

OPEGA Status Update
Prepared for the Government Oversight Committee
February 10, 2023

Reunification in Child Protective Services

Background

The Government Oversight Committee (GOC) approved the scope of work for OPEGA’s review of Child Protective Services (CPS) in August 2021.¹ The Committee divided this comprehensive review project into three components: Oversight, Investigations, and Reunification. The Oversight and Investigations components were completed in January 2022 and March 2022, respectively. OPEGA began preliminary research on reunification in April 2022. The research included:

- interviewing OCFS management and staff, and various participants in child protection, including foster and biological parent representatives, judicial branch representatives, assistant attorneys general, defense attorneys, the Child Welfare Ombudsman, and service providers.
- reviewing current state statute and federal law relevant to reunification and permanency;
- understanding the design (policy) and implementation (practice) of reunification by OCFS, including the use of Structured Decision-Making tools in reunification; and
- determining case-level record information available from OCFS.

Following preliminary research, OPEGA proposed two options for a Phase 3 of CPS work related to reunification to the GOC. On July 20, 2022, the GOC voted to direct OPEGA to proceed with fieldwork and to provide a full report to the 131st GOC by the end of January 2023 to include the following components:

- Descriptions of the reunification process, the framework for reunification and other permanency decisions, and the roles and responsibilities of the various entities in the process; and
- The results of OPEGA’s evaluative work consisting of our analysis of QA review results and narrative descriptions, and interviews with caseworkers and supervisors to identify reunification practice issues and potential root causes.

OPEGA began fieldwork on the CPS Reunification project following the July 2022 meeting.

Current Status

At the September 21, 2022 GOC meeting, the Committee voted to direct OPEGA to conduct a Rapid Review of CPS, with regard to four child death casefiles, with the understanding that OPEGA would pause work on the CPS Reunification project. OPEGA staff immediately began work on the Rapid Review following the September 2022 meeting. The current status of the CPS Reunification project is paused in the fieldwork phase.

¹ Review of Child Protective Services: Approved Scope. <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/7043>