

## **Advisory Social Services Board (ASSB)**

Wednesday, November 15, 2023, 7:00pm-8:30pm  
Government Center Building, Conference Room 4 & 5  
12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax, VA 22035

### **MEETING NOTES**

#### **Attendees:**

**Laura Martinez**, Providence District, President  
**Raymond McGrath**, Mount Vernon District, Vice Chair  
**Julian De Phillips**, Mason District, Secretary  
**Noah Abraham**, At-Large – Chairman’s Office  
**Karen Darley**, Braddock District  
**Andre Lee**, City of Fairfax  
**Mary Wilcox**, City of Falls Church  
**Ben Zuhl**, Dranesville District (Virtual)  
**Latreice Prince-Wheeler**, Franconia District  
**Jose Garzon**, Sully District

#### **Members Absent:**

Joe Koszarek, Hunter Mill District

#### **Positions Vacant:**

Springfield District

#### **Staff Present:**

Michael Becketts, DFS Director  
Melanie Fenwick, DFS Staff Support  
Sandi Slappey, Assistant Division Director, Children Youth and Families  
Toni Zollicoffer, Director, Domestic and Sexual Violence Services (Virtual)

#### **Approval of Remote Participation:**

The meeting was held in person with one member joining virtually. A quorum of the ASSB was physically assembled at the primary meeting location. The ASSB approved the member’s remote participation. The member participated from the Dranesville District and the voice of the remotely participating member could be heard by all persons at the primary meeting location.

#### **Meeting Opening**

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

- Introduced new members Latrice Prince-Wheeler and Jose Garzon.
- Announced Mary Wilcox has resigned and recognized her service to the board. This will be her last meeting.
- Mary Wilcox gave comments regarding her resignation and thanks.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

The September 20 meeting minutes were approved with one change. The location of the meeting was changed to Government Center Building, Conference Room 4 & 5.

### **Director's Announcements**

- Welcome to the new members. A meeting between Director and new members will be scheduled, as well as a new member orientation.
- Started a guaranteed income project, with first cash disbursement on October 26<sup>th</sup>. Many applicants for few spots, discussed eligibility criteria regarding income and zip code. United Way ALICE households are eligible, DFS administered eligibility and disbursements due to general relief statutes. United Way is performing the support and outreach components of the program. George Mason University will evaluate the outcome of this pilot.
  - Latreice Prince-Wheeler asked about funding and eligibility.
  - Mary Wilcox asked about measures for success.
  - Jose Garzon asked about ARPA funds.
  - Noah Abraham mentions issues with eligibility criteria impacting benefit eligibility in other areas.
- Director Becketts gave an overview of the DFS Customer Engagement survey. 28,000 participants were selected, with the exclusion of some types of clients. The survey summary noted that satisfaction remained high despite the reduction of SNAP benefits. There continue to be opportunities to better target and select survey participants for improving the value of the responses.
- An update on business from September, met with those that oversee child welfare and Virginia League of Social Services to discuss the court appointed attorney pool. VDSS has asked to communicate with the Office of the Children's Ombudsman. The flow of funds in this case is controlled by the Virginia Supreme Court. Federal Administration for Children and Families, HHS, may make federal dollars available in for these attorneys under new rules.
  - Latreice Prince-Wheeler asked about the mechanism of raising awareness through this letter.
  - Vice-Chair McGrath sought clarification about potential VDSS action and reported that he had raised the matter with Supervisor Storck at a recent district dinner of Mount Vernon BAC appointees. In response to his general question about how BACs might engage more effectively in the legislative agenda process, Supervisor Storck had responded that he would ask Supervisor Walkinshaw to consider the question.
  - Jose Garzon asks about the decision-making between the legislature and judiciary in Virginia.
  - Chair Martinez clarifies that the impacted families are primarily disadvantaged and highlights the low number of available attorneys.
  - Director Becketts notes 210 kids in foster care in a given day, 100 added to or removed from foster care over the course of the year. Also reiterates that this could halt the child welfare system in as few as 3 years.
  - Chair Martinez clarifies the challenges and thanks Ben Zuhl for raising this issue and Director Becketts for his efforts on this issue.

### **Annual Report**

- Removed from agenda, to follow up via email. Moved and seconded to proceed.

### **Children, Youth, and Families (CYF) – Child and Youth Wellbeing**

Sandi Slappey, Assistant Division Director, Children Youth and Families

- Provides child welfare services for the county. A full continuum of services: Prevention Services, Child Protective Services, In-Home Services, and Foster Care and support through age 21.

Presented the flow of children through CPS, In-Home Services, and entries into foster care. Made the distinction of children referred through CPS and other sources, such as court order. Three of every 10,000 children in Fairfax County referred through foster care will be placed in the care of the state, compared to the national average of 50 of every 10,000 children.

- Jose Garzon asks about the distinction between foster care and placement with relatives. These children are not captured as foster care, as this is not state custody of the child. Director Becketts comments here and discusses the kin-first, extended family preference of some referrals.
- Chair Martinez asks about the support given to family members caring for referred children. ADD Slaphey talks about non-cash assistance, supportive childcare assistance, in-home services, and mentions that there is a disparity of financial support relative to foster care. Director Becketts mentions that this is likely a \$30M cost to support these support families statewide.
- ADD Slaphey talks about the preference to avert the need for foster care through preventative care. CYF Prevention Services support a philosophy of supporting children. The Safe & Connected model, as well as the Onboarding Academy as ways to promote the goals of CYF.
- Director Becketts highlights prevention services as a way to build resilience. Fairfax County is remarkable for the low rates of children in foster care relative to its size and population. This is largely due to the overlapping organizations and collaboration between those groups. State of Virginia has been attempting to put together a child welfare academy, and Dir. Becketts has pushed forward a model for this public private partnership to accomplish this.
- Noah Abraham asks about cases of family reunions. ADD Slaphey clarifies that this is a requirement to attempt and a frequent occurrence.

### **Domestic and Sexual Violence Services – Child & Youth Wellbeing**

Toni Zollicoffer, Director, Domestic and Sexual Violence Services

- Thanked the board for the time and introduced DSVS, after nearly a year from the last discussion with the board. Between 36-40% of families engaged with child protective services had a history with domestic or sexual violence.
- Dir. Zollicoffer starts by defining gender-based violence, which covers a broad range of causes, impacts, and perpetrators. This is rooted in inequality and toxic norms of masculinity. Most of this is perpetrated by romantic partners and is related to disparities in power and justice.
- Discussing the Fairfax County coordinated response to domestic violence and stalking, highlighting the Lethality Assistance Program (since 2015). Step Up for Kids Coalition for supporting children that witness or experience DV. DV Network, Sexual Assault Response Team (SART), DV Fatality Review Team, Domestic Violence Action Center (DVAC), and Council to End Domestic Violence (CEDV) were discussed.
- Ben Zuhl asked about coordination with Red Flag laws. Dir. Zollicoffer describes those areas of collaboration, such as requirements to surrender firearms in some cases. Zuhl asked about recommendations to strengthen these, which will be an item for follow-up. One example of a weakness, there have been 1,388 calls, 376 arrests, and only 5 firearms surrendered as a result.
- For the first time since inception, CEDV will be led by three women. Dir. Zollicoffer highlights the diversity of DVS through a visual of the organization of 50 full time staff.
- Julian De Phillips asks about the hotline relative to “first responder” friends and family and what they can expect when calling. Dir. Zollicoffer states that the hotline could assist with some training and recommendations on what would be most helpful in those cases.
- Dir. Zollicoffer returns to discuss the Hospital Assistance program and partners supporting 10-15 victims per week for hospital exam support. Prevention is highlighted as a key area that is

difficult to quantify, as well as the risk to prevention programs in budget cuts due this. Six priorities and some program statistics were discussed in conclusion.

- Vice-Chair McGrath asked about arrest charges due to strangulation (increased), whether this is due to higher accountability or more cases. Dir. Zollicoffer believes violence has increased as a result of the pandemic and become more dangerous to survivors, and training with LEOs has increased around strangulation through partnerships.
- Noah Abraham asks about prevention of DV through awareness and outreach in this way. Dir. Zollicoffer talks about tabling events, religious group events, community partners, sororities and fraternities, Green Dot on campuses, open trainings, trainings on request.
- Dir. Zollicoffer closes with a story where a district court judge suggested that a victim “should talk to Advocacy first” before dropping a protection order. This victim and her family was protected and supported through this process until returning her and her family to her home with the abuser removed. 24-hour Domestic & Sexual Violence Hotline 703-360-7273

#### **Chair’s Announcements**

- December meeting date originally planned for December 20, 2023 must be rescheduled. Annual report content and business will be conducted via email. Recommend December 13, 2023, but a poll will be distributed to determine.
- Election for Chair and Vice Chair for 2024 in January.
- Strategic planning for 2024 on how to advise.

#### **District Items**

- Karen Darley mentions updates on the Victims Services Division holding their gift card drive for those that have lost loved ones.

#### **Adjourned:**

Meeting adjourned at 8:40 pm

#### **Next ASSB Meeting:**

Wednesday, December 13, 2023, 7:00 pm – 8:30 pm; Remote