

DRAFT

Pursuant to § 2.2-3707.1 of the Code of Virginia this DRAFT of the minutes of the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and Children's Justice Act (CJA) Advisory Committee is available to the public. The public is cautioned that the information is provided in DRAFT form and is subject to change by the Advisory Committee prior to becoming final. Once the minutes have been finalized, they will be marked "FINAL" and made available to the public.

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

July 24, 2026

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held virtually on July 24, 2026.

Members Present

Jackie Robinson Brock
Shamika Byars
Judge Eugene Butler
Kristin Camp
Mary Chamberlin
Morgan Cox
Davy Fearon
Sandy Karison
Katharine Hunter
Allison Martin
Patt Popp, Vice Chair
Lana Mullins
Jeannine Panzera
Eric Reynolds
Lora Smith
Judge Thomas Sotelo, Chair
Kayla Stultz

Members Not Present

Davy Fearon
Viola Vaughan-Eden

Guests

Rachel Miller (VDSS)
Carley Lansden (VDSS)

Staff Present

Jenna Foster
Tracey Jenkins
Melissa O'Neill
Terry Willie-Surratt

- I. **Call to Order:** Judge Thomas Sotelo, CASA/CJA Advisory Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM. All present introduced themselves including newly appointed members.
- II. **Approval of Minutes:** The committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the April 24, 2026, meeting. Eric Reynolds made a motion to approve the minutes, and Katharine Hunter provided the second. The motion was approved.
- III. **Proposed Meeting Dates for Next Year**
Committee members reviewed the proposed meeting dates for upcoming year.

Friday October 23, 2026 (CJA Planning Session: 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM)
Friday January 22, 2027 - Virtual
Friday April 23, 2027
Friday July 23, 2027 – Virtual

Katharine Hunter made a motion to approve the meeting dates, and Shamika Byars provided the second. The motion was approved.

- IV. **CASA Program Update:** The committee was previously provided with a written update regarding the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program. The following additional topic was discussed.

Melissa O'Neill shared an update on the status of the CASA regulation revisions. The CASA Regulations have been certified by the Attorney General's Office. The Department of Planning and Budget has completed the Economic Impact Analysis, and the Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security is currently conducting their review.

Melissa O'Neill presented a draft guidance policy concerning the use of Artificial Intelligence in local CASA Programs. The committee engaged in an in-depth discussion on the matter, offering insights informed by their respective professional experiences and areas of expertise. The committee concluded that the development of a formal guidance policy on this topic would be advantageous and agreed to proceed with its development.

The committee discussed the additional funding awarded to local CASA programs during the 2026 General Assembly session. CASA programs received an additional \$2,350,000 in state general funds, bringing the total appropriation to \$4,000,000

- V. **CJA Program Update:** The committee was previously provided with a written update regarding the Children's Justice Act Program. The following additional topics were discussed.

Jenna Foster provided a status update on the 2026 MDT Database Survey, which collects demographic and contact information for members of multidisciplinary teams focused on

child sexual abuse, human trafficking, and sexual assault response. The survey remained open until August 1, 2026. Upon completion of the review process, outreach will be conducted to localities that do not have membership represented in the survey.

Jenna Foster also highlighted the upcoming MDT *Good to Great* training scheduled for September 3, 2026, in Charlottesville. MDTs with a minimum of three members are encouraged to apply to attend as a team and may be eligible for a lodging scholarship. Participation will be limited to 50 attendees.

Judge Sotelo recommended strengthening connections between Judges, Child Advocacy Centers (CACs), and MDTs through judicial training to enhance awareness of the full scope of MDT roles and services.

The CJA three-year strategic planning session is scheduled for Friday, October 24, 2026, in Richmond. Jenna Foster will contact CASA/CJA Advisory members to assess interest in providing topical presentations aligned with their areas of expertise. Following these presentations, members will engage in program discussions related to the six priority areas identified during the April 2026 CASA/CJA meeting.

VI. Citizen Review Panel

Carley Lansden, Child Fatality Specialist from the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) shared information on the review of child fatalities involving substance-exposed infants. This presentation is in response to the following recommendation from the committee in its role as a Citizen Review Panel:

The Advisory Committee expressed concern for the increase in the number of substance-exposed infants (SEI) and particularly those involved in child deaths. The Advisory Committee requests data on the number of children identified as substance-exposed infants (SEI) served by VDSS.

Ms. Lansden presented data on child fatalities involving substance-exposed infants from SFY2024 and SFY2025. In SFY2024, 854 substance-exposed infants were identified, and 20 child fatalities involved investigations related to prior substance exposure. In SFY2025, 652 substance-exposed infants were identified, and 18 child fatalities involved investigations related to prior substance exposure. Ms. Lansden noted that this issue has emerged as a recurring trend across nearly all five child fatality review teams statewide. Recommendations from these teams include increasing education on the intersection of safe sleep practices and substance use in parenting and caregiving. VDSS is collaborating with the Virginia Department of Health to better understand the information and education currently provided to families regarding safe sleep and substance use in prevention activities. Ms. Lansden discussed plans for a collaborative safety campaign to launch in the fall with a focus on safe sleep and substance use.

Committee members engaged in thoughtful and substantive discussions informed by their professional experience with substance-exposed infant fatalities. Several members

expressed willingness to participate in workgroups or policy discussions with VDSS to help advance the practice changes needed in these high-risk situations.

Rachel Miller, Citizen Review Panel Coordinator, Virginia Department of Social Services, provided a detailed overview of the national Citizen Review Panel conference she attended in June. She presented comprehensive information on the plenary sessions and workshops she participated in. Committee members were informed that this conference may be an opportunity for them to attend in the future, should they be interested.

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

VIII. Adjourn: Eric Reynolds made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Pat Popp provided the second. The motion was carried and the meeting adjourned at 12:07 PM.

Next meeting dates:

Friday October 23, 2026 (CJA Planning Session: 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM)

Friday January 22, 2027 - Virtual

Friday April 23, 2027

Friday July 23, 2027 – Virtual