

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE/CHILDREN'S JUSTICE ACT
PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES

April 26, 2024

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held on April 26, 2024, at the Henrico Training Center in Richmond, Virginia.

Members Present

Randy Bonds
Jackie Robinson Brock
Judge Eugene Butler
Shamika Byars
Davy Fearon
Katharine Hunter
Jeannine Panzera
Giselle Pelaez
Pat Popp, Vice-Chair
Shannon Hartung
Eric Reynolds
Judge Thomas Sotelo, Chair
Ashley Thompson

Members Not Present

Regina Baker
Sandy Karison

Guests

Lora Smith (VDSS)
Rachel Miller (VDSS)
Dara Hecter (Office of the Children's Ombudsman)

Staff Present

Jenna Foster
Carolyn Halbert
Laurel Marks
Melissa O'Neill
Terry Willie-Surratt

- I. Call to Order:** Judge Thomas Sotelo, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 AM. Members introduced themselves. Two members attended the meeting virtually per the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee approved Remote Participation attendance policy. Judge Thomas Sotelo is attending the meeting virtually due to his location being more 60 miles away. He is currently located in southwest Virginia on personal business. Giselle Pelaez is also located more than 60 miles away and is attending the meeting virtually in Alexandria, Virginia.

- II. **Approval of Minutes:** The committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the January 26, 2024, meeting. Randy Bonds made a motion to approve the minutes. Shamika Byars provided a second. The motion was approved with Eric Reynolds abstaining.
- III. **Final Outcome of Tracked General Assembly Bills:** DCJS and members of the committee reported on bills passed during the 2024 General Assembly session regarding the investigation, prosecution and judicial handling of child abuse cases.
- IV. **Presentation on Human Trafficking Multi-Disciplinary Team and Response:** This presentation was postponed and will be rescheduled.
- V. **CASA Program Update:** The committee was previously provided a written update regarding the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program. The following additional updates were discussed.

Draft Proposed Regulations Review: A draft document of proposed changes to the CASA regulations was reviewed during the January meeting. Committee members were requested to provide any additional written comments for consideration prior to today's meeting. The committee discussed the comments received and additional items of interest. The committee agreed to advance the draft proposed regulations as presented to the Criminal Justice Services Board for consideration at the June 13, 2024, meeting.

CASA Expansion Legislative Study: Committee members were briefed on the CASA Expansion Legislative Study included in the 2024 General Assembly session. DCJS is directed to complete a study to determine the feasibility of requiring a local CASA program in every jurisdiction throughout the Commonwealth and to identify any obstacles regarding the establishment of programs. The report is due by November 1, 2024.

VI. **CJA Program Update**

The CASA/CJA Advisory Committee was provided with a written report detailing significant activities of the CJA program this quarter. The following additional updates were provided.

Domestic and Sexual Violence Housing Programs – Children's Advocacy

Workgroup: Committee members were briefed on a workgroup being formed to address the needs of advocates for children in domestic and sexual violence housing programs.

It is our expectation that this workgroup will help us all to better support advocates that work with children involved in domestic and sexual violence related cases. This, in turn, will allow the advocates to offer services and support to the child and family that may ultimately have a positive impact on the child testimony in court proceedings.

DCJS Domestic Violence Conference: Members were informed about the Domestic Violence focused conference, scheduled for October 7-9, 2024 in Williamsburg that DCJS is planning. The conference will have a child-focused track in addition to specific

sessions for program leadership. Scholarships may be available pending available funding.

VII. Citizen Review Panel

The committee reviewed and discussed the current Citizen Review Panel recommendations provided in advance to the Committee. An amendment to the draft was made to include the language under paragraph one of “System Improvement.” Judge Thomas Sotelo made a motion to approve the amendment and Pat Popp seconded. The motion was unanimously approved. Without further amendments to the draft recommendations, Davy Feron made a motion to approve the 2024 Citizen Review Panel Recommendations and Ashley Thompson seconded. The motion was passed unanimously.

VIII. New Business: Members provided updates, information and news from their respective agencies and disciplines.

IX. Adjourn: Ashley Thompson made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Davy Feron provided the second. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 12:01 PM.

Next meeting dates:

Friday, July 26, 2024 – This meeting will be held virtually