

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

January 24, 2025

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children’s Justice Act programs was held virtually on January 24, 2025.

Members Present

Randy Bonds
Jackie Robinson Brock
Judge Eugene Butler
Shamika Byars
Morgan Cox
Davy Fearon
Katharine Hunter
Sandy Karison
Jeannine Panzera
Giselle Pelaez
Pat Popp, Vice-Chair
Eric Reynolds
Lora Smith (for Shannon Hartung)
Judge Thomas Sotelo, Chair

Members Not Present

Lana Mullins
Ashley Thompson

Guests

Rachel Miller (VDSS Staff to the Citizen Review Panel)
Jeff Williams (VDOE)

Staff Present

McKayla Burnett
Jenna Foster
Laurel Marks
Melissa O’Neill
Terry Willie-Surratt

- I. **Call to Order:** Judge Thomas Sotelo, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM. Members introduced themselves.
- II. **Approval of Minutes:** The committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the October 25, 2024, meeting. Shamika Byars made a motion to approve the minutes and Randy Bonds provided the second. The motion was approved with Sandy Karison and Davy Fearon abstaining.
- III. **Conflicts of Interest and Financial Disclosure Reminder:** The committee was reminded that as members they are required to complete annual financial disclosure statements. Members should have received emails with instructions for completing the forms. Additionally, every two years, members must complete the Conflict of Interest Act training. Those members required to complete the training this year will be notified.
- IV. **General Assembly Session: Presentation of Bills of Interest**
DCJS and members of the committee reported on bills of interest introduced during the 2025 General Assembly session regarding the investigation, prosecution and judicial handling of child abuse cases.
- V. **Presentation of Licensed Childcare Updates**
Jeff Williams, Director of Child Care Health and Safety at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), gave a presentation to the Advisory Committee outlining the responsibility of VDOE around licensing childcare facilities across the Commonwealth. In cases of alleged abuse or neglect, VDOE collaborates with the local Department of Social Services (DSS) and law enforcement during investigations. The DCJS Child Death Investigation Protocol (CDIP) training will be modified to include a section on childcare-related deaths and VDOE's role in their investigation as part of the Unsafe Sleep section.
- VI. **Presentation of Human Trafficking MDT Mandate**
McKayla Burnett, State Trafficking Response Coordinator at DCJS, gave a presentation on the mandate to establish Human Trafficking Multi-Disciplinary Teams across the state. The new mandate, which went into effect on July 1, 2024, requires the team to meet at least once annually, and that the DCJS State Trafficking Coordinator or their designee be invited to at least one Human Trafficking MDT annually in each locality. She shared details about the training and resources created by the DCJS Human Trafficking team.
- VII. **CJA Program Update:** The CASA/CJA Advisory Committee was provided with a written report prior to the meeting detailing significant activities of the CJA program this quarter. The following additional updates were provided:
 - a. Discussion related to the current MDT training provided by the Virginia MDT Stakeholder Group (convened and facilitated by DCJS) and the future enhancements of training content to better support developing MDTs throughout the Commonwealth.
 - b. An MDT locality-specific contact list is being developed now and will be updated annually based on self-reported information.
 - c. The mandatory CJA Grantees Meeting will be held on March 31, 2025, in Bethesda, Maryland.

VIII. CASA Program Update: The CASA/CJA Advisory Committee was provided with a written report prior to the meeting detailing significant activities of the CASA program this quarter. The following additional updates were provided:

- a. A budget amendment of \$161,500 was submitted for the CASA programs in response to the findings of the CASA Expansion Study report.
- b. In December 2024, the National CASA Association issued an updated set of standards for local programs, marking the fourth revision in seven years.

IX. Citizen Review Panel: Prior to the meeting, committee members received copies of the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) response that was provided to the Citizen Review Panel’s 2024 recommendations in accordance with the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). They also received a copy of the 2024 recommendations to prepare for discussions on potential revisions for 2025.

Members discussed initial recommendations and will submit additional suggestions to Melissa O’Neill before the next meeting for consideration. Recommendations must be finalized at the April meeting.

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

XI. Adjourn: Pat Popp made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Giselle Pelaez provided the second. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 12:03 PM.

Next meeting dates:

Friday April 25, 2025
Friday July 25, 2025 – Virtual