



Family & Children's Trust Fund of Virginia

May 29, 2024

James H. Williams
Acting Commissioner
Virginia Department of Social Services
5600 Cox Road
Glen Allen, VA 23060

Dear Acting Commissioner Williams:

I write to you on behalf of the Family & Children's Trust Fund of Virginia, also known as FACT. FACT was created by the Virginia General Assembly in 1986 as a public-private partnership to raise funds, increase awareness and advise on policies for the prevention of family violence, including: child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse and neglect. FACT is the only organization in Virginia that addresses family violence across the lifespan. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) provides administrative support and technical assistance to the FACT's Board of Trustees, all of whom are currently gubernatorial appointees. The Department provides a full-time position for FACT's Executive Director and a part-time position for FACT's Senior Research Associate. As you know, the VDSS Commissioner, serves as a permanent member of the Board of Trustees. We look forward to working with you.

A key committee of FACT is the Child Abuse and Neglect Advisory Committee (CAN). CAN was established in 2012 by legislation under the Governor's Executive Reorganization Plan which consolidated the Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (GAB) and FACT. Among its current charges, the CAN does the following:

- makes recommendations to the FACT Board of Trustees regarding the prevention and treatment of child abuse and neglect that impact VDSS, the Board of Social Services, the Governor and most importantly, the children of Virginia;
- reviews regulations, guidance, practices and compliance of state and local Child Protective Services and make recommendations for change when necessary;
- communicates with the Departments of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Criminal Justice Services, Education, Health, Juvenile Justice, the Attorney General and the Governor regarding promising and best practices related to efforts to prevent and treat child abuse and neglect within families; and
- increases understanding, ownership, and investment in child protection across Virginia and advocate for needed resources to achieve the goals of protecting children, promoting child well-being, and strengthening families.

The CAN Committee also serves as a Citizen Review Panel for the VDSS, an activity and requirement related to funding for children protection activities through the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act, or CAPTA. As described by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services on its Child Welfare Information Gateway:

CAPTA provides Federal funding and guidance to States in support of prevention, assessment, investigation, prosecution, and treatment activities and also provides grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations, including Indian Tribes and Tribal organizations, for demonstration programs and projects. Additionally, CAPTA identifies the Federal role in supporting research, evaluation, technical assistance, and data collection activities; establishes the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect; and establishes a national clearinghouse of information relating to child abuse and neglect.

CAN Committee members receive VDSS policy, practice, data, and guidance updates shared by VDSS staff at each of their quarterly meetings, and also sends a report annually to the Department outlining concerns, questions, and recommendations to improve Virginia's child welfare and protection efforts. This is another requirement of CAPTA.

This is a long explanation, but hopefully one that gives you a clearer sense of our work at FACT. My request to you, on behalf of the FACT Board and the CAN Committee is to allow CAN member participation in an important effort underway in your Department. We understand that VDSS is developing a new database system, COMPASS, to support its child welfare programs and responsibilities, one that will significantly improve the ability to track activities and impacts in child protection cases.

We ask that the two Co-Chairs of the CAN Committee – Jeanine Harper, Executive Director of Greater Richmond SCAN (Stop Child Abuse Now) and Dr. Virginia Powell, Retired Researcher and member of the FACT Board – be added to the workgroup established to provide input on which outcome measures and processes will be collected through this new system. Our goal is to assist in developing strategies to increase impact and effectiveness, and ultimately reveal the strengths and challenges of the Family First Act as it is implemented in Virginia. Ms. Harper has over 30 years of experience working in child welfare. She has extensive knowledge and experience in program planning and research particularly related to child abuse and neglect. She has served on many state and local committees and taskforces related to child wellbeing and safety currently including the State Child Fatality Review Team of Central Virginia. Dr. Powell has worked on several research and data-based projects at the Supreme Court of Virginia and the Virginia Department of Health. She coordinated the State Child Fatality Review Team in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, and later took on the Program Manager role for all of its Fatality Review and Surveillance Programs. As a result, she is familiar with data and trends in child abuse and neglect, as well as intimate partner/domestic violence and elder abuse. Her direct experience with research projects will support the development of strong measures and outcome data. Together, the two would make a strong contribution to this much needed and promising project.

I would appreciate your consideration of this request and thank you for your efforts in protecting Virginia's vulnerable children.

Sincerely,



Linda D. Wilkinson, Chair

Chair, Board of Trustees of the Virginia Family and Children's Trust

Cc: Ryan Kelly, Acting Deputy Commissioner Policy and Administration & Acting Chief of Staff