

Child Abuse and Neglect Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

June 4th, 2024, 11AM-1PM Microsoft Teams

Participation

Committee Members Present: Ginny Powell, Co-Chair, FACT Board Member; Jeanine Harper, Co-Chair, Greater Richmond SCAN; Ron Brown, Families Forward Virginia; Eric Reynolds, Office of the Children's Ombudsman; Melissa O'Neill, Department of Criminal Justice Services, CASA; Katharine Hunter, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services; Kristen Pritchard, Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance; Frank Somerville, JDR Judge (retired); Carol Wilson, Office of Children's Services; Hannah Spector for Maria Altonen, VDH; Betty Wade Coyle, Prevent Child Abuse Hampton Roads (arrived 11:30am)

Committee Members Absent: Stephenie Howard, Norfolk State University; Anya Shaffer, Department of Criminal Justice Services

Other Attendees: Laurie Crawford, VDSS; Rachel Miller, CRP Coordinator VDSS; Nikki Cox, VDSS; Nicole Poulin, FACT; Taylor Hohle, FACT; two legal interns from the Office of the Children's Ombudsman

Meeting called to order by Ginny Powell at 11:04 AM

All motions were passed unanimously unless otherwise noted.

Approval of Minutes, *Ginny Powell*

- **A motion to approve the minutes from the March 2025 Child Abuse & Neglect Advisory Committee meeting was made by Ron Brown and seconded by Eric Reynolds.**

Updates from the Office of the Children's Ombudsman (OCO), *Eric Reynolds*

- The next annual report is due in October. It will include data on reports, child fatality notifications, and findings, as well as some case summary examples.
- Eric is attending listening sessions with Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to hear about the kinship care bill that passed in the General Assembly last year.
- There will be an upcoming Continuing Law Education (CLE) event in Fredericksburg for attorneys, stakeholders and judges.
 - Potential to do a CLE in Henrico, partnering with CASA, to do a poverty simulator with lawyers. Eric has attended a simulation in the past and found it very insightful.
- VDSS has hired a consultant agency to look at Child Protective Services (CPS) and foster care for areas of improvement. The initiative is called Safe Kids, Strong Families.
- A workgroup on relief of custody petitions has been convened based on a request from the General Assembly.
- Potential legislative proposals for the 2026 session of the General Assembly –
 - Establishment of a permanent children's cabinet – Previous administrations have had a children's cabinets with different emphases. This could help with addressing systemic issues that cross multiple agencies such as the work of the Safe and Sound Task Force.
 - Guardians' Ad Litem (GAL) payment increase – There was a slight increase in

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the budget last year for payments. Currently they receive \$55 per hour for time out of court and \$75 per hour for time in court. The list of available and trained GALs is down to 890, and one of the stated barriers to taking these cases is the low compensation.

- VDSS Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy's Workforce Support Program proposal
- Post-Adoption Contact Agreements (PACAs) are used to maintain communication between parents and children after adoption. There are a number of cases where children could benefit from other blood relatives having PACAs.
- Amendments to the OCO statutes that need to be made to clarify and improve work through the Office.

FACT Updates, Nicole Poulin & Taylor Hohle

- Child Fatality Investigation and Review report – This report was started over two years ago after a panel discussion hosted by FACT on the topic. A draft of the report is in the review process with the Child Fatality Review Subcommittee.
- Child Fatality Review Subcommittee is in the process of reviewing cases from State Fiscal Year 2023. The group is reviewing two cases per VDSS region and will be compiling a report of findings that should be completed by the September meeting.
 - There was a discussion on firearm and suicide deaths that are not investigated by social services and lack of clarification on whether suicides should be screened in at local department of social services.
 - There was also discussion around federal funding cuts and the potential impact on child fatality data and trends. Hannah Spector shared the fiscal year budget in brief that was released on Friday.
<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fy-2026-budget-in-brief.pdf>

VDSS Updates, Nikki Cox, VDSS Family Services

- Workforce capacity –
 - The current turnover rate for Family Services Specialists (FSS) is around 40%. The vacancy rate is 20%.
 - FSS are staying for two years on average. It takes over a year to complete all of the training required for the position.
 - The average salary is \$36,000/year for FSS. The goal is to increase this to around \$52,000/year.
 - There has been no national data for 25 years on what an appropriate and accurate workload looks like for FSS. A workload study is being conducted for both CPS and in-home staff.
- CPS Referrals
 - In 2024, CPS received 94,728 reports.
 - 36,846 were valid and required a CPS response.
 - Of those, 27,000 resulted in a Family Assessment (FA).
 - 8800 resulted in an investigation and 2400 were founded.
 - There are different response times based on the case circumstances. Response Time (RT) 1 requires first contact within 24 hours. RT 2 requires first contact within

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48 hours. RT 3 first contact must be made within 40 working hours.

- Virginia's completed timely response is at 87.6%. The national average is 95%.
- There has been an increase in child fatalities reported to CPS, especially among families with prior child welfare involvement. Only 23% of high or very-high assessed risk cases are being opened to in-home services. Staff is working on a plan to understand the scope of the issue and why these cases are not being opened to in-home services and how the structured decision-making tools are being utilized.
 - There was a discussion on the low in-home rate and potential causes. The family has an option to continue with in-home services and how it is being presented to the family is important. Miscommunication between CPS and in-home units has been seen by the OCO in different localities. Some local departments have never opened an in-home case since the start of these services in 2021.

VDSS Workforce Development, Laurie Crawford, Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP)

- The Community Resilience Model is a skills-based model taught over an hour and a half workshop that focuses on skills to use for well-being day-to-day and also following critical incidents.
 - Funding was not approved to pilot the model so OTRP staff who have been trained are partnering with the Division of Local Training and Development to host six sessions for local staff.
- Funding for the peer support line was also not approved. This would consist of a support line staffed by retired family services workers for current workers to reach out during difficult cases.
 - The Office of Research and Planning is working to obtain the overall cost of family services staff turnover, including the cost of training and onboarding new staff. New Jersey has a peer support line and has a turnover rate around 6-9%

Next Steps, Ginny Powell

- This is the last meeting for this fiscal year and Ginny Powell's last meeting as co-chair of the Committee. Season Roberts, FACT Chair, will be joining as co-chair with Jeanine Harper.
- A poll will be sent out to the group to determine the meeting dates for next Fiscal Year. The next meeting will be in-person and will likely be held in September.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:57 PM