed using an inductive coding method to uncover themes shared by participants.

Summary of Findings

Overall, evaluation results show an increase in knowledge for each class - CPS 101 and 201 for parents and CPS 101 for providers. For parents and providers who participated in CPS 101, participants left the training with a greater understanding of how CPS works. For parents, this also include increased understanding of who is on their team, and for providers an increased understanding of the roles of the CPS team. The most common specific aspect of what parent respondents found helpful was the improved understanding of the process of department involvement. Parents also frequently mentioned that knowing more about the specific roles within the department was helpful. Parents increased their understanding of what they need to do to reunify their family and reported an increase in hope about their Child Protective Services involvement.

Parents who participated in CPS 101 mentioned several positive aspects of the class with some of the respondents noting the general usefulness of the entire class. Respondents also highlighted the benefits of hearing the stories and experiences of other parents; learning more about parental rights and resources; and the advice and tips provided. Additional things that parent participants noted as helpful included the videos, feelings of hope, and solidarity, and the opportunity to ask questions. Similarly, providers found videos, question and answer sessions, tips, and descriptions of the CPS process and roles helpful, in addition to the lived experience of presenters and attendees. PowerPoints, resources, and information from a provider perspective were also helpful.

The majority of parent respondents indicated that they had no suggestions to improve the class. Of the recurring suggestions, a few related themes emerged, including the themes of more information, longer sessions, more parents and stories, one-on-one time for parents, additional support after the session, including advice for if the DHHS team is not supporting the parent effectively, and an overview of problems more frequently encountered. Providers also suggested more time for discussion and questions, while also providing some specific ideas about accessibility for families, resources, more examples of how a case moves through the system, success examples, and more about legal systems and advocacy for parents.

For parents who participated in the CPS 201 class, respondents experienced an increase in understanding of what is expected at visits with their children and how to advocate for their family. The largest average increase from pre to post was understanding how to prepare for Family Team Meetings. Information about Family Team Meetings was helpful, including providing more detailed information about processes. Additionally, parent respondents reported an increase in understanding how to communicate with their Child Protective Team. Communication was a main theme of what parents found helpful, including tips for communication with their team, and the templates, tips and tricks, and how to keep track of information.

Similar to the 101 classes, parents recommended more of the class: more time, more information, more resources, individual meetings, more examples, more situations covered, and more tips.

These data indicate a positive overall experience with the classes and positive benefits for participants in regards to an increase in knowledge and shifting attitudes about their experiences. The overarching feedback for future classes is to find ways to get more information and support for parents through this process.

CPS 101

Learning from
Participants

CLASS ATTENDANCE

CPS 101

January 2022 – June 2024

142

parents
attended CPS 101

137

had an
open case at
the time of the
class

3

average
number of
attendees per
class

46

class sessions held

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

CPS 101

January 2022 – June 2024

Most participants identified as **Female**.

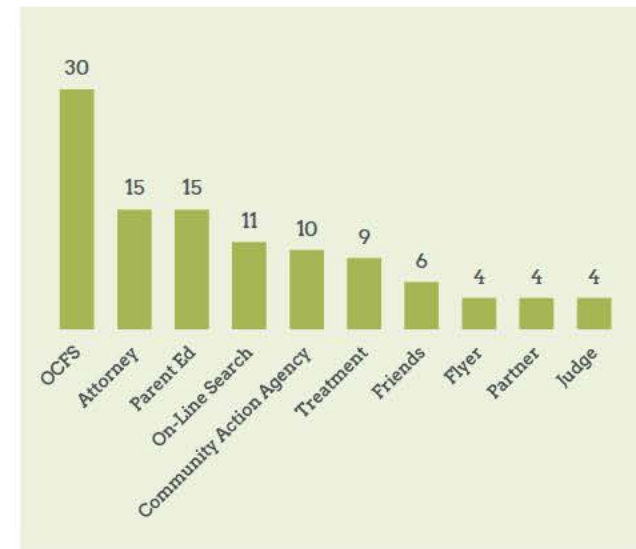
Participant cases came from **14** out of Maine's 16 counties.

OCFS was the most commonly listed referral source.



County	% of participants
Cumberland	25%
Penobscot	14%
York	12%
Androscoggin	8%
Kennebec	8%
Hancock	7%
Waldo	6%
Somerset	5%
Piscataquis	4%


Franklin, Aroostook, Knox, Oxford, Sagadahoc, and those who were unsure each had fewer than 5 individuals. There were no participants from Washington or Lincoln counties.



UNDERSTANDING HOW CPS WORKS

I understand how the Child Protective System works.

	Average <i>Scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)</i> 139 respondents
Pre	2.71
Post	4.05



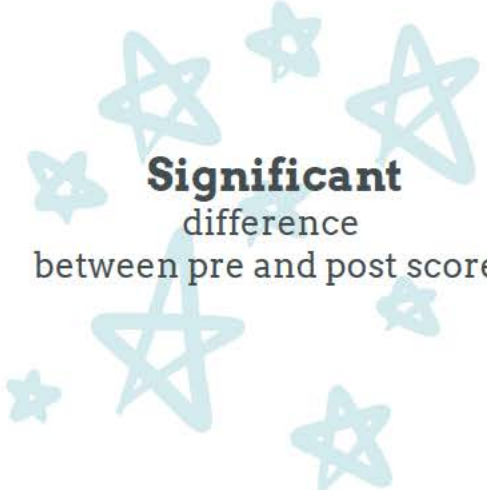
Significant
difference
between pre and post scores

Increase	107
Same	26
Decrease	6

UNDERSTANDING CPS TEAM

I understand who is on my Child Protective Services team and what they each do.

	Average <i>Scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)</i> 140 respondents
Pre	3.13
Post	4.23




Significant
difference
between pre and post scores

Increase	102
Same	33
Decrease	5

UNDERSTANDING REUNIFICATION

I understand what I need to do to reunify my family.

	Average <i>Scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)</i> 141 respondents
Pre	3.09
Post	3.79



Significant
difference
between pre and post scores

Increase	75
Same	49
Decrease	17

FEELING HOPE

I feel hopeful about my Child Protective Services involvement.

	Average <i>Scale of 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)</i> 140 respondents
Pre	2.89
Post	3.69

Significant
difference
between pre and post scores

Increase	79
Same	45
Decrease	16



“The stories/ the time it took for the explanation about the services that can be provided with DH[HS]. The hope it brings for reunification.”

- CPS 101 PARTICIPANT on what was helpful about the class

WHAT WAS HELPFUL

CPS 101

January 2022 – June 2024

**Whole
Class**

Improved
understanding
of CPS process

**Hearing other
parents'
experiences**

Knowledge of
**rights
and resources**

**Knowledge of
roles within
DHHS**

**Advice
and tips**

**Videos and
the ability to
ask
questions**

Feelings
of **hope** and
solidarity

WHAT WAS HELPFUL

CPS 101

January 2022 – June 2024



"The **whole class** was very helpful there was a lot of information that I had not known or had been given the wrong information before this class."

"**Hearing other peoples situation its really inspiring.** I related on a level that makes me tearful and can see the silver lining and that this is not going to last forever."

"Being able to **understand the process and what everyone is doing** even if I'm in the dark there are resources who can shed light through just as this class has!"

"I was **informed on exactly who everyone is and their role in my case.** And was most definitely reassured that most of my teams biggest goal is to reunify children with their parent/s as soon as it is safe and appropriate"

WHAT WAS HELPFUL

CPS 101

January 2022 – June 2024



"Knowing the roles, my rights, what I can do and where I can go!"

"The fact that the women running this have a personal experience with CPS cases"

"Listening & Understanding what I have to do to get my babies back and Don't give up no matter what and keep your head up and keep moving forward."

RECOMMENDATIONS

CPS 101

January 2022 – June 2024

Suggestion	# of respondents who suggested
More information	8
Longer session	6
More parents and stories	5
Advertising	4
Support after class	3
1:1 time	3
Advice if DHHS is not supporting	3
Overview of frequent problems	2



"Make it more known!!

I'm 10 months into my case and just heard about it. Very informational and helpful"

Ideas about support and sharing

"If it comes available for a peer to peer for one on one after class would be helpful for future questions that might get thought of."

"Support/'after care' group for case specific concerns"

"Maybe have more 101 time or a question segment where someone can answer some personal questions."



"Start a coffee club or parenting workshop where parents who are going through the process can meet and share stories, resources etc."

"I think you did a perfect job! Maybe include a relationship counselor or just counselor in general to kind of explain what services might look like/different supports might be."

CPS 101

Learning from
Providers

CLASS EXPERIENCE

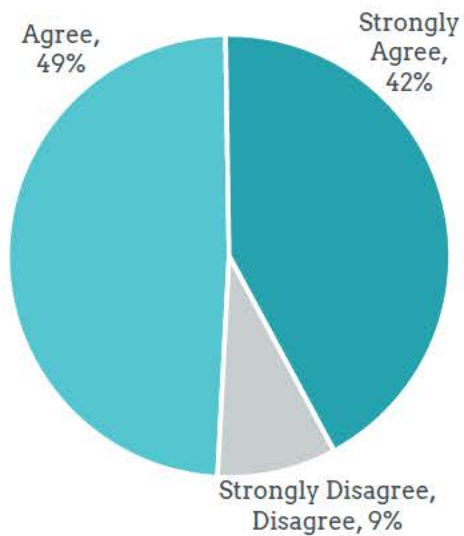
CPS 101 | Providers

Providers would **recommend** this class to others.

The professional **video presentations** were **helpful**.

The **information and tips** section was **helpful**.

91% **agreed** or **strongly agreed** that they would recommend the class to others.



99%

of respondents said **Yes**, the video presentations were helpful.

92%

of respondents said **Yes**, the information and tips section was helpful.

PROVIDER OUTCOMES

CPS 101 | Providers

Question/Statement Responding to the following statements on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree	Average Pre	Average Post
I understand the roles of the CPS team	3.2	4.16
I have an understanding of how The Child Protective System works.	3.49	4.12
Do you think that parents are offered the services and resources they need to reunify their family?	3.02	3.62
Do the parents that you support feel they have everything they need to reunify their family?	2.71	3.16

← Largest average increase

WHAT WAS HELPFUL

- The videos
- Learning the CPS roles
- Question and Answer Section
- Tips for providers to support parents
- The timeline
- Descriptions of the CPS process
- PowerPoints
- Resources
- The lived experience of presenters and attendees
- Information from a provider perspective
- The facilitators



"I do hope that each family with a child in state care, is able to see these videos."

"To hear more details of what we usually are asked to do to support our members, but may not have the experience or information to have the confidence to do so."

"The honesty and good faith of the presenters. CPS has an incredible amount of power over families that have had their children removed with little support and constant changing of the end zone to close the case. Thank you for presenting!"

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Review how the process can look prior to showing the videos
- More discussion and questions
- How to advocate when parents do not have an attorney assigned to them
- More parent feedback
- Accessibility to other social groups: interpreters and translation
- Handout of presentation slides
- A list of resources available to families
- Statistics and success stories
- Examples of a case moving through the system
- Following through on court orders and plans
- Increased empathy
- More information about presenters and their roles



"More discussion based aspects / more room for questions amongst participants (helpful to hear from other providers how their work fits into this content / things they are seeing on the ground when supporting families)"

"Acknowledging the high emotion/stress, but showing them the practicality of how to change their circumstances is always a tricky line to straddle but I think that's so helpful and effective. Most of that thoughtfulness came through in the Q and A session, so just ensuring that comes through regardless of what questions are asked."

CPS 201

Learning from
Participants

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS

CPS 201

Most participants identified as **Female** and **all had an open case**.

Participant cases came from **8** out of Maine's 16 counties.

CPS101 was the most commonly listed referral source.

17

**total
participants**

Mostly **female**

All had
an open case

**Counties represented
included:**

Cumberland
Franklin
Kennebec
Penobscot
Piscataquis
Somerset
Waldo
York

The most common referral source was the CPS 101 class or an email.

Other sources included DHHS, lawyers, therapists, or found on-line.

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

CPS 201

Question Responding to the following statements on a scale of 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree	Average Pre	Average Post
I understand what is expected at my visits with my children.	4.24	4.53
I understand how to advocate for my family.	3.59	4.29
I understand how to prepare for my Family Team Meetings.	3.29	4.06
I understand how to communicate with my Child Protective Team.	3.29	4.00

← Largest average increase

WHAT WAS HELPFUL

CPS 201

100%
of participants
said the
**information and
tips were helpful**

100% of
participants
said they would
**recommend the
class** to others

What was helpful:

- Tips on Communication with their team
- Building Understanding of the Process
- The templates, tips, and tricks to keeping track of information and communications
- FTM Information
- Detailed Information



"Information on how to prepare for family team meetings, meeting with your case worker. Also, that you can request to have meeting with your caseworker's supervisor, and have the AAG present at your FTM's."

"The templates set out a good guide for those that have never had to set up an email or formal message"

RECOMMENDATIONS

CPS 201

- More time and more information covered
- In person meetings
- More resources
- Individual meetings to answer specific questions
- How to handle dissatisfaction with your team or advocate against wrong-doing within the department
- FTM examples
- Talk about the end of the court process
- Discuss visitation issues
- Tips on agreeing to disagree



"I feel like if we can discuss the different ways how visitation works if your child [is] not take[n] by DHHS but by a parent. What resources and idea we can [use in] this situation"

"Who you can contact when the department doesn't follow [their] own rules"

"Meet with individuals and answer case specific questions."



"Keep working to make this more have information overall. This being new and all Keep up the hard work"

- CPS 201 PARTICIPANT on recommendations

CPS Classes

Data + Statistics

UNDERSTANDING HOW CPS WORKS

Our paired t-test revealed a significant difference between pre and post scores in responses to the statement, "I understand how The Child Protective System works." A total of 107 participants demonstrated a positive difference in a Post-Pre analysis, meaning that scores after the session were higher for 107 participants than they were before the session. 6 individuals had lower scores after the session, and 26 scored the same.

Paired T test Post-Pre	
Total N	139
Mean Difference	1.342
Standard Error Mean	.111
Two-Sided p Sig.	<.001

Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test.

Decision: reject the null hypothesis

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRE_understanding	139	2.71	1.110
POST_understand	139	4.05	.805

Positive Difference	Negative Difference	Tie
107	6	26

UNDERSTANDING CPS TEAM

Our paired t-test revealed a significant difference between pre and post scores in responses to the statement, "I understand who is on my Child Protective Services team and what they each do." A total of 102 participants demonstrated a positive difference in a Post-Pre analysis, meaning that scores after the session were higher for 102 participants than they were before the session. 5 individuals had lower scores after the session, and 33 scored the same.

Paired T test Post-Pre	
Total N	140
Mean Difference	1.100
Standard Error Mean	.096
Two-Sided p Sig.	<.001

Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. **Decision:**
reject the null hypothesis

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRE_CPSteam	140	3.13	1.046
POST_team	140	4.23	.812

Positive Difference	Negative Difference	Tie
102	5	33

UNDERSTANDING REUNIFICATION

Our paired t-test revealed a significant difference between pre and post scores in responses to the statement, "I understand what I need to do to reunify my family." A total of 75 participants demonstrated a positive difference in a Post-Pre analysis, meaning that scores after the session were higher for 75 participants than they were before the session. 17 individuals had lower scores after the session, and 49 scored the same.

Paired T test Post-Pre	
Total N	141
Mean Difference	.709
Standard Error Mean	.113
Two-Sided p Sig.	<.001

Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. **Decision:**
reject the null hypothesis

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRE_reunify	141	3.09	1.407
POST_reunify	141	3.79	1.334

Positive Difference	Negative Difference	Tie
75	17	49

FEELING HOPE

Our paired t-test revealed a significant difference between pre and post scores in responses to the statement, "I feel hopeful about my Child Protective Services involvement." A total of 79 participants demonstrated a positive difference in a Post-Pre analysis, meaning that scores after the session were higher for 79 participants than they were before the session.

16 individuals had lower scores after the session, and 45 scored the same.

Paired T test Post-Pre	
Total N	140
Mean Difference	.807
Standard Error Mean	.102
Two-Sided p Sig.	<.001

Related-Samples Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. **Decision:**
reject the null hypothesis

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRE_hopeful	140	2.89	1.259
POST_hopeful	140	3.69	1.065

Positive Difference	Negative Difference	Tie
79	16	45

PROVIDER OUTCOMES

CPS 101 | Providers

Question/Statement	Average Pre	Average Post	Post-Pre Mean	Significance
I have an understanding of how The Child Protective System works.	3.49	4.12	.697	< .001
I understand the roles of the CPS team	3.2	4.16	1	< .001
Do you think that parents are offered the services and resources they need to reunify their family?	3.02	3.62	.587	< .001
Do the parents that you support feel they have everything they need to reunify their family?	2.71	3.16	.5	< .001

The response options ranged from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Through paired t-tests, each question demonstrated a significant increase between the pre and post scores, meaning that providers on average endorsed the statements higher during the post survey than during the pre survey.

PARTICIPANT OUTCOMES

CPS 201

Question (Responding to the following statements)	Average Pre	Average Post	Average Change Post-Pre
I understand how to prepare for my Family Team Meetings	3.29	4.06	+.77
I understand how to communicate with my Child Protective Team	3.29	4.00	+.71
I understand what is expected at my visits with my children.	4.24	4.53	+.29
I understand how to advocate for my family.	3.59	4.29	+.706

Every question showed an overall increase in score between the pre and post session surveys, indicating a stronger endorsement of the corresponding statements. The question on expectations of visits showed lower levels of increase, possibly because the pre score was already higher than the pre scores for other questions. Due to small sample size, we did not test for significance of these changes.

The scale is a Likert Scale from 1 to 5, with 1 one being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Higher scores signify a higher endorsement of the statement.

Parent Attorney and Guardian ad Litem Recruitment and Retention Subcommittee September 2024 Recommendations

Recommendation #1:

Maine Commission on Public Defense Services (PDS), the Maine Judicial Branch, and the Office of the Attorney General should implement an exit interview protocol for parent attorneys, GALs, and AAGs who are no longer working with the protective custody docket. Survey results should be shared with the Justice for Children Task Force on an annual basis.

Justification:

Consistent data collection can establish trends within the system as to why individuals are choosing not to work in the child welfare system, making possible system change informed and in-line with data trends. Sharing the information at the Justice for Children Task Force meetings will allow for all system partners to hear the information and determine if changes need to be made.

Recommendation #2:

Ask that the Board of Overseers of the Bar establish the National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) Child Welfare Specialist designation in Maine. The purpose of offering this designation to attorneys practicing child welfare law in Maine is to provide them with an *optional* opportunity to deepen their expertise; PDS agrees this designation should not become a requirement.

Justification: The Maine Child Welfare Advisory Panel, in its 2023 Annual Report, recommended that “the State of Maine should certify the ‘Child Welfare Law Specialist’ (CWLS) certification program offered through the National Association of Counsel for Children as a specialization available to Maine attorneys.” Maine is one of only five states that does not offer the National Child Welfare Law Specialist certification. This is a law specialization that is accredited through the American Bar Association. It is a certification that is offered to any attorney in the child welfare process—including assistant attorneys general, guardians ad litem, counsel for children and counsel for parents. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, as well as the Conference of Chief Judges/Conference of the State Court Administrators both endorse this certification program. The Children’s Bureau strongly encourages all attorneys and judges practicing child welfare law to obtain CWLS certification. The certification is funded by participant fees. There has been some coordination by individual members of the parent attorney bar in an attempt to align Maine with the practice of the vast majority of other states offering this, and this effort should have the benefit of systemic support from Maine’s legal systems partners in the child welfare system response.

The NACC started certifying attorneys as part of the CWLS program in 2006. According to the Administration for Children and Families (Log No: ACYF-CB-IM-17-02), “[n]umerous studies and reports point to the importance of competent legal representation for parents, children, and youth in ensuring that salient information is conveyed to the court, parties’ legal rights are protected and that the wishes of the parties are effectively voiced. There is evidence to support

that legal representation for children, parents, and youth contributes to or is associated with: increases in party perceptions of fairness; increases in party engagement in case planning, services, and court hearings; more personally tailored and specific case plans and services; increases in visitation and parenting time; expedited permanency; and cost savings to state government due to reductions of time children and youth spend in care.” With an active and ongoing discussion about the quality of representation provided to indigent Mainers through PDS, adding a certificate specialization in the State of Maine that is already recognized so widely across the country is a logical next step in continuous improvement efforts.

Recommendation #3:

The Maine Supreme Judicial Court should amend M.R. Civ. P. 90(a) and M.R. Crim. P. (56)(a) to allow students of an ABA accredited law school to receive student practice authorization for internships and externships with contract counsel supervised by PDS.

Justification: Gaining student practice authorization from the Supreme Judicial Court to place students into PDS contractor offices will provide students access to practical experience in parent’s attorney work and create a potential pipeline for recruiting new attorneys to take up this work in the future. Opportunities for internships and externships already exist within the Office of the Attorney General, therefore, expanding to contract parent counsel would create parity.

Recommendation #4:

The Maine Judicial Branch should prioritize implementation of an electronic billing system for guardian ad litem billing.

Justification: Prompt payment of GAL vouchers is fundamental for recruitment and retention of GALs. The present GAL voucher system is paper-based and relies on ground mail to transmit vouchers for the various stages of the voucher review process. Relying on the mail creates delays at various stages of the voucher review process. If a GAL would like to confirm receipt of a voucher by the court or identify the status of a voucher in the review process, the GAL presently must contact the courthouse or the Administrative Office of the Courts, which can be time consuming for the GAL and court personnel. A survey of GALs was conducted by a GAL organization in Maine, MEGALI 2.0, and they report 66% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the current billing process.

Many of the court-compensated GALs also provide services to clients through PDS. PDS does not rely on a paper system. Their electronic billing system allows attorneys to enter their time and expenses without ever relying on a paper submission, provides information about a voucher’s stage in the review process, and allows communication between the attorney and PDS within the electronic billing system. GALs and parent attorneys should have similar billing systems and experiences, as that would create efficiencies for both the GALs and the Judicial Branch (i.e., eliminate delays with mail, reduce the number of emails and calls between the GAL and the Judicial Branch to check on the status of GAL vouchers, and less technical support would be needed if PDS and the Judicial Branch have similar billing systems).

Additionally, an electronic billing system would allow the Judicial Branch to capture more data about GAL billing trends to better inform conversations about the GAL budget, including the data to inform possible cost reduction, and future needs. Current data is rudimentary in nature and does not provide critical data points.

Recommendation #5:

The Maine Judicial Branch should eliminate the requirement for GALs to submit a motion for prior approval to exceed the legal stage hourly cap for billing, and should instead allow GALs to submit a justification for any hours above the cap at the time the voucher is submitted. The justification would be reviewed for reasonableness (akin to the process adopted by PDS).

Justification: Administrative Order JB-05-05 requires a GAL to file a motion with the court to request permission to exceed the presumptive hourly cap for a legal stage in a child protection case prior to providing services. The motion necessarily requires court action, which can take time given the courts' high caseloads. This process has placed GALs in difficult positions where the GAL must decide whether to: (1) cease performing services pending approval of the request to exceed the cap and potentially put a child's safety at risk, or (2) perform the services without the pre-approval from the court to exceed the hourly cap and risk not being compensated for their time.

Because of the current parent attorney shortage, many cases are being continued at the summary preliminary hearing and jeopardy stage due to lack of counsel. These continuances can add several months to the stage of the case. This ongoing crisis is likely to lead to an increase in the percentage of cases where GALs are required to file a motion for permission to exceed the cap.

Many of the GALs performing services in child protection cases also provide parent attorney services for PDS, and PDS does not implement legal stage hourly caps. While PDS has triggers for presumptive review, if a parent attorney exceeds that trigger amount, the parent attorney is required only to submit a justification for the overage at the time of the voucher submission. Upon review, PDS may ask additional questions of the parent attorney before approving the overage, but overall, the PDS process for exceeding a trigger for presumptive review is much less burdensome than the process that GALs must follow if they anticipate exceeding a legal stage hourly cap. Another benefit of PDS' approach is that it uses less resources than the Judicial Branch's current approach, which includes the GAL's time spent drafting the motion, the motion being processed by the clerks (both before and after the judicial officer's action), and a judicial officer's review and action on the motion.

The current prior approval process has resulted in some GALs opting not to request prior approval for additional hours, and instead, forgo compensation, especially when the excess over the cap is minor. Finally, many of these motions by GALs are granted by the Judicial Branch, raising additional questions about the necessity of the current process. Adopting a process more akin to PDS's compensation model would improve GAL morale and retention.

Recommendation #6:

The University of Maine School of Law should return to offering the child protection class each year and consider adding a clinic that is focused on child protection. The Maine State Legislature and/or PDS should provide financial support to establish and maintain this clinic to ensure sustainability. Additionally, the University of Maine School of Law should partner with PDS to ensure that the curriculum qualifies as the minimum standards training required for PDS.

Justification: The class has a strong history of student interest and received excellent evaluations. It meets Maine Law's goals of having their students as close to 'practice ready' by graduation as possible. Also, this class is in keeping with Maine Law's value statement about the importance of public service.

Recommendation #7

The pay rate for Title 22 GALs and Parent Counsel should be re-evaluated and increased at least every two years to meet or exceed statewide, regional, and national cost-of-living adjustments, inflation rates, and market rate trends for legal services.

Justification: The vast majority of GALs, and all parent counsel, in child protection cases are registered attorneys in the State of Maine. The majority of GALs and parent counsel practice in small or solo practices with little to no administrative support or employee benefit packages. For many years, GALs and parent counsel have been under-compensated for professional legal services, compared to colleagues statewide and in other New England states. In the past decade, the pay rate has been increased only twice, at irregular intervals, and still lags far behind the average pay rate for other legal services in the state. Serving in some of the most legally complex and emotionally fraught cases, GALs and parent counsel are very much aware of the below-average pay for the complicated legal service they provide. This inequity discourages professionals from starting or continuing service as a parent counsel or GAL. Regular, predictable increases of parent counsel and GAL pay to match or exceed inflation, cost-of-living increases, and market rates every two years would encourage more attorneys to start or continue service as parent counsel and GALs.

Recommendation #9

The requirement that GALs – alone among all other practicing attorneys in the State -- accept pro bono or reduced fee referrals from the courts, as set forth in M.R.G.A.L. 2(b)(5), should be eliminated.

Justification

All GALs, including Title 22 GALs, are currently required to take at least one pro bono or reduced fee Title 19-A (Family Matters) case every year as a condition of rostering pursuant to M.R.G.A.L. 2(b)(5). This requirement, which is inconsistently applied and enforced, is highly controversial among GALs, perhaps particularly those who have elected to pursue only Title 22 work, which requires a different skill set and specialization from family matters cases. Although other practicing attorneys in Maine are "expected" to take on pro bono casework, there is no explicit requirement or specific number of cases placed on other practicing attorneys.

This inequitable requirement leads to decreased morale of GALs, particularly those who are committed to practicing in the area of child protection. Recognition of the right of GALs to accept or deny appointments (including pro bono or reduced fee appointments) based on their own professional judgment, should support recruitment and retention of dedicated Title 22 GALs.

Like all other practicing attorneys in the State, GALs can and should be encouraged to take on a reasonable amount of pro bono or reduced fee work, but the Courts (and Legislature) should find and fund more viable and effective means to meet the need for GALs in high-conflict parental rights cases involving indigent parents.