



**Advisory Committee to the
Court Appointed Special Advocate
and Children's Justice Act Programs**

AGENDA

Virtual Committee Meeting

January 26, 2024

10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84275723401>

Meeting ID: 842 7572 3401

Passcode: CASACJA24!

One tap mobile

+16469313860,,84275723401#,,,,*0403128771# US

+13017158592,,84275723401#,,,,*0403128771# US (Washington DC)

Dial by your location

- +1 646 931 3860 US
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- +1 309 205 3325 US

Meeting ID: 842 7572 3401

Passcode: 0403128771

- **Welcome and Introduction of Guests**
- **Review of October 27, 2023 Minutes**
- **Legislative Update: Bill Tracking**
- **CASA Program Update**
 - a) **CASA Regulation Proposed Draft Review**
- **CJA Program Update**
 - a) **Child-focused Crime Victims' Rights Week: April 22-26, 2024**
 - b) **Domestic and Sexual Violence Children's Programming Initiative**
- **Citizen Review Panel**
 - a) **Review VDSS Response to 2023 Recommendations**
 - b) **Consideration of Updated Recommendations for 2024**
- **Adjournment**

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

October 27, 2023

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children’s Justice Act programs was held on October 27, 2023, at the Libbie Mill Library in Richmond, Virginia.

Members Present

Randy Bonds
Judge Eugene Butler – Virtual
Shamika Byars
Davy Fearon
Katharine Hunter
Jeannine Panzera
Giselle Pelaez
Pat Popp, Vice-chair
Lora Smith for Shannon Hartung
Judge Thomas Sotelo, Chair
Ashley Thompson

Members Not Present

Regina Baker
Jackie Robinson Brock
Sandy Karison
Eric Reynolds

Guests

Kathleen Hollywood (VDSS) - Virtual
Laura Robinson (Henrico CASA Law Intern)
Aaran Kelley (VDSS) - Virtual

Staff Present

Jenna Foster (DCJS)
Carolyn Halbert (DCJS)
Laurel Marks (DCJS)
Melissa O’Neill (DCJS)
Terry Willie-Surratt (DCJS)

- I. **Call to Order:** Judge Thomas Sotelo, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:03 AM. Members introduced themselves. The Committee recognized and congratulated member Randy Bonds for his recent promotion to “Captain”.
- II. **Remote Participation of Members:** Committee Chair, Judge Thomas Sotelo received and approved a request from Judge Eugene Butler to remotely participate in the meeting. Judge Eugene Butler’s virtual participation is for personal reasons due to a scheduled hearing today. He attended the meeting from the 24th Judicial District Juvenile Court in Amherst.

Judge Thomas Sotelo confirmed Committee members can adequately hear Judge Eugene Butler in the meeting room and requested approval from the Advisory Committee to allow his remote participation in accordance with the remote participation policy. The Advisory Committee unanimously approved.

- III. **Approval of Minutes:** The committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the April 28, 2023, meeting. Randy Bond made a motion to approve the minutes. Pat Popp provided a second. The motion was approved.

- IV. **Review of Meeting Dates for 2024:**

Friday, January 26, 2024

Friday, April 26, 2024

Friday, July 26, 2024

- V. **Appointment of Nominations Committee for Chair and Vice-Chair**

Jeannine Panzera and Eric Reynolds agreed to serve as the Nominations Committee during the April 28, 2023, meeting. Jeannine Panzera presented a slate of officers for the next two years to include Judge Thomas Sotelo as Chair and Pat Popp as Vice Chair. Judge Sotelo asked if there was a motion to approve the nominations as presented. Ashley Thompson made the motion and Jeannine Panzera provided the second. Judge Sotelo asked if there were any nominations from the floor and hearing none, the motion was carried unanimously.

- VI. **Approval of Updated Remote and Virtual Meeting Policies**

Committee members received copies of Remote and Virtual Meeting policies for approval prior to the meeting. These policies incorporate changes to the Virginia Freedom of Information Act requirements for public meetings. Members reviewed the policies and discussed the updates. Ashley Thompson moved to approve the policies as written and Shamika Byars seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

- VII. **CJA Program Update**

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

Jenna Foster provided the Advisory Committee with an update on the Child Advocacy Centers (CAC) reductions from the Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) federal funds.

After much discussion, Judge Sotelo made a motion that the Advisory Committee draft a resolution in support of Virginia’s Child Advocacy Centers and the value they bring across all multi-jurisdictional systems that support child victims. Davy Fearon seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. DCJS staff (Foster) will draft a resolution based on input from members of the Advisory Committee.

The Advisory Committee received an update regarding the implementation of the Child Death Investigation Protocol.

A virtual training series for Child Abuse Awareness is scheduled for the third week in April 2024 during Virginia Crime Victims Rights Week. DCJS plans to focus on minor victims of crime in April 2024.

In addition to the training series, the current “Kids to Court” coloring book that provides an overview of the court process to children in a child-friendly manner is being updated and will be disseminated to DCJS constituents that provide services to child victims.

VIII. CASA Program Update

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

The Advisory Committee was provided with an update on the current CASA program expansion projects.

The Criminal Justice Services Board approved the Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (NOIRA) to begin the process of revising the CASA Regulations. The Advisory Committee will participate in the regulatory review process.

Melissa O’Neill provided the Advisory Committee with an update on a current situation with the National CASA/GAL Association (NCASAA) concerning federal funding and impacts on two local Virginia CASA programs.

IX. Citizen Review Panel

Aaran Kelly, Virginia Department of Social Services, provided the Advisory Committee with an update on the status of the implementation of Family First Prevention Services Act.

Kathleen Hollywood, Virginia Department of Social Services, shared information with the Advisory Committee on work being done related to Kinship Care.

X. New Business - Members provided updates, information and news from their respective agencies and disciplines.

XI. Adjourn – Ashley Thompson made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Pat Popp provided the second. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 12:05 PM.

Next meeting dates:

Friday, January 26, 2024

Friday, April 26, 2024

Friday, July 26, 2024

CASA/CJA Advisory Committee Citizen Review Panel 2023 Recommendations

Approved April 28, 2023

Prevention/FFPSA

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should continue to focus prevention efforts that ensure safety and well-being of the child and support families in ways that provide support and enhance permanency. This includes providing services to prevent removal, and services to support adoptive and kinship families. VDSS should continue to build capacity for evidence-based practices and services and then work toward enhancing a robust and qualified workforce. Services should include respite for all members of the family including siblings in the home. Primary and secondary prevention efforts should focus on avoiding penetration into and continued need for tertiary services.

The Virginia Department of Social Services should develop mechanisms for reporting on its prevention services model. This would include establishing criteria and definitions of the various levels of prevention interventions. Consideration should include reports on the number of prevention (pre-court intervention) cases served, length of time cases are served in prevention, outcomes of prevention efforts, interventions and services provided, how many prevention cases were non-compliant, and what steps the Department took when cases were non-compliant.

System Improvement

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) continues to focus on family engagement practices as a cornerstone of the child welfare system. To implement family engagement practices effectively, more trained workers are needed. VDSS has experienced the impacts of a reduced workforce due to the pandemic, fiscal constraints, and vicarious trauma.

VDSS should encourage local Departments of Social Services (LDSS) to improve communication and collaboration across jurisdictions when investigating child abuse and neglect and participate in a local multidisciplinary team (MDT), if available.

VDSS should encourage LDS agencies to improve cross systems collaboration to support thorough investigations of child abuse and neglect. This should include cross systems joint training opportunities. Upon commencement of dependency proceedings, VDSS should encourage inclusion of attorneys, relatives and other actors in service planning (i.e., family partnership meetings and team meetings).

The pandemic presented numerous challenges, especially for frontline workers. The VDSS should continue to examine the preparedness for the COVID19 pandemic and

begin planning for the next pandemic that will inevitably strike. Included in this planning should be helping teachers and other mandated reporters to identify child abuse and neglect in a virtual environment. VDSS should continue to study trends in the reductions of the number of child abuse and neglect complaints and determine if the reduction in complaints trends actually equates to a reduction in harm to children.

VDSS in-home services practices align CPS ongoing practice, prevention services, and the implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act. The Advisory Committee requests continued collection of data and information on the path to permanency for children and families involved in Alternate Living Arrangements.

As the Virginia Department of Social Services builds the new Child Welfare Information System (CWIS), the Committee requests updates and asks the Department to seek stakeholder input into the development of data points for the system.

The Virginia Department of Social Services will provide the Committee with a report on the impact and utilization of the Virginia Heals project.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Child Welfare

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) should ensure equity in its response to child welfare including examination of data through an equity lens. The examination of child welfare practice should include practice implications for children and caregivers of color, children and caregivers that identify as LGBTQ, and children and caregivers with disabilities.

VDSS should ensure voices with lived experience are included in decision-making and policy considerations, with special consideration given to parents and caregivers.

The Committee would like an update on the impact of halting the Qualified Residential Treatment Placement (QRTP) designation for residential setting.

Report to the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee

January 26, 2024 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Programs

Prepared by: Melissa O'Neill, CASA Coordinator - DCJS

I. CASA Network State Leadership Team Updates

The State Leadership Team (SLT) is focused this year on updating and implementing the goals of the strategic plan. DCJS worked during this reporting period to facilitate the SLT. The following is a highlight of accomplishments of the SLT efforts during this reporting period.

A. Training Committee

The Training Committee completed the implementation of the 2023 CASA College training plan.

DCJS facilitated the final two training sessions for the 2023 calendar year. The sessions included Understanding Trauma Reactions and Behaviors in Children and Best Practices in Volunteer Recognition. In all, the CASA College training initiative offered a total of eleven trainings during the 2023 calendar year with 1027 CASA volunteers and staff participating in the sessions.

During this reporting period, the Training Committee successfully launched the CASA College Training portal on the Virginia CASA website. The portal is password protected and allows CASA volunteers, staff and directors access to recorded training sessions and accompanying materials from CASA College trainings.

The Training Committee continues efforts to revise the Virginia Case Studies Pre-Service Training Curriculum. The committee held six work sessions during this past quarter. The trajectory for completion of the curriculum is on track for the Spring of 2024 and anticipates offering facilitators training in the Summer of 2024.

B. Data Committee

The Data Committee completed activities related to the examination of outcomes tracked to determine continued viability. The Data Committee determined the outcomes tracked are viable and relevant. The Data Committee shared findings

and recommendations with the CASA Manager User Group during the December meeting.

II. Network Support Meetings

DCJS staff was invited to participate during the annual Program Directors Retreat held on November 16 and 17, 2023 at the Roslyn Center. The training portion of the program focused on the development of Strengths Based Leadership Skills of each director in attendance. DCJS facilitated the purchase of the Strengths Based Leadership book for each CASA program director to assist in continued leadership development learning.

DCJS facilitated three CASA Network Support meetings using virtual technology during this reporting period. These meetings assist local programs with navigating program operations and management concerns.

III. CASA Regulations Revision

The Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (NOIRA) was published in the Virginia Register of Regulations on Town Hall on January 1, 2024. Members can access the information [here](#).

IV. CASA Expansion Grants

Through the availability of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, DCJS was able to award three grants to local programs for the purpose of CASA program expansion to unserved localities in the state. The grants support three program expansions into a total of six previously unserved localities. This funding will be available for one year, from July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024.



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

October 20, 2023

Sent Electronically

Melissa O'Neill

CASA/CJA Citizen Review Panel Coordinator

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

1100 Bank Street, Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Ms. O'Neill:

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) commends the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program and Children's Justice Act Committee for their work as an active Citizen Review Panel (CRP) as part of Virginia's Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Plan. The feedback for our Child Protective Service Program by our Citizen Review Panels is crucial to the improvement of our program for the citizens 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 2022, there were 52,894 children reported as possible victims of child abuse or neglect in 35,917 completed reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. Of those children, 4,911 were involved in founded Investigations, 8,179 were involved in unfounded Investigations, and 39,804 in Family Assessments (differential response). In SFY 2022, Family Assessments accounted for 73% of all CPS reports accepted by local Departments of Social Services, and as of 10/19/2022, 29 children died because of abuse or neglect. There were 31 children involved in 28 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.

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. Prevention/FFPSA

VDSS continues to work on several initiatives aimed at advancing primary and secondary prevention efforts. In leveraging the [Virginia Plan to Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect](#) as a comprehensive framework for targeting resource and services to prevent child maltreatment, VDSS is actively collaborating with Families Forward Virginia to coordinate the creation of activities to support each objective and strategy in the plan that promote upstream approaches to lessen the immediate and long-term harms of child abuse and neglect. In this second phase, four top-priority recommendations were identified to fuel success of the plan:

- Keep diversity, equity, inclusion, and cultural competency at the center of implementation efforts.
- Embrace a “No Wrong Door Approach” with accessing services and normalize asking for help.
- Create and adopt universal definitions and terms across systems, policies, and practices.
- Promote a well-prepared, well-supported family-wellbeing workforce.

Service coordination is also key component of developing and establishing a Virginia child-welfare prevention program that targets resources and services to prevent abuse and neglect, so that children can remain safely at home or with kin caregivers. Currently,

primary and secondary prevention services are linked throughout the child and family services continuum and are largely funded by grants and projects, to include:

- Child abuse awareness activities;
- Child abuse prevention play;
- Child advocacy centers (CACs);
- Child abuse prevention month/conference;
- Community-based child abuse prevention grants (CBCAP);
- Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA);
- Sexual and Domestic Violence Primary Prevention Fund; and
- Healthy Families.

Additionally, VDSS works closely with Families Forward Virginia, through CBCAP funding, to strengthen the primary prevention vision. One of the strategies to advance and coordinate primary prevention efforts among communities is through the work of the [Thriving Families, Safer Children](#) initiative in which VDSS, Families Forward, and other key partners, will seek to better understand what community needs are and develop a coordinated model to meet each unique community needs like a Family Resource Center (FRC). The FRC model provides multiple services to both children and families, increases parenting skills and protective factors, and reduces the likelihood of formal involvement with Child Protective Services. VDSS will utilize and share child welfare data to help prioritize which communities have the greatest needs.

VDSS will continue to work internally, towards a larger, multi-system alignment, committing to work among Benefit Programs (SNAP, Child Care Assistance, Medical Assistance, etc.) and Family Services to develop a more coordinated state system to work to radically shift the approach to and expectations of the internal structure and alignment. VDSS will prioritize system infrastructure alignment to better serve families further upstream by primary prevention programs, with concrete support via Benefits Programs as a key component as the evidence supports the need for families to have concrete supports (housing, food, childcare, utilities, and medical care).

[Virginia's Title IV-E Prevention Services Plan](#) also addresses key tertiary prevention services activities as VDSS continues to prioritize the enhancement of evidence-based prevention services to ensure that all LDSS have the resources needed to provide prevention services for children and families, particularly those at risk of entering foster care. VDSS works closely and in contract with the Center for Evidence-based Partnerships in Virginia (CEP-Va) at VCU to expand service array of evidence-based programs (EBPs) in Virginia eligible for IV-E prevention services funding. CEP-Va engages in an ongoing needs assessment and gaps analysis (NAGA) to support this work. The initial NAGA report ([NAGA 1.0](#)), published in late 2021, recommended additional evidence-based programs (EBPs) for Virginia which were added in 2023. The second NAGA report ([NAGA 2.0](#)), published in early 2023, focused on workforce and other factors impeding implementation and sustainment of Family First EBPs, and offered recommendations for strategies to address these issues. They are in the process of developing the methodologies for a service coordination study known as Pathways to

Access Local Services (PALS). The PALS study will gather information on policies and practices that connect families to resources and services that support parents and kin caregivers to prevent abuse and neglect and removal into foster care. The study will include a review of the legislation, regulations, and policies in place, as well as gathering input from localities on their practices, from community-based partners, and from families who have accessed, or attempted to access, these services.

CEP-Va is also contracted with VDSS to complete fidelity monitoring of the EBPs in Virginia's IV-E Prevention Plan. They will be preparing reports on this data to present to VDSS and their governance committee, which will then be made available to the public. Additionally, they provide expert consultation on data analytics to comply with federal reporting requirements, as well as to develop additional measures as a part of ongoing continuous quality improvement efforts. Due to the low utilization of IV-E prevention funds in the first two years, and thus the limited data available, VDSS and CEP-Va are looking at measures that would include families that could have been eligible but did not receive IV-E prevention funding for an EBP. As these measures are developed and the data is analyzed, VDSS will determine how it is shared with partners and stakeholders.

2. System Improvement

VDSS strongly encourages LDSS to participate in cross system collaboration to improve the investigation of child abuse and neglect. VDSS is a key leader in the newly formed Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Stakeholder Group which is a collaborative partnership between the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS); Child Advocacy Centers of Virginia (CACVA); Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS); and Commonwealth's Attorney's Services Council (CASC) committed to strengthening and sustaining MDTs throughout the state. The MDT Stakeholder Group believes training, resources, and support targeted at MDTs at key points along their developmental pathway have the greatest potential to cultivate effective teams who are best equipped to help children and families impacted by abuse. To that end, the MDT Stakeholder Group hosted two MDT 101 Trainings and two Good to Great MDT Trainings with 67 local MDT members attending. Additionally, VDSS partnered with DCJS on the development of a Child Death Investigation Protocol and supported the implementation of the protocol through a Train-the-Trainer model. Twenty MDT members from across the state completed the Train-the-Trainer training and have hosted five trainings across the state training 162 MDT members on the Child Death Investigation Protocol. Furthermore, VDSS partnered with DCJS and Virginia State Police (VSP) to deliver the Interdiction for the Protection of Children trafficking training for law enforcement. VDSS wrote the Child Protective Service module of this training and Regional Staff presented the material during the training.

VDSS acknowledges that the findings presented in the Office of the Children's Ombudsman (OCO) report underscores the variability of practice in Virginia, as well as the diversity of the children, parents, and kin caregivers involved. In turn, VDSS will continue to utilize these insights to enhance the development of best practice strategies to prevent unnecessary entry into foster care and its In-Home Services practice framework.

The primary goal of In-Home Services is to support families to safely maintain children, in their own homes or with alternate caregivers in their own communities, by addressing identified safety and risk concerns and reducing the reoccurrence of child maltreatment. This is achieved through engagement of the family, their support system, and other service providers. VDSS has strongly encouraged family participation in case planning and the involvement of extended family in the care and protection of children and recognizes that children and families will benefit from LDSS receiving additional guidance, training, and resources to support quality and uniform practice in the prevention of foster care. Thus, continued efforts include developing uniform practice guidance to support alternative living arrangements with relatives or fictive-kin caregivers as needed.

VDSS will continue to focus on the use of data to drive decisions, support recommendations, and conduct thorough root-cause analysis in this area of practice. Detailed living arrangement and services data will offer insight into the circumstances leading to the use of alternative living arrangements and the types of services and supports provided during the arrangement. This data will also enable VDSS to further explore whether disparities exist in alternative living arrangements statewide and how the practice impacts the well-being of children and families over time. VDSS will also continue to collaborate with the Virginia League of Social Services Executives (VLSSE) who has established a workgroup to discuss and consider potential recommendations in this area.

The new system will be designed using human centered design theories to make sure that the needs of the user and community are considered wherever possible.

[The Virginia HEALS Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery](#), and the resources provided in the [Toolkit](#) that supports it, continue to have a significant impact across systems. The OTRP is committed to ensuring that those providing services to children, youth, and families in community are provided training and technical assistance on trauma-informed and healing-centered policy and practice. The Virginia HEALS Toolkit includes:

- o [Community Resource Mapping Facilitation Guide](#) and [e-Learning](#)
- o [Family Engagement Guide](#) and [e-Learning](#)
- o Screening for Experiences and Strengths (SEAS) and [e-Learning](#)
- o [Referral and Response Protocol](#) and [e-Learning](#)
- o [Trauma-Informed Agency Self-Assessment](#) (updated in 2022 to incorporate vicarious trauma and historical/collective trauma)

In the last year, the Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP) has provided training and capacity support from a trauma-informed and healing-centered lens to over 1,330 service providers and policy makers at the local, state, and national level. OTRP staff facilitated sessions on a variety of trauma-related topics, including: the Virginia HEALS Trauma-Informed Model of Service Delivery and Toolkit, Work-Life Balance,

Resilience in the Workplace, and Best Practices for Engaging Voices of Lived Experience.

3. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Child Welfare

VDSS established a DEI Committee comprised of about six diverse staff, representative of the division across programs. The committee is focused on providing resources for home office related to diversity and implications related to child welfare. The committee is currently on a hiatus with respect to competing priorities. In addition, the various programs within the division review data related to equity and child welfare implications, in collaboration with the Division of Continuous Quality Improvement.

The DFS Parent Advisory Council was created in September 2021 and is currently made up of 8 birth parents with lived experience in the child welfare system. They meet monthly and participate in ad hoc meetings/focus groups. They have been informed of current initiatives and asked for their input. They have a representative on the Child Welfare Advisory Committee and will have representatives on the Thriving Families Safer Children initiative. They have provided input on the 2023 General Assembly proposed legislation for all child welfare-related bills as well as input on other current initiatives and projects such as brochures on THC use, Safe Sleep, Water and Gun Safety, input on the foster parent recruitment, the development of a kinship resource website, and lending their voices to the child welfare New Worker Training. In addition, several of the parents on the Council presented on a panel at the 1st Annual Permanency Conference in December 2022 and participated on a Q&A with several Child Welfare Stipend Students from across the state.

The Department of Family Services (DFS) is in the process of creating a tribal engagement eLearning for release in May 2023. DFS sought input from Virginia's tribes on the focus of the training and one tribe has already provided feedback on the curriculum outline. DFS will ask for Virginia's tribes' feedback throughout the process of creating this eLearning to include giving final review before its release.

DFS holds quarterly roundtables with Virginia's 11 state and federally recognized tribes; on average representatives from 3-4 tribes attend. DFS uses the roundtables to share child welfare data, initiatives and to get their input as well as time for the tribes to bring forward any child welfare specific challenges/issues they are experiencing. Most recently, DFS shared the creation of a Foster Parent Recruitment Video that came out of a recommendation from the quarterly roundtable. Several tribes have partnered with DFS to create videos to elevate visibility of Virginia's tribes to child welfare staff. Tribal representatives frequently reach out to the DFS Tribal Liaison for resources and referrals to other programs outside of Social Services due to the positive relationship that DFS has established.

The VDSS Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy began convening and facilitating a Lived Experience (LEx) Community of Practice in 2022. This group, which is made up of individuals who coordinate lived experience groups at VDSS, as well as other state agencies and partners, is interested in collaborating on the most effective and best practice strategies for centering the voices of those who have lived experience with the challenges related to navigating systems and accessing services in order to foster more compassionate and responsive systems that effectively addresses the needs of individuals and communities. The LEx Community of Practice has access to a diverse range of experiences and knowledge from individuals with different backgrounds across state agencies and community partners.

We look forward to continuing our work together. Please let us know if you have any additional questions. Again, we thank you for serving as one of our Citizen Review Panels.

Sincerely,

Shannon Hartung
Protection Program Manager

Cc: Kimberly Huhn Murphy, Children's Bureau

PROPOSED DRAFT CHANGES 1-18-24



Regulations Relating to the Court-Appointed Special Advocate Program



**Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services
1100 Bank Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804-786-6428**

Virginia Administrative Code

Effective Date – October 29, 2008

CHAPTER 160 REGULATIONS RELATING TO THE COURT-APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE PROGRAM (CASA)

PART I: General Definitions

6VAC20-160-10. Definitions.

The following words and terms when used in this chapter shall apply unless the context clearly indicates otherwise:

“Advisory council” means a locally appointed body with a specific purpose to advise the governing board of a local CASA program.

“CASA” means court-appointed special advocate.

“CASA program” means any locally operated court-appointed special advocate program which utilizes court-appointed volunteers to assist in judicial proceedings involving allegations that a child is abused, neglected, in need of services, or in need of supervision and for whom a Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court judge determines such services are appropriate.

“Case” means a child for whom a Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court judge has entered an order of appointment for a CASA volunteer.

“DCJS” means the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services.

“Director” means the director or coordinator of a local CASA program responsible for the day-to-day operations of the local CASA program.

[“Guardian ad litem” as defined by §16.1-266.](#)

“Governing board” means the oversight body responsible for the local CASA program. This may be a city council, county board of supervisors or the board of directors of a nonprofit organization.

“Staff advocate” means an employee of the CASA program who serves, in lieu of a CASA volunteer, as the assigned advocate for a case.

“Volunteer” means a court-appointed special advocate.

PART II: Program Administration

6VAC20-160-20. CASA program governance.

- A. A CASA program shall have a governing board responsible for overseeing the program's operations.
- B. A governing board may choose to establish an advisory council to support the CASA program operations. The governing board shall articulate in writing a clearly defined purpose for the advisory council, criteria for selection of members, a defined relationship between the council and the CASA program staff and a clear process for reporting to the governing board.
- C. If the governing board is not a city council or county board of supervisors, the composition of a local CASA governing board and any established advisory council should include representatives of each geographic area served by the program. Members should represent diverse cultures, professional disciplines, public and private sectors, and have knowledge of or an interest in matters including, but not limited to, the courts, child welfare, ~~and~~ juvenile justice and nonprofit governance.
- D. All new governing board members and advisory council members shall receive an orientation within six months of their selection. The orientation shall include education about Virginia's the local CASA programs' mission, goals and objectives with emphasis on governing board member and advisory council roles, fiduciary responsibilities and fundraising. This training shall include information on the roles and responsibilities of governing board members primary duties known as the "duty of care", "duty of loyalty", and duty of obedience".

6VAC20-160-30. Recordkeeping and monitoring.

- A. CASA programs shall maintain records of the activities of the CASA program by using an automated data system prescribed by DCJS.
- B. CASA programs shall provide annual and other reports on the operation of the CASA program to DCJS in a format prescribed by DCJS according to a timeline established by DCJS.
- C. CASA programs shall maintain complete case records gathered about the child.
- D. CASA programs shall develop record retention policies.
- E. CASA programs shall develop policies to require CASA volunteers to return all documents and information gathered to the office upon case closure and to destroy all forms of electronic communication gathered during the case.

6VAC20-160-40. Program and personnel policies.

- A. ~~CASA programs shall be in compliance with Standards for National CASA Association (NCASAA) Member Programs.~~
- B. CASA programs shall ~~ensure that~~ identify an attorney ~~is available~~ for CASA directors and governing boards to provide legal consultation in matters pertaining to administration of the programs.
- C. ~~CASA program employees shall not concurrently supervise children in need of services, children in need of supervision, or juvenile offender cases, either for the courts or any child serving agencies.~~
- D. CASA programs shall ~~write~~ develop written policies on the following and make those written policies available to the respective courts. Policies should be reviewed and updated as needed, but at a minimum, every four years.
 - 1. The maximum caseload to which a volunteer may be assigned at any one time is two children or two sibling groups. If that number is ~~larger than two children or two sibling groups to be exceeded~~, a rationale must be submitted to and approved by DCJS prior to assignment of any additional case.
 - 2. Assignment of CASA staff as an advocate. In the event a CASA supervisor or staff member is required to serve as ~~an~~ staff advocate, that staff member will serve no more than two children or two sibling groups. If that number is ~~larger than two children or two sibling groups to be exceeded~~, a rationale must be submitted to and approved by DCJS prior to assignment of any additional case.
 - 3. The maximum number of volunteers to be supervised by each staff person. The staff-to-volunteer ratio calculated and reported each quarter shall not exceed one full-time equivalent staff to ~~30-25~~ 30-25 volunteers who are assigned to active cases. This ratio is reduced according to the number of hours the volunteer supervisor may be assigned to administrative or other responsibilities. A request shall be submitted to DCJS for approval should that ratio exceed 1:~~30~~25.
 - 4. The review, investigation and handling of any complaints that may be received concerning CASA volunteers, including procedures for the removal of CASA volunteers from specific cases and dismissal from the program should dismissal become necessary.
 - 5. The specific factors to be used by the CASA program to accept and prioritize cases for assignment to CASA volunteers.
 - 6. The confidentiality of the records and information to which CASA volunteers will have access, and training volunteers on the importance of confidentiality.
 - 7. The objectives, standards, and conduct for CASA volunteers and the procedures that the CASA program will use to annually evaluate the performance of its volunteers ~~in order~~ to ensure that volunteers are meeting CASA's objectives and standards of conduct.
 - 8. The CASA volunteers' responsibility to report incidents of suspected child abuse and neglect.

- 9. ~~Concerning In~~ CASA investigations, CASA's role and responsibility in assisting the guardian ad litem, and monitoring ~~court order~~ compliance with court orders.
- 10. ~~Compliance with federal laws, including Equal Opportunity Employment, Drug Free Workplace, Smoke Free Workplace, and political activity statements.~~
- 10. The CASA volunteer's responsibility to visit the child a minimum of once a month unless an exception is granted according to the CASA program's exception policy.

E. CASA programs shall employ staff capable of managing effective and efficient program operations. ~~The following job descriptions provide for essential CASA program management:~~

- 1. ~~**Director.** The director is responsible for accomplishing organizational goals and all managerial functions. This staff position requires a degree or equivalent experience in child welfare, public administration, counseling, human services, juvenile justice or law. The person should have an understanding of and experience with community organization and volunteer program management. Generally the duties and responsibilities of the director are as follows:~~
 - a. ~~Conduct or oversee the recruitment, screening, training, supervision and evaluation of the program volunteers and staff;~~
 - b. ~~Develop and maintain procedures for case recordkeeping; supervise staff and volunteers in completing recordkeeping tasks;~~
 - c. ~~Serve as a liaison to the court, the local governing board, and if applicable, advisory council, to local agencies serving children, to DCJS, to the Virginia CASA Network, and to the National CASA Association;~~
 - d. ~~Plan for and manage program growth, development and evaluation, including special projects, budgets, annual workplans, and analysis of trends in program services;~~
 - e. ~~Represent the program to networks of service providers and community coalitions dealing with child welfare issues; and~~
 - f. ~~Supervise program operations including financial management, risk management, and resource development.~~
- 2. ~~**Program/Volunteer Coordinator.** Depending on program size, it may be necessary to designate a staff person having knowledge of, or willingness to learn about, court matters, child welfare and juvenile justice issues who will focus on volunteer recruitment, screening, training, case assignment, and supervision. Generally, the duties and responsibilities of the program/volunteer coordinator are as follows:~~

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~~a. Develop and distribute volunteer recruitment materials, and conduct presentations on the CASA program for the purpose of recruiting volunteers and increasing community awareness;~~

~~b. Screen volunteer applications and conduct interviews to determine the suitability of the applicant for the CASA program;~~

~~e. Arrange training for CASA volunteers;~~

~~d. Recommend trained volunteers for acceptance into the CASA program;~~

~~e. Assign cases and supervise volunteers;~~

~~f. Plan and implement volunteer recognition events;~~

~~g. Evaluate effectiveness of volunteer recruitment, training, and case assignment; and~~

~~h. Conduct annual written evaluations of each CASA volunteer.~~

F. CASA programs shall develop human resources and personnel policies to include at a minimum, the following:

1. Human resources practices, job descriptions, background checks for employees, compensation, onboarding, training, and performance reviews.

2. Compliance with federal laws, including Equal Opportunity Employment, Drug-Free Workplace, Smoke-Free Workplace, and political activity statements.

3. Grievance policy and handling of complaints pertaining to CASA staff.

4. Social media and texting policies.

5. Whistle blower policy.

6. Crisis communication policy.

G. CASA programs shall develop financial management polices to include at a minimum the following:

1. Financial management operational policies and procedures to ensure accounting controls including descriptive chart of accounts, prompt and accurate recording of revenues and expenses, maintenance of a filing system containing account records and receipts, safeguarding and verification of assets, control over expenditures, separation of duties, and internal control policies.

2. The CASA program shall use a financial management system that demonstrates and ensures the tracking of funds.

H. CASA programs are responsible for disseminating CASA reports according to § 16.1-274 of the Code of Virginia.

I. CASA volunteers shall submit a report to the court in accordance with §9.1-153, prior to every hearing according to the rules of the local court, after appointment to a case by a Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Judge.

Part III: Volunteer Administration

6VAC20-160-50. Case assignment.

- A. The CASA director shall be responsible for all decisions pertaining to the assignment or removal of specific volunteers to specific cases.
- B. A CASA volunteer shall not be assigned to a case involving any professional connection or close personal relationship with the child client or family.

6VAC20-160-60. CASA volunteer duties and responsibilities.

~~A. Volunteers shall follow specific policies regarding the nature of assistance:~~

- ~~1. Provided to the guardian ad litem;~~
- ~~2. Relating to their investigative role;~~
- ~~3. Relating to monitoring compliance with court orders; and~~
- ~~4. Relating to the submission to the court of written reports.~~

A. Pursuant to §9.1-153, the duties of a CASA volunteer shall include:

- 1. Investigating the case to which he is assigned to provide independent factual information to the court.
- 2. Submitting to the court of a written report of his investigation in compliance with the provisions of § 16.1-274. The report may, upon request of the court, include recommendations as to the child's welfare.
- 3. Monitoring the case to which he is assigned to ensure compliance with the court's orders.
- 4. Assisting the guardian ad litem appointed to represent the child in providing effective representation of the child's needs and best interests.
- 5. Reporting a suspected abused or neglected child pursuant to § 63.2-1509.

- B. The CASA volunteer's investigation involves fact-finding via interviews, review of records and professional reports received, observation of family and social interactions, and observation of the child's environment.
- C. The CASA volunteer's investigation involves the observation of the child's circumstances. CASA volunteers ~~may shall~~ conduct interviews of children; however, CASA volunteers are specifically prohibited from questioning or inquiring of the child information regarding a precipitating incident or allegation involving child abuse and neglect.
- D. The CASA volunteer ~~should encourage~~ may attend and participate in interdisciplinary meetings as identified in § 9.1-153(C), for coordination and cooperation, ~~whenever possible~~.

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~~in an effort to develop a plan of action in conjunction with other local agencies and professionals. The CASA volunteer may share information orally related to the child during these meetings, provided the information is not shared further § 9.1-156(B). The CASA volunteer may share information on other parties if the parties provide the CASA program with a signed release of information.~~

6VAC20-160-70. Confidentiality.

- A. All CASA volunteers shall follow the specific policies described above regarding the following:
 - 1. Reporting suspected child abuse and neglect, and the procedure for making such reports;
 - 2. Confidentiality of records and information; and
 - 3. Contacting, interviewing and responding to persons involved in the case.

~~B. To the extent permitted by state and federal confidentiality laws, CASA volunteers should share information gathered with other involved professionals whenever possible and practicable.~~

B. CASA volunteers must share documents and information on the child with the Guardian ad litem appointed to the case.

C. CASA volunteers must share information with the Guardian ad litem regarding parents, guardians or interested persons in the case but may not give copies of documents to the Guardian ad litem.

D. CASA volunteers may share information but not documents at interdisciplinary team meetings identified in § 9.1-153(C).

E. To access any documents on any other interested person involved in the case other than the child, CASA volunteers shall obtain a signed release of information.

F. CASA volunteers shall only share information with the court and the Guardian ad litem unless the interested persons involved in the case sign a release of information.

6VAC20-160-80. ~~Code of ethics~~ Professional Conduct.

- A. CASA volunteers should conduct themselves in a professional manner, ~~adhering to a code of ethics~~ that is consistent with ethical principles established by local, state or national guidelines.
- B. CASA volunteers ~~should shall not become inappropriately involved in the case by providing direct provide services delivery to any parties involved in the case that could (i) lead to conflict of interest or liability or (ii) cause a child or family to become dependent on the CASA volunteer for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations.~~

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Part IV: Qualifications of Volunteers

6VAC20-160-90. Qualifications.

- A. CASA volunteers ~~shall~~must be at least 21 years of age.
- B. CASA volunteers ~~shall~~must have the ability to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, to prepare court reports and to provide testimony.
- C. CASA volunteers ~~shall~~must possess mature judgment, a high degree of responsibility and sufficient time to assist in advocating for the best interests of the child.
- D. CASA volunteers ~~shall~~must be able to relate to children and families who have various life experiences, ~~persons of different~~ cultures, ethnic backgrounds and socioeconomic statuses.

6VAC20-160-100. Screening and Application Process for Volunteers.

~~A.~~ A. — Volunteer applicants must complete the following steps prior to acceptance as volunteers:

1. ~~Prior to being sworn in, CASA v~~Volunteers applicants shall successfully complete screening procedures, which, ~~at a minimum,~~ shall include a written application and personal interview.

2. Pursuant to § 9.1-153 of the *Code of Virginia*, the ~~director~~program shall obtain, ~~with the approval of the court,~~ a copy of each volunteer applicant's criminal history record or certification that no conviction data is maintained on him, in accordance with § 19.2-389 of the *Code of Virginia*; a copy of information from the central registry, maintained pursuant to § 63.2-1515 of the *Code of Virginia*, on any investigation of child abuse or neglect undertaken on him or certification that no such record is maintained on him. If the volunteer applicant has lived in another state within the past five years, the ~~CASA~~ program ~~director~~ shall also obtain a copy of his criminal history record and a copy of information from the central registry from that area. The program shall obtain information from the National sex offender registry and criminal records from the jurisdictions in which the volunteer applicant currently resides and works. ~~A~~ volunteer applicant shall be rejected if he refuses to sign a release of information for appropriate law enforcement background checks.

3. The CASA program shall contact and obtain a response from three references provided by the ~~CASA~~ volunteer applicant. References will speak to the character, judgment and suitability for the position of ~~CASA~~ volunteer applicant.

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~~D-4~~ Before the volunteer applicant is sworn in by the court to serve as an advocate, the director shall determine that the CASA-volunteer applicant is qualified under 6VAC20-160-90 and 6VAC20-160-120.

~~E-5~~ CASA-volunteers applicants shall successfully complete required training as set forth in 6VAC20-160-120.

6VAC20-160-110. [Redesignated]

Part V: Training Guidelines for Volunteers

6VAC20-160-120. Pre-Service Training.

- A. To ensure that volunteers are fully prepared to perform their role as a CASA volunteer and to assume the accompanying responsibilities, each volunteer shall participate in a minimum of 30 hours of training prior to being accepted as a CASA volunteer and assigned cases using a training curriculum approved by DCJS. Credit may be given towards the 30 hours of training for any previous training obtained by a volunteer prior to application to a local CASA program if that program uses the NCASAA Training Curriculum- a training curriculum approved by DCJS and documentation of completion of the training is provided.
- B. The initial pre-service training curriculum for a CASA volunteer should, at a minimum, include:
- ~~The delineation of the roles and responsibilities of a CASA volunteer focusing on the rationale for family preservation/permanency planning, discussion of the basic principles of advocacy, distinction between the appropriate and inappropriate activities for a CASA volunteer, level of commitment required of a CASA volunteer involved in a case and the performance expectations, review of the case assignment process and procedures, differentiation between the role of the CASA volunteer and other child welfare system personnel, and a comprehensive list of resources available and when and how to utilize these resources~~Defining the roles, responsibilities and competencies of CASA volunteers, distinguishing their role from other professionals in the system;
 - ~~The obligation of confidentiality in CASA-related matters, proper recordkeeping techniques, and the scope of state and federal statutes on the confidentiality of records;~~Understanding the juvenile court process, including the various court proceedings, legal terminology, hearing preparation, and CASA court report writing;
 - ~~The dynamics of cultural diversity and the development of cultural sensitivity by the CASA volunteer;~~Obligation of confidentiality in CASA-related matters, proper recordkeeping, and state and federal confidentiality statutes;
 - Developing awareness and understanding of differences and diversity and its dynamics, and the importance of sensitivity and inclusivity by the CASA volunteer;

5. ~~The nature of child abuse and neglect. Understanding the impact of drugs and alcohol on substance use, mental health conditions, domestic violence and poverty on child abuse and neglect reports, including local social service responses; the incidence of abuse, identification of the family conditions and patterns which lead to and perpetuate abuse and neglect, and instruction on how local departments of social services respond to and assess reports of abuse and neglect;~~
 56. ~~The general Exploring child and family development principles, recognizing trauma and resilience experiences; and concepts of child and family development;~~
 67. ~~Examining C~~concepts of separation and loss, ~~the role of~~ foster care and permanency planning, ~~family connections in the context of state law with consideration of the state's position on family preservation,~~ family reunification and alternative permanent plans ~~under state law; for a child who cannot be returned to the home;~~
 78. ~~Training in~~ Basic communication, ~~and interview skills, addressing sensitive issues and writing CASA court reports; and with guidelines for dealing with sensitive issues and the interaction between the CASA volunteer and parties to a case, and practice in conducting interviews and writing reports;~~
 8. ~~The juvenile court process which should include an outline of the various types of court proceedings, what transpires at each proceeding, the CASA volunteer's role, who to contact when there is a question about the court process, a glossary of legal terminology, how to prepare for a hearing, and how to prepare a report for the court;~~
 9. ~~The development of Developing advocacy skills, such as negotiation and conflict management to improve a child's circumstances, and how they may be used by the CASA volunteer to improve the conditions for a child; and~~
 10. ~~The development of a general understanding of the codes of ethics of other professionals with whom the CASA volunteer will be working.~~
- C. The ~~initial pre-service~~ training program shall ~~provide offer~~ trainees an opportunity ~~for the volunteer~~ to observe ~~actual~~ court proceedings similar to those ~~they will encounter while serving as~~ in which he would be involved as a CASA volunteer. This observation is above and beyond the hours included in the ~~initial pre-service~~ training.
- ~~D. CASA volunteers in training should be provided an opportunity to visit community agencies and institutions relevant to their work as a volunteer.~~
- E. The CASA program shall provide volunteers in training with the following ~~written~~ materials:
1. ~~Copies of p~~ertinent laws, regulations, and policies;
 2. A statement of commitment form ~~and volunteer job description, statement of confidentiality,~~ clearly stating the minimum expectations of the volunteer once trained; and
 3. A training manual which is easy to ~~access,~~ update and revise.

- F. Trainers ~~and faculty~~ for the initial-pre-service training program and any ongoing training or continuing education shall be persons with substantial knowledge, training and experience in the subject matter which they present and should also be competent in the provision of technical training to lay persons.
- G. CASA program staff and others responsible for the initial-pre-service training program should be attentive to the participation and progress of each trainee and be able to objectively evaluate his abilities according to criteria developed by the CASA program for that purpose. CASA directors should use a DCJS approved training curriculum ~~the Comprehensive Training Curriculum for CASA from the NCASAA and training curricula developed within the state as a reference in designing and developing~~ for their training program. CASA program staff providing pre-service training should be trained as facilitators for their respective approved curriculums.

6VAC20-160-121 In-Service Training

- H. The CASA program shall make available a minimum of 12 hours of in-service training annually for volunteers who are accepted into the program and available to serve cases. These in-service programs should be designed and presented to maintain and improve the volunteer's level of knowledge and skill. Special attention shall be given to informing volunteers of changes in the law, local court procedures, the practices of other agencies involved, CASA program policies and developments in the fields of child development, child abuse and child advocacy.
- I. CASA volunteers shall complete 12 hours of ~~continuing education~~in-service training annually as approved by the director. Annual in-service hours are required to be completed the fiscal year after the volunteer completes pre-service training. This ~~continuing education~~ in-service may be ~~in-service~~training programs provided directly by the CASA program, or in conjunction with another agency or agencies, or may be through an outside agency, through print or electronic media, or from other sources. All training not conducted or sponsored by the CASA program must be reviewed and approved by the CASA director for its suitability for the continuing education of CASA volunteers, and the amount of continuing education credit that is appropriate.