

Child Abuse and Neglect Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

December 3rd, 2025, 10AM-12PM

Microsoft Teams

Participation:

Committee Members Present: Jeanine Harper, Co- Chair, Greater Richmond SCAN; Ginny Powell, Previous FACT Board Member; Ron Brown, Families Forward Virginia; Carol Wilson, Office of Children's Services; Eric Reynolds, Office of the Children's Ombudsman; Frank Somerville, JDR Judge (retired); Melissa O'Neill, Department of Criminal Justice Services, CASA; Maria Altonen, Virginia Department of Health; Betty Wade Coyle, Prevent Child Abuse Hampton Roads; Stephenie Howard, Norfolk State University; Season Roberts, Co-Chair, FACT Board Member (left at 11:00am); Jennifer Gillard, Previous FACT Board Member; Theresa Orr, Child Welfare Advocate; Ian Danielsen, Longwood University; Jennifer Gillard, FACT Board Member; Katharine Hunter, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services

Committee Members Absent: Kristen Pritchard, Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance; Cayla Kirby, VDSS; Anya Shaffer, Department of Criminal Justice Services

Other Attendees: Nicole Poulin, FACT; Taylor Hohle, FACT; Laurie Crawford, VDSS; Rebecca Simmons, Child Advocacy Centers of Virginia; Michelle L'Hommedieu, FACT Counsel; Patrick Bridge, VDSS; Rachel Miller, CRP Coordinator; Keshia Bagby-Bailey, VDSS

Meeting called to order by Season Roberts at 10:04 AM

All motions were passed unanimously unless otherwise noted.

Approval of Minutes, Season Roberts

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

Update on Child Advocacy Centers of Virginia (CACVA) & Proposed Legislation. Rebecca Simmons, Executive Director CACVA

- Rebecca provided an overview of Child Advocacy Centers (CACs) and their role in child welfare. CACs provide forensic interviewing, family advocacy, multidisciplinary case coordination, and mental health services.
- During the General Assembly session, CACVA is hoping to raise awareness of CACs and the importance of their role in the investigation process.
 - Currently funded at \$7.4 million/year from general funds. CACVA is asking partners to offer letters of support for an increase in funding to \$20 million/year - \$16 million would be for current CACs to replace lost federal VOCA funding, \$4 million would be to address the 20% of Virginia that lacks a CAC.
- **A motion was made by Ian Danielsen, seconded by Ron Brown, to recommend the FACT Board of Trustees write a letter of support for the increase in funding for Child Advocacy Centers. Melissa O'Neill, Carol Wilson, Maria Altonen, and Katharine Hunter abstained.**

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

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- Eric provided an overview of the office for newer members.
- Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 data – more information can be found in the annual report published here: <https://www.oco.virginia.gov/reports/>
 - 466 complaints received involving 88 of 120 local Departments of Social Services (LDSS)
 - 315 were opened to preliminary assessments
 - 32 moved onto an investigation
 - Noteworthy practice issues identified
 - Inadequate LDSS participation in local Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) for child abuse investigations
 - Lack of CPS follow up with mandated reporters
 - Inadequate case transfers and collaboration between LDSS
 - Permanency placement decision conflict
 - Lack of meaningful engagement with fathers
 - Child Fatality Data
 - 49 notifications received in FY 2025 compared to 54 in FY 2024.
 - Most of the children are less than 1 year old
 - 29% of cases involved unsafe sleep
 - 25% involved Substance Exposed Infants
 - 51% involved Parental Substance Use (includes substance exposed)
 - 19 cases involved parental cannabis use in fatalities of children under 6 months old.
 - 18% involved domestic violence
 - 27% involved parental mental health issues
 - Recommendations for System Changes
 - Workforce Support
 - Competitive compensation, equal pay scales across jurisdictions, in-person training, workforce support program, state pool of emergency Family Services Specialist, consolidating smaller adjacent LDSS
 - Child Protective Services
 - Centralized intake and validation, 24-hour response to CPS referrals involving children < 3 years old, parental substance misuse training and plans of safe care
 - State Oversight of Local Administration
 - State intervention in CPS cases (currently can intervene in foster care cases), clarification on Commissioner's authority on appointment/performance/removal of directors
 - Legal Representation
 - Guardian ad litem compensation increase, pilot programs for multidisciplinary legal representation model for parents
 - Children's Cabinet – establishment of a permanent children's cabinet to coordinate efforts on statewide responses
- **A motion was made by Ginny Powell, seconded by Ron Brown, to recommend the FACT Board of Trustees write a letter of support for the creation of a permanent Children's Cabinet. Melissa O'Neill, Carol Wilson, Maria Altonen, and Katharine Hunter abstained.**

VDSS Updates, VDSS Staff

- Training Academy Updates, *Patrick Bridge, Director of Division of Local Training and Development*
 - Newly named Virginia START – foundational training for all LDSS workers

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- Universal core training should roll out in calendar year 2026 with individual course pathways following in calendar year 2027.
- Improvements throughout 2025 - no longer have waitlists for classes, increase in learner completion of courses

FACT Updates, Nicole Poulin

- A motion was made by Betty Wade Coyle, seconded by Ginny Powell, for the CAN Committee Co-Chairs to send a letter thanking Secretary Janet Kelly for the leadership on the Safe Kids, Strong Families initiative and to request a copy of the final report. Melissa O'Neill, Carol Wilson, Maria Altonen, and Katharine Hunter abstained.
- A motion was made by Ginny Powell, seconded by Betty Wade Coyle, to recommend that the FACT Board of Trustees send a letter to the incoming Commissioner of VDSS, once appointed, to prioritize the procurement process to update the Child Welfare Information System and restate the request for the CAN Committee Co-Chairs to be included in conversations on outcome measurement development. Melissa O'Neill and Carol Wilson abstained.
- A motion was made by Melissa O'Neill, seconded by Ian Danielsen, to recommend to the FACT Board of Trustees for FACT to take on the role of coordinator for a Virginia section of the Association of Professionals Solving the Abuse of Children (APSAC).
- Problematic Sexual Behavior Project – Multidisciplinary Teams (MDT) train-the-trainer pilot will be hosted in January 2026.
- Child fatalities – the workgroup has completed reviewing a sampling of cases throughout VDSS regions. A report will be released in the coming weeks with fictional composite case examples to provide awareness of trends in child fatality cases.
- FACT's biennial report was released: <https://www.fact.virginia.gov/reports-strategic-plan/>

Next Steps, Jeanine Harper

- The next meeting is in-person on March 10th, 2026 10:30 A.M. – 1:30 P.M.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:02 PM