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## STATE OF MAINE

### TASK FORCE ON KINSHIP FAMILIES

#### MEETING NOTES, AUGUST 3, 2010

1. The first meeting of the Task Force on Kinship on Kinship Families convened on Tuesday, August 3rd. Present were Senator Margaret Craven, Representative Patricia Jones, Representative David Webster, Representative Sara Stevens, Representative Joan Nass, Dr. Joanna Dotts, Diana Loranger, Barbara Kates, James Beougher, and David Stockford (by phone). Also present were staff Jane Orbeton and Karen Nadeau-Drillen from the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis, Dean Crocker and Carla Mowatt from the Maine Children's Alliance, David Wihry from the University of Maine Center on Aging and Virginia Marriner from DHHS.
2. Senator Craven and Representative Jones greeted the task force members. Task Force members discussed the duties of the task force and the issue of "fictive kin," who are persons who act as kin but who are not legally related to the child and family.
3. Task Force members introduced themselves and spoke of their interest and experience with kinship care issues. The challenges that they mentioned included the following:
  - achieving permanency for children and the balance of parental, kin and children's rights and interests (keeping children as the focus) and the timeline for permanency; concern about the effect of further disruption in the life of the child;
  - legal processes, legal expenses, finding a parent unfit and determining the best interest of the child;
  - balancing the benefits, requirements and restrictions of involvement by the State;
  - providing support and services to kinship families, including what are the legal requirements for education, special educational services, health care services;
  - the range of legal status of families caring for non-biological children [(1) formal with DHHS involvement, (2) informal with a legal guardianship or parental rights and responsibilities court order, (3) informal with a power of attorney and (4) informal with no legal paperwork];
  - whether informal care should be formalized to more easily know children's status and provide the support and services they and their families need;
  - what are the special needs of children in kinship care;
  - how to provide behavioral health services for children in kinship care; and
  - whether the State could provide guidance to schools regarding enrollment requirements, to families and health care providers regarding authority to consent to treatment and authority to

treat, and to housing authorities regarding non-biological children being considered members of the family.

4. Possible agenda items for meeting #2 include:

- Department of Education issues regarding kinship care for children (enrollment, consent for special education, preventing disruptions in education) by David Stockford;
- data and other information requests to the University of Maine Center on Aging by David Wihry;
- information on initiatives and approaches in other states, particularly Maryland, Illinois and Washington, by a representative of the National Conference of State Legislators or a national advocacy group;
- information on legal processes and legal issues in Maine for children and families in the formal and informal systems of care for children by non-biological parents by Virginia Marriner of DHHS and a representative of the Family Law Advisory Commission;
- data on children in the formal and informal systems, including their being at risk of child abuse and neglect by Barbara Kates and Virginia Marriner; and
- presentations by families and children in the formal and informal care systems, to be coordinated by Virginia Marriner and Barbara Kates.

5. The task force discussed briefly the possibility of using Department of Education distance learning technology. David Stockford will assist Karen and Jane with this. Mary Anne Lynch of the Judicial Department offered assistance from her department to the task force.

6. The next meeting of the task force is scheduled for Tuesday, September 7<sup>th</sup> at 10 a.m. in the Cross State Office Building in Augusta (room location to be determined).