

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

MEETING MINUTES

January 23, 2009

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held on Friday, January 23, 2009, at the Richmond Police Training Academy in Richmond, Virginia.

Members Present

Lauren Caudill  
Ruth Anne Cutright  
A. Michael Hall  
Cliff Harrison  
Nan McKenney  
Darby Lowe  
Claudette Overton  
Stephen Rideout

Members Not Present

Michelle Clayton  
Shawn Schwertfeger

Staff Present

Fran Ecker  
Laurel Marks  
Melissa O'Neill  
Hope Hodgson  
Denise Marks

Staff Not Present

Roz Trent

- I. **Call to Order and Approval of Minutes** – A. Michael Hall called the meeting to order at 10:16 a.m. Members of the committee introduced themselves to each other. The minutes of the last meeting were reviewed. Nan McKenney motioned to approve the minutes and Lauren Caudill seconded. With no objections, the minutes were unanimously approved.
- II. **DCJS Organizational Update – Fran Ecker:** Ms. Ecker gave a brief update on the re-organization of DCJS and reviewed some of the responsibilities that the agency holds. Ms. Ecker also spoke about DCJS's relocation which will tentatively take place the first weekend in March. The reorganization is "planned" to happen concurrently with the move. She asked the committee if they had any questions regarding the reorganization and some discussion took place.

**III. Citizen's Review Panel – Nan McKenney, Virginia Department of Social Services** – Nan McKenney explained to the newest members her purpose on the committee. She explained that they are in the process of doing some things with the Child Protective Services program. A draft of the Child and Family Services Review has been complete and they expect to submit it to the Feds in March. More data upon which they will make case review selections in should be submitted in July. Ms. McKenney requested input from the committee for the Program Improvement Plan which develops services for children and family (safety and permanency). Ms. McKenney provided public comment to CPS regulations to the committee and advised that they will be effective March 4, 2009. She also reported that there was not much interest in CPS specific legislation this year and that very few bills were being introduced. She did note one thing of interest - a bill to repeal a section of the code (63.2) related to CPS to repeal the requirement for an annual report to the general assembly for Differential Response System. (Hope – I had a note here to see you if needed. Please let me know if something should be added. I also missed what specific bill she was speaking about because lunches were being delivered.) Ms. McKenney provided the committee with handouts including a Child Abuse and Neglect in Virginia report from July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008 and commented on it briefly. Committee members did have questions regarding how many of the calls are screened out. Ms. McKenney indicated that the numbers on the handout reflected actual calls to the toll free hotline and not just “complaints”. She also indicated that she will e-mail her findings showing how many were screened-in and how many were screen-out with decisions regarding those that were accepted. Several questions were asked from the committee of Ms. McKenney and discussion took place regarding these.

**IV. CJA Program Update:**

- Legislation: Melissa O'Neill gave the committee a handout regarding bills that have been introduced by Legislation that might be of interest to them and discussion took place regarding some of these.
- Improving Investigation and Prosecution of Child Abuse – Hope Hodgson reported on the October conference and let the committee know that we have 100+ in attendance. She also reported that the overall evaluations seemed to be better than May. We believe this might have been because Cassandra Conyers joined Nancy Lamb to go over the Virginia Law perspective, Crawford vs. Washington, etc., as the Advisory Committee had recommended.
- CAC Needs Assessment - Anatomical dolls were shipped to all programs that had a need with 2 families per agency. (Hope – How many were actually mailed?)
- Finding Words – Hope Hodgson reported that we had planned to hold this training in July, 2007, but we did not get enough appropriate applications. With lack of numbers we decided to only go with the September training which took place at the Chesterfield Police Training Center. Evaluations from

this training were good. A conference call will take place with faculty for 2009 trainings. Other trainings and professional development scholarships are being worked on as well.

- Review Three Year Plan: Hope Odgson opened the floor to questions and discussion took place regarding the document. Mike Hall recommended using some of the federal dollars to assist with training (reduction for cost of conferences, etc.) I had the following note “Judge Rideout mention ??? regarding #5” but can’t remember what it was about. Can one of you help me?

**V. CASA Program Update:** Expansion for CASA has been low (with DSS support, constituent support, etc.), but not from Judges. Discussion took place regarding this. It appears that judges seem to feel GAL’s serve the purpose. **Melissa – should this stay on?**

- Regulations - Regulations were finalized on October 29, 2008 and will be posted to our website shortly. Copies are available on our website – if not there now, they should be within a few days.
- COMET Standardization – All CASA staff are using VA COMET (special standardized database to track statistics to coincide with the National level). A step-by-step users guide is being created. A meeting took place this week to review about one half of the users guide and the next meeting should take place in February. Ms. O’Neill will test the database once the training is complete.
- Governor’s Budget – CASA did sustain a reduction of slightly under 10% (\$158,000.00) for 2009/2010.
- CASA Conference – The 2008 CASA Conference was a great success with 275+ attendees. Evaluations achieved “Excellent” and “Good” comments. The First Lady provided a welcoming address that fit with the keynote speaker.
- Case Studies Training – An in-depth volunteer training took place regionally across state. Another event is planned for February 28, 2009 in Southwest Virginia.
- Council on Report – We are continuing to participate on this with the Dept. of Social Services
- Guidance Policies – Confidentiality and Information Sharing issues. The next step is for Melissa O’Neill to meet with Lelia Hopper to craft some language (at the discretion of the Judge) onto the Court Order stating that if the Judge chooses, a confidentiality agreement can be made between CASA and DSS (not just GAL’s).
- Appropriate roles and boundaries for CASA Volunteers – Discussion took place regarding what is the appropriate role. Possibly issuing a guidance document to show this. Ms. O’Neill will create a template for the committee to review and give advise. Judge Rideout suggested the “what not to do” approach rather than the “what to do” so people will be allowed to “think outside the box”.
- Background Checks/Screenings, etc. - National CASA is changing their standards related to background checks and screens for volunteers (more stringent). This may require Social Security number verification. Discussion took place as to whether Virginia has been maintaining this information.

- VI. By-Laws Revision:** Melissa provided a handout to the committee which was reviewed and showed noted changes. Cliff Harrison made a motion that the bylaws be accepted and Lauren Caudill seconded. Mike Hall made some recommendations regarding some of the wordage and about the Citizen's Review Panel being part of it. The role of CJA is broad enough to encompass this. Cliff Harrison motioned that Melissa review this and bring recommendations to the next meeting. Discussion took place regarding minor changes and Cliff Harrison motion to accept it with changes and Lauren Caudill seconded. The committee then unanimously approved.
- VII. New Busienss:** No new business.
- VIII. Adjourn:** There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 1:23. Mike Hall motioned to adjourn, and Lauren Caudill seconded. The next meeting is scheduled for April 3, 2009.