

State of Maine

Child and Family Services

An Office of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services

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Improving Maine's Child Welfare & Children's Behavioral Health System

With comprehensive reviews of the system complete, reforms are under way to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Maine children

Update: March 5, 2019

The Maine Department of Health and Human Services recognizes the importance of input and collaboration as we work to improve Child Welfare and Children's Behavioral Health services. We will take as many immediate, evidence-based steps as needed to protect children and help them thrive, as well as to support our staff, as we gather input from our own workers as to what they think will best advance the wellbeing of Maine children.

The Department has embarked on an aggressive campaign to staff up in the Office of Child and Family Services, hiring 103 staff to fill vacancies in the Child Welfare system. These hires include 75 caseworkers, 17 caseworker supervisors, 4 child welfare administrative staff, and 7 support positions. The Department will continue this campaign until all vacancies are filled. Additionally, workloads will be assessed and steps will be taken to align with best practices and national standards.

We are also hiring to better support our Child Welfare Intake Unit, which receives over 70,000 calls annually reporting potential child abuse and neglect. The Department recently added 7 new positions to the Intake Unit and is working towards full staffing. Additionally, working with the Office of Information Technology and the State telephone vendor, the Department identified several improvements to the phone network and has begun a plan to modernize call flow over the next three months. The improvements include better call routing, call-back functionality, real-time management reporting, and management tools to better support staff.

To give child welfare caseworkers access to better background information on individuals when assessing abuse and neglect allegations, the Department partnered

with the Maine Attorney General's Office, Department of Public Safety, and the Federal Bureau of Investigations to create a Background Check Unit within Child Welfare. The piloted program has been in operation for several months, primarily supporting York and Cumberland counties as personnel learn the state and federal systems. In January alone, the Background Check Unit conducted over 1,100 checks, contributing to the safety of Maine's children. The Access Integrity Unit at the Department of Public Safety performed a "test audit" and praised the Department for the accuracy and the work conducted thus far.

Additionally, based on recommendations from consultants, the Department updated its investigation policy, ultimately changing the starting point for activities that must be completed within 24 or 72 hours. The clock now starts when the report is received by the Child Welfare Intake Unit, rather than when the report is sent to the district. This recommended change is in alignment with national best practices and is an important step in providing consistency of response.

In Children's Behavioral Health, the Department has been working closely with outside experts to develop an implementation plan for the 24 system recommendations in a report posted in January. The work plan will identify short-term activities and develop an implementation plan for selected recommendations. Staff and stakeholder involvement will be critical to our success.

These important initiatives are among many that the Department is pursuing to better support Maine's children and families. We are dedicated sharing the progress we are making and look forward to public participation as we strengthen the system of care for children in the state of Maine.

Credits

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