



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

October 10, 2024

*Sent Electronically*

Nicole Poulin

Family and Children's Trust Fund of Virginia

801 East Main Street, 15th Floor

Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Ms. Poulin:

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) commends the Child Abuse and Neglect Advisory Committee of the Family and Children's Trust Fund of Virginia for their continued work as a Citizen Review Panel (CRP) as part of Virginia's Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Plan. The feedback of our CRPs is critical to the improvement of our program for the children of the Commonwealth.

Child Protective Services (CPS) in Virginia is a continuum of specialized services designed to assist families who are unable to safely care for their children. CPS is child-centered, family-focused, and based on the belief that the primary responsibility for the care of children rests within their families. CPS encompasses the identification, assessment, investigation, and treatment of abused or neglected children. Virginia's specialized services are designed to:

- Protect children and their siblings;
- Prevent future abuse or neglect;
- Enhance parental capacity to provide adequate care; and
- Provide substitute care when the family of origin cannot remedy the safety concerns.

CPS will respond to valid child abuse or neglect reports by conducting a Family Assessment response or an Investigation response, also known as Differential response. The goals of both responses are: to assess child safety, strengthen and support families, and to prevent future child maltreatment. The track decisions are guided by state statute and local policy. In SFY 2023, there were 52,480 children reported as possible victims of child abuse or neglect in 33,679 completed reports of suspected child abuse or neglect.

Of those children, 4,368 were involved in founded Investigations, 8,033 were involved in unfounded Investigations, and 40,079 in Family Assessments (differential response). In SFY 2023, Family Assessments accounted for 76% of all CPS reports accepted by local Departments of Social Services, and 38 children died because of abuse or neglect. There were 26 children involved in 26 Human Trafficking Assessments, which are required when a report alleges a child is a victim of human trafficking, sex, or labor, and does not meet the validity criteria for an Investigation or Family Assessment.

Over the last year, VDSS continues to prioritize working towards meeting our federal outcomes related to child protection including responding to reports of abuse with a timely consistent response, providing ongoing services to children who are at high or very high risk (In-Home Services) and ensuring timely case closure. Additionally, VDSS is prioritizing family engagement using Family Partnership Meetings, and Child and Family Team Meetings.

We have reviewed your recommendations and thank you for your input. VDSS offers the following responses to your recommendations:

### **1. In-Home Services and Family First implementation**

VDSS continues to expand access to title IV-E prevention services funding for certain trauma-informed, evidence-based programs (EBPs) to serve families involved in In-Home Services cases, keeping children and youth safe at home or with a relative/fictive kin caregiver and preventing entry into foster care. Foundational continuous quality improvement (CQI) and quality assurance and accountability (QAA) processes will support continuing efforts to improve service delivery, ensure effective use of resources, and achieve desired outcomes. VDSS planning efforts will continue to align with Virginia's overall movement toward EBPs and programming, while implementing additional services that are approved for title IV-E funding in the [Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse](#) and the identified needs in Virginia. Virginia's implemented EBPs include Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Functional Family Therapy (FFT), Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT), Family Check-Up (FCU), Homebuilders (HB), High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW), and Motivational Interviewing (MI). VDSS is working towards increasing title IV-E eligible services and has continued its partnership with the [Center for Evidence-based Partnerships in Virginia \(CEP-Va\)](#) to assist in expanding service eligibility and availability. CEP-Va's Needs Assessment and Gaps Analysis (NAGA) process is an ongoing assessment approach that targets the identification of barriers and facilitators to inform implementation of new and pre-existing title IV-E programs. Studies are determined in collaboration with state partners and findings from ongoing projects. CEP-Va has conducted its third annual NAGA report which is expected to be published in October 2024.

The next phase of Family First in Virginia is the expansion of EBPs and title IV-E prevention services funding to a larger population through primary and secondary prevention services, known as Community Pathways, serving families upstream and outside of the child welfare system. This will allow title IV-E prevention services funding to be utilized in areas that might otherwise rely on 100% state or local funding sources. In

addition to community based EBP's, VDSS is continuing with the implementation of Motivational Interviewing among LDSS In-Home Services staff as a case management engagement strategy that will intersect with substance use disorder, mental health, and parent skill building. As of March 2024, four cohorts have received training with cohorts five and six to be trained by the end of 2024.

Currently, 84 LDSS have received training; it is the plan for all 120 LDSS statewide to receive training. Studies have shown that MI may help support workforce capacity by providing staff with skills to increase job satisfaction, which may reduce burnout and turnover.

As the In-Home Services Program continues to grow, through continued implementation of Family First, along with the CQI model and ability to dive deeper into data, VDSS will work to better share and integrate the data, including identifying and responding to gaps in services and areas of opportunity. In conjunction with the programs and services described above, VDSS has identified the need for activities that enhance public awareness that supports and embraces positive parenting while also increasing strengths that prevent child abuse and neglect. These efforts will be supported through collaboration with lived experience partners and will utilize various media avenues to ensure a broader and more inclusive audience and work on rebranding VDSS and prevention services as opportunities to promote family preservation.

VDSS is developing a comprehensive dashboard to report out on Protection, Prevention, and Permanency outcomes. Through the development process, VDSS has begun collaborating across programs to understand which data elements may impact multiple programs. For example, we are currently working on developing a report that shows how many children entered foster care at any point in time following an Alternative Living Arrangement. Once these reports are finalized, a public facing report will be developed.

## **2. Recruitment, compensation, and retention of Child Welfare professionals and the child abuse and neglect Hotline staff**

The State Hotline has made several updates to procedures to continue in our efforts to further improve call response. Not only in timeliness but in quality and consistency of responses.

**Recruitment:** Although for state positions both full time and part time we work directly with VDSS Human Resources and post positions as they become available, we have a bit more control over how we hire for our contracted positions. We have developed a quarterly hiring schedule that allow us to be more thoughtful and devote appropriate time to the hiring and training process. The leadership worked together to develop a more cohesive training model which allows us to be more planful throughout the training process and makes for a seamless transition from training to mentorship.

**Retention:** The State Hotline has little turnover in state full time positions. These are coveted positions most of our staff strive for. VDSS has begun conducting Exit

Interviews when staff vacate our state part time, as well as both full time and part time contracted positions. Two of three vacated state part time positions in CY2024 were due to increased commitments of those staff members' full time jobs with LDSS which did not allow them to meet the hourly requirement for state part time workers. They both ended up coming back as contracted workers. The third resigned due to personal issues. All our contracted workers sited the need for full time positions with benefits upon their departure from the State Hotline.

Compensation: Hotline leadership works very closely with Human Resources and our budget team to ensure that we are maintaining competitive compensation for state and contracted positions.

Data: The State Hotline has submitted a budget request to upgrade the Verizon InContact phone system to include Workforce Management (WFM) and an improved Interactive Voice Response (IVR) which will improve data collection while further improving staffing.

### **3. Regional Child Death Review Teams**

VDSS continues to publish the recommendations made by the regional Child Fatality Review Teams each year. The regional CFRTs do not keep records or detailed documentation on the cases reviewed in order to ensure confidentiality; however, the recommendations that come from these meetings are captured in the [annual report on child maltreatment death investigations](#). The dynamics of the children and their families are closely examined during these meetings and directly inform prevention activities for each region and the VDSS. In addition, the annual report on child maltreatment death investigations also captures data on all child deaths investigated by the local departments, to include demographic information on the families involved in these investigations, which of those families had prior CPS involvement, and a summary of the child's cause of death as determined by the medical examiner. The Office of the Children's Ombudsman (OCO) also publishes [reports](#) annually, and VDSS sends notification to this office when a child fatality investigation meets specific [criteria](#). As of January 2024, the five regional CFRTs only review the fatalities that are also reviewed by the OCO.

Sincerely,



Shannon Hartung

Protection Program Manager

Cc: Kimberly Huhn Murphy, Children's Bureau