

## Child Abuse and Neglect Committee Meeting Minutes

March 1, 2023

Hybrid Meeting - Varina Library (1875 New Market Road, Henrico VA 23231) & Virtual

**In-Person Meeting Attendees:** Ginny Powell, FACT Board; Jeanine Harper, GRSCAN; Maria Altonen, VDH; Brandi Peterson, Child Fatality Coordinator, VDSS; Kathleen Hollywood, Citizen Review Panel Liaison, VDSS; Ali Faruk, Families Forward; Nicole Poulin, FACT Executive Director; Michelle L'Hommedieu, FACT Counsel; Melissa O'Neill, CASA-DCJS; Anya Shaffer, DCJS; Kristen Pritchard, VSDVAA; Katharine Hunter, DBHDS; Eric Reynolds, OCO; Beverly Crowder, FACT Board; Stephanie Howard, Norfolk State University; Betsy Bell, DCJS

**Virtual Meeting Attendees:** Taylor Hohle, FACT; Carol Wilson, Office of Children's Services; Betty Wade Coyle Prevent Child Abuse Hampton Roads (Retired), Christy Clarke, VDSS; Jenna Easton, DJJ

**Public Attendees:** Abigail Wescott, FACT Board (virtually)

### Meeting called to order by Ginny Powell at 10:38 AM

All motions were passed unanimously unless otherwise noted.

### Approval of Minutes, *Ginny Powell*

A motion to approve the minutes from the June 2022, September 2022, and December 2022 Child Abuse & Neglect Committee virtual meetings was made by Jeanine Harper and seconded by Melissa O'Neill.

### Updates from the Office of the Children's Ombudsman, *Eric Reynolds*

- From Oct 1<sup>st</sup> to today there have been 134 complaints. Currently averaging about 100 complaints per quarter. This has increased from last year but that is to be expected as the Office becomes more well known.
  - Of the 134 complaints, a few have become full investigations which is consistent with last year.
- Studying substance exposed infants – there was a change in law five years ago with how CPS handles reports. OCO will take a look at the numbers of recent cases to see if any changes in policies and procedures are necessary. This project is coming out of OCO's 2022 annual report and seeing a significant number of these cases.
- 2023 Session Legislation
  - [SB 1214 \(Lucas\)](#) – would change definition of abuse and neglect to allow exceptions for marijuana use by parents as the sole reason for a CPS case (died in House).
  - [SB 1367 \(Vogel\)](#) - would change definition of abuse and neglect to address specific independent activities allowed for children by their parents to not be considered abuse or neglect cases. Other states are considering similar legislation.
    - Families Forward helped to bring the bill forward with the Virginia Poverty Law Center to address children who were pulled into CPS cases when it wasn't necessary, particularly those cases involving children of color. A few families and children testified that police had been called on them while they were playing near their residence alone or walking to their bus stop or library. The bill would remove these types of cases from the definition of abuse and neglect that include only these types of activities and no other signs of abuse/neglect.
    - There was discussion among Committee members about the bill, about how necessary it was to add to the existing Code and its potential implications. There are concerns that the vague language could lead to different interpretations and potentially lower the

number of cases that are responded to for families and children who are in need of services. Concerns also included: the lack of data around how many cases were actually taken into the CPS system solely due to lack of supervision of the outlined types of activities; the lack of evidence that the additional language would have any impact on individual citizens calling police or child protective services; and potential impact on the ability of Commonwealth's Attorney's Offices to prosecute criminal cases involving children.

- Betty Wade Coyle made a motion for the committee to send a letter to Governor Youngkin expressing the Committee's concerns about the unintended consequences for children from SB1367 and to ask the Governor to take any appropriate actions that would address those concerns. The motion was seconded by Ginny Powell.
  - The following members abstained from the vote: Jenna Easton, Carol Wilson, Maria Altonen, Brandi Peterson, Betsy Bell, Melissa O'Neill, Eric Reynolds, and Katharine Hunter
  - Yeas: Jeanine Harper, Ginny Powell, Beverly Crowder, Betty Wade Coyle
  - Nays: Ali Faruk, Kristen Pritchard, Stephanie Howard
- Ali Faruk made a motion to send a letter to Governor Youngkin to include a Child Tax Credit in the budget to reduce child abuse and neglect. The motion was seconded by Ginny Powell.
  - The following members abstained from the vote: Jenna Easton, Carol Wilson, Maria Altonen, Brandi Peterson, Betsy Bell, Melissa O'Neill, Eric Reynolds, and Katharine Hunter
  - Yeas: Beverly Crowder, Ali Faruk, Ginny Powell, Stephanie Howard, Kristen Pritchard, Jeanine Harper
  - Nays: Betty Wade Coyle

#### **VDSS Family Services Updates, Christy Clarke**

- Hotline Updates:

|                                  | 2021    | 2022   |
|----------------------------------|---------|--|
| Number of calls                  | 144,000 | ~150,000   |
| Mandated Reporter Portal Reports | 1800    | 5000 – 193% increase<br>(so far in 2023 – over 4000) |

|   | January 2022 | January 2023 |
|---|--------------|--------------|
| Average # weekly calls                  | 2700         | 3200         |
| Average wait time                       | 17 minutes   | 5 minutes    |
| Average weekly abandoned calls          | 482          | 300          |
| Longest wait time                       | 4 hours      | 1.7 hours    |
| % of calls answered in under 10 minutes | ~60%         | 86%          |

- Even when fully staffed, still in need of 44,000 minutes per week available to take calls. This equates to 26 additional fulltime employees.
- Training and retention efforts – pushing to get full time positions for retention (benefits that are included for full time positions increase retention), and creating handbook for employees for training purposes.
- Customer satisfaction – currently no survey is included at the end of calls but leadership is interested in developing this in the future.
- The hotline leadership team can be reached at [statehotlineleadership@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:statehotlineleadership@dss.virginia.gov).

- In 2022, of all calls answered, 45% were CPS, 19% were APS, 18% were Child & Adult Welfare (answering questions but not a report), the rest were misc.
- Safe Haven
  - Virginia passed first law in 2004 that allows parent to remain anonymous and prevent themselves from allegations of child abuse, neglect, and abandonment when child is safely left at a safe haven location (24/7 attended medical facilities such as hospitals, fire stations, emergency medical services) within 30 days of birth. It also provides hospital and EMS personnel immunity from injury to the child unless it is due to negligence.
  - CPS responds to these cases the same as other investigations. The only difference is that the adoption process is sped up due to lack of available family for care.
  - Virginia law does not have a timeframe or clear policy for parents who change their mind. For now, parents go back to the location where the child was dropped off and then contact the local DSS to start the process.
  - Between 2018-2021, 19 infants were relinquished under Safe Haven law in Virginia.
  - In July 2022, a bill was passed that required DSS to establish a 24-hour hotline to provide resources to families/parents about Safe Haven laws and resources.
    - In October 2022, VDSS engaged a contract with the National Safe Haven Alliance to provide hotline. VDSS is about to launch a statewide campaign to increase awareness of the hotline.

### **Discussion of CAPTA Reports**

- The committee reviewed the proposed areas for the 2023 CAPTA Letter for Virginia Department of Social Services
  - Recruitment, compensation, and retention of child welfare professionals, including the state hotline.
  - Continued review and discussion of in-home services and Family First implementation.
  - Continue the dialog between the FACT Board/CAN Committee and regional child death review teams.
  - Continued discussion of child protection system in relevant cases of child-on-child sexual abuse.
  - Continued discussion and review of trafficking cases involving children, particularly from a child protection/welfare/well-being perspective.
  - Discussion of Safe Haven Laws in Virginia: how they are implemented, challenges posed, and implications for child welfare.
  - The letter will feature three cross-cutting themes:
    - Continue providing data already collected.
    - Provide deeper dive with data that looks at outcomes, impacts, implications of policy and practice for child safety and well-being.
    - Find ways to learn about what's happening in local communities in terms of the issues described above.
- A motion was made by Melissa O'Neill to approve the proposed areas for the 2023 CAPTA report. Seconded by Jeanine Harper.

### **Committee Report Out:**

- VDSS is hosting the Annual Statewide Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Conference, which is being held April 3-4, 2023, at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Richmond, VA. This year's conference, "Building Together: Prevention in Partnership," will offer you an opportunity to engage in dynamic

workshops and network with other child welfare service providers, along with advocates in the field. [Click here](#) for further details regarding conference registration and hotel reservations.

- Problematic Sexual Behavior Project event on March 10<sup>th</sup>. Email [taylor.davis@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:taylor.davis@dss.virginia.gov) to register.
- Information on DCJS's School and Campus Safety Conference and VDH's Data Equity Primer Workshop will be sent to the committee.

**Next Steps, Ginny Powell**

✍ Next meeting will be held virtually May 31st, 2023 2-4pm.

**Meeting was adjourned at 12:30 PM**