

Advisory Social Services Board (ASSB)
Monday, December 11, 2023, 7:00pm
Electronic Meeting

MEETING NOTES

Attendees:

At-Large – Chairman’s Office, Noah Abraham
City of Fairfax, Andre Lee
Braddock District, Karen Darley
Franconia District, Latriece Prince-Wheeler
Mount Vernon District, Raymond McGrath, Vice Chair
Providence District, Laura Martinez, Chair
Sully District, Jose Garzon

Members Absent:

Dranesville District, Ben Zuhl
Hunter Mill District, Joe Koszarek
Mason District, Julian De Phillips, Secretary

Positions Vacant:

City of Falls Church
Springfield District

Staff Present:

Michael Becketts, DFS Director
Melanie Fenwick, Senior Manager for DFS Strategic Initiatives
Amy Carlini, DFS Communications Director

The meeting was held virtually. The public and members who could not access the Zoom platform could participate by dialing 888-270-9936 and entering conference code 371526.

Meeting Opening:

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

Approval of Minutes:

Minutes from the November 15 meeting were approved with one change to the Vice Chair's report under District Updates.

Director's Announcements:

Director Becketts reported that he was working with the Board of Supervisors staff to fill the remaining board vacancies. Mr. Becketts proposed that a New Member Orientation be held on Wednesday, February 7, 2024.

Director Becketts reported that the Virginia Office of the Children's Ombudsman had released its annual report; its top recommendation was to call on the Governor and General Assembly to focus attention on weaknesses in the area of court-appointed legal counsel to parents in child dependency cases. Mr. Becketts explained that with the release of the annual report DFS will now move ahead with a letter supporting the Ombudsman's proposal and highlighting the social costs of not addressing the program's shortcomings, including financial compensation to court-appointed lawyers. Mr. Becketts said that he hoped to have the letter finished by December 18 and that he would share it with the ASSB.

Annual Report:

DFS Communications Director Amy Carlini provided an update on the annual report with the following target timeline: January 17, provide report text to the ASSB for review; January 23, ASSB members' comment and edits due; February 9, the communications office provides Director Becketts with the fully formatted report; February 20, PDF version finalized. Director Becketts explained that if the ASSB wished for DFS to generate hard copies of the report, those could be ready by March 5.

The ASSB and DFS staff then discussed whether publishing hard copies of the report might promote wider distribution to the county community. Director Becketts said that seven months earlier he had established a program with the Board of Supervisors' district offices to provide them with electronic links to key documents for publication on Supervisors' websites and district newsletters. In response to a question from Noah Abraham, district staff explained that the electronic version of the report was translatable to 180 languages on the county website.

The ASSB and DFS staff discussed the Chair's cover letter, especially with respect to the issue of child welfare and custody cases in county courts. It was agreed that Mr. Becketts, Ms. Fenwick, and Ms. Carlini should focus on how to amplify the ASSB's court-related concerns, as might be expressed in the Chair's letter, in the annual report's section on child welfare. Mr. Abraham encouraged DFS and the ASSB to use the upcoming report to reiterate the concerns expressed in the previous annual report on the issue of affordable housing.

ASSB Elections:

Ms. Fenwick introduced the matter of annual elections for ASSB Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary. The floor was opened for nominees for Chair. Raymond McGrath nominated Laura Martinez for reelection to allow for her continued leadership of the anticipated ASSB Strategic Planning initiative proposed for the first half of 2024 (below). Ms. Martinez agreed to stand for reelection but also let Members know that other nominations were welcome. The vote for Chair will be held at the ASSB's January 2024 meeting.

Chair's Announcements:

Chair Martinez proposed that the ASSB turn its attention in the coming months to Strategic Planning. She reflected that for the past two to three years the ASSB had devoted most of its energy to gathering information about the social services needs of the county population and how the Department of Family Services helps to address those needs, but she believed it was time that the ASSB take a deeper look at how it could better serve the community and DFS. She explained that she understood from Director Becketts that a consultant might be available to help the ASSB consider its strategic role.

Director Becketts reported that DFS regularly works with consultants, one of whom had helped DFS craft its Strategic Framing Document and supported the Community Action Advisory Board. He said the consultant he has in mind does not simply provide off-the-shelf advice but instead helps organizations build out from where they are to define what they are trying to accomplish. He said she is wrapping up a project in January and so will probably be available. He could make money available from the Director's budget to fund a project.

Karen Darley, as the longest serving member, explained that historically the ASSB has focused most of its attention on hearing from the different DFS offices about what their tasks and what they had accomplished. She noted that as an advisory group the ASSB's role in defining and guiding policy change represented a gray area, but still a broader discussion about a possible evolving role for the ASSB seemed like a good next step.

Along with operational goal setting, Raymond McGrath suggested the need for the ASSB to strengthen its approach to community outreach, both to the general public and even to the Board of Supervisors, who to an extent lack awareness about the work of the ASSB and other Boards, Authorities and Commissions. Mr. Becketts suggested that one aspect of a strategic planning effort might be to survey other social services boards around Virginia to learn more about how they approach their work.

Jose Garzon asked about the timeframe for this process. Ms. Martinez and Mr. Becketts said the process of engaging and planning could begin as early as February 2024. It would be good to align the ASSB's strategic planning schedule with the county's broader work on three strategic plans. Mr. Becketts said the time is ripe for this initiative and that he would pull

together a proposal so that the ASSB could think through the body of work to discharge its duties.

District Updates:

None

Adjourned:

Meeting adjourned at 8:15pm

Next ASSB meeting:

Wednesday, January 17, 2024, 7:00 pm-8:30pm