

Advisory Social Services Board (ASSB)
Wednesday, June 21, 2023, 7:00pm-8:30pm
Pennino Building, Conference Room 505
12011 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA 22035

MEETING NOTES

Attendees:

Noah Abraham, At-Large – Chairman’s Office
Andre Lee, City of Fairfax
Mary Wilcox, City of Falls Church
Ben Zuhl, Dranesville District
Joe Koszarek, Hunter Mill District
Julian De Phillips, Mason District
Raymond McGrath, Mount Vernon District, Vice Chair
Laura Martinez, Providence District, Chair
Alice Foltz, Sully District

Members Absent:

Karen Darley, Braddock District
Saud Hasan Shah, Franconia District, Secretary

Positions Vacant:

Springfield District

Staff Present:

- Michael Becketts, DFS Director
- Mery Juarez, Executive Assistant
- Janet Bessmer, Director, Fairfax-Falls Church Children’s Services Act Program
- LaVurne Williams, Division Director, Residential Treatment, Community Services Board
- Brian Anderson, Division Director, Wellness Health Promotion and Prevention, Community Service Board
- Hilda Calvo Perez, Management Analyst, Healthy Minds Fairfax

The meeting was held in person.

Meeting Opening:

Chair Laura Martinez called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and performed the roll call.

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes from the June 21, 2023, meeting were approved with one change.

Public Comment:

No members of the public attended the meeting.

Welcome New Member – Noah Abraham:

Chair Martinez introduced Noah Abraham as the newest member of the ASSB, representing the Board of Supervisors Chairman’s Office. Mr. Abraham briefly described his career with the District of Columbia Department of Human Services and his interest in putting that experience to work for Fairfax County.

Child & Youth Wellbeing – Mental Health:

After opening comments and context by Director Becketts, Janet Bessmer, LaVurne Williams, Brian Anderson and Hilda Calvo Perez briefed the ASSB on the work by Fairfax County, Fairfax City and Falls Church City in support of children’s mental and physical wellbeing, using the document provided to ASSB members (and available to the public on the ASSB website under the ‘Behavioral Health System of Care’ link provided for the June 21 meeting).

Hilda Calvo Perez and Brian Anderson introduced the topic with data about the very large increase since 2012 in suicidal and self-harming behaviors, especially in the 10-to-17 and 18-to-24 age groups. However, they pointed out, protective factors (discussed at the ASSB May Board Meeting) are associated with reduced risk, and the Healthy Minds Fairfax, Community Services Board, and Children’s Services Act programs are working to provide those protective factors to local youth through a continuum of care.

(Note: "Fairfax-Falls Church Community Services Board (CSB)" refers to both the agency that provides services for people in Fairfax County, Fairfax City and Falls Church who have mental illness, substance use disorders, and intellectual or developmental disabilities; and the policy board that oversees the establishment and operation of these local services. For purposes of this meeting the CSB refers to the agency.)

They described training programs offered through neighborhood and community services, and Fairfax County Public Schools. For example, 4000 teachers, school administrators and librarians have received training in such areas as counseling, medication, crisis response and recovery support; now this training is being expanded to include support staff such as custodians and bus drivers. Support is also provided to parents in areas such as lock boxes for medications and firearms, and on how to succeed with “those hard conversations.”

For children aged 3-8, ‘Al’s Pals’ addresses topics like coping, emotional regulation, and good decision-making.

Hilda Calvo Perez explained that in Virginia young people aged 14 and older are legally authorized to reach out on their own behalf for short-term behavioral health assistance and said that LGBTQ+ youth are among those who take this initiative.

LaVurne Williams provided statistics on how many youth are served by CSB programs, detailed information about the continuum of care, program locations, and specialized programming and partnerships. She described training provided to the Fairfax County Police Crisis Intervention Team. ASSB Member Alice Foltz gave an example of the excellent work of the FCPD CIT.

Janet Bessmer briefed on Children's Services Act (CSA) support for families and children who have extreme or unique needs not covered by Medicaid or insurance, to help children stay "at home, in school, and out of trouble." Director Becketts and Janet Bessmer together explained that there is no funding shortfall for CSA programs, but that hiring service providers represents an ongoing challenge.

In response to questions from the ASSB, briefers explained how service providers tailor efforts for families of different cultural backgrounds (Lee); that services are provided regardless of an individual's immigration status (Foltz); and that the opioid crisis is driving much of the community's increased need for services (De Phillips).

Chair's Announcements:

- Chair Martinez proposed and the ASSB approved a new agenda item called 'District Updates' in which members could share news about ASSB-related events and initiatives in their home districts.
- Chair Martinez reported the need for a new ASSB Secretary and requested nominations. Julian De Phillips volunteered for the role and was unanimously confirmed.
- Chair Martinez noted that Fairfax County BACs have until August to propose items for the 2024 Human Services Issue Paper and Legislative Agenda. Mery Juarez will provide last year's documentation to ASSB members, highlighting relevant sections. The ASSB will discuss these materials at the July board meeting.

Adjourned:

- Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

Next ASSB meeting:

- Wednesday, July 19, 2023, 7:00 pm-8:30 pm