

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

April 24, 2026

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held on April 24, 2026, at the Virginia Department of Social Services, 5600 Cox Road, York River Room, 111B, Glen Allen, VA 23060.

Members Present

Randy Bonds
Shamika Byars
Judge Eugene Butler (Virtual)
Davy Fearon
Sandy Karison
Katharine Hunter
Allison Martin
Kate Miller for Patt Popp, Vice Chair
Lana Mullins
Jeannine Panzera
Eric Reynolds
Judge Thomas Sotelo, Chair

Members Not Present

Jackie Robinson Brock
Morgan Cox
Lora Smith

Guests

Rachel Miller (VDSS)

Staff Present

Jessica Carter
Jenna Foster
Laurel Marks
Melissa O'Neill

- I. Call to Order:** Judge Thomas Sotelo, CASA/CJA Advisory Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM. All present introduced themselves. Judge Eugene Butler attended the meeting virtually per the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee-approved *Policy for The Remote Participation of Members*. Judge Butler requested approval to attend virtually due to personal matters and his principal residence being more than 60 miles from the meeting location. Judge Butler attended the meeting virtually from Amherst, VA.
- II. Approval of Minutes:** The committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the January 23, 2026, meeting. Davey Fearon made a motion to approve the minutes, and Eric Reynolds provided the second. The motion was approved.

III. Citizen Review Panel: Committee members reviewed the Citizen Review Panel's 2026 draft recommendations and discussed final revisions for submission to the Virginia Department of Social Services.

Several amendments were made following the Committee's discussion, including the prioritization of recommendations. System Improvement, with emphasis on workforce support, development, and cross-system collaboration, was designated as the top priority. Child Abuse Prevention was identified as the second priority and includes implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, the Parental Child Safety Placement Program, and the Child Abuse Prevention Services Model. Data and Evaluation was established as the third priority.

Judge Butler made a motion to accept the 2026 Citizen Review Panel Recommendations with approved amendments. Eric Reynolds provided the second. The motion was unanimously approved.

IV. CJA Program Update: The CASA/CJA Advisory Committee was provided with an update on the activities of the CJA program this quarter including multi-disciplinary team training, and development of the CJA grant application and Three-Year Assessment. Both documents are due to HHS by May 29, 2026.

- **CJA Priorities Discussion:** In preparation for the 2026-2029 CJA three year assessment and creation of a new plan, the Task Force was sent an electronic survey to gauge priorities in areas related to child abuse and neglect. The survey completion request also asked members to consult with their peers and professional associations within their disciplines to identify strengths and specific challenges within the child protection system as related to the 2023-2026 three-year recommendations.

During the planning discussion on April 24, 2026, the following specific steps were taken to formulate and refine 2026-2029 recommendations:

- a. Staff provided a list of 8 priority themes that arose in the electronic survey.
- b. Staff provided a summary of CJA activities from the 2023-2026 three-year assessment that may carry over into the 2026-2029 assessment.
- c. Staff organized priorities into common themes:
 1. MDT Support
 2. CASA Support
 3. Policy
 4. Evidence-Informed Best Practices
 5. Children with Disabilities
 6. Multi-systems Training
 7. Children Affected by Domestic Violence
 8. Anti-Human Trafficking Efforts
- d. Members each selected two themes that best matched their expertise and provided additional guidance as to how these themes may be carried out in the next three years. Special consideration was given to themes that directly align with CJA priorities.

- e. Members were given three color dots and were asked to identify their top three themes (1-green, 2-yellow, 3-red) by putting their respective dots on the flip chart paper.
- f. After the meeting, staff reviewed all themes and recommendations to ensure alignment with CJA priority areas. Some recommendations were consolidated; others remained in a “parking lot” if they did not meet CJA priority areas, with the idea that members or other programs within DCJS would know of this identified need.
- g. Staff synthesized all notes and crafted the 2026-2029 CJA three-year plan recommendations based on Task Force feedback. Further review of the plan will continue in October.

V. 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.

CASA program closing: Committee members were briefed on the closure of the 28th Judicial District CASA program, effective July 1, 2026. The program operates under the supervision of People Incorporated, a Community Action Program. In September 2025, People Incorporated notified DCJS of its intention to discontinue oversight of CASA services, which include the 28th Judicial District and Culpeper County in the 16th District. Piedmont CASA, which serves the 16th District, has agreed to assume responsibility for Culpeper, and DCJS has committed bridge funding to support the transition. Unfortunately, despite efforts to identify another governing structure for the 28th Judicial District, none has been secured, and CASA services in that district will conclude on July 1, 2026. DCJS responded to committee members’ questions regarding case status, judicial notifications, and the potential for establishing a program in the future.

VI. Legislative Update: Bills of Interest

Members of the committee received a report in advance of the meeting on outcomes of bills of interest introduced during the 2026 General Assembly session regarding the investigation, prosecution and judicial handling of child abuse cases.

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

VIII. Adjourn: Randy Bonds made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Eric Reynolds provided the second. The motion was carried and the meeting adjourned at 12:01 PM.

Next meeting dates:

Friday July 24, 2026 – Virtual