



## **Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act Programs**

### **AGENDA**

#### **In-Person Meeting**

Virginia Department of Social Services  
5600 Cox Road, Glen Allen, VA 23060  
York River Room, 111B

October 24, 2025  
10:00 AM – 12:00 PM

- 1. Welcome, Roll Call and Introduction of Guests**
- 2. Review and Approval of July 25, 2025, Minutes**
- 3. Presentation of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman Annual Report** – Eric Reynolds,  
Director, Office of the Children's Ombudsman
- 4. CJA Program Update**
- 5. CASA Program Update**
  - Guidance Policy Review
- 6. Citizen Review Panel**
  - Review Virginia Department of Social Services Response to 2025 CASA/CJA Advisory  
Committee Citizen Review Panel Recommendations
- 7. Adjournment**

## DRAFT

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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.

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

July 25, 2025

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held virtually on July 25, 2025.

#### Members Present

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

#### Members Not Present

Morgan Cox  
Lana Mullins

#### Guests

Rachel Miller (VDSS)  
Gracie Dougherty (University of Richmond Law Student Intern, Office of the Children's Ombudsman)  
CJ Morgan (University of Richmond Law Student Intern, Office of the Children's Ombudsman)

#### Staff Present

Jessica Carter  
Melissa O'Neill  
Terry Willie-Surratt

- I. Call to Order:** Judge Thomas Sotelo, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM. All present introduced themselves.

- II. Approval of Minutes:** The committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the April 25, 2025, meeting. Melissa O'Neill noted Eric Reynolds was not listed as having attended. Davey Fearon made a motion to approve the minutes as amended, and Katharine Hunter provided the second. The motion was approved with Randy Bonds abstaining.
- III. Nominations Committee Election of Chair and Vice-Chair:** Jeannine Panzera and Eric Reynolds agreed to serve as the Nominations Committee during the April 25, 2025, meeting. Eric Reynolds presented a slate of officers for the next two years to include Judge Thomas Sotelo as Chair and Pat Popp as Vice Chair. Judge Sotelo asked if there were any nominations from the floor and hearing none, Judge Sotelo asked for a vote to approve the nominations as presented. The motion was carried unanimously.
- IV. Set Meeting Dates for the Upcoming Year:** Committee members established the following meeting dates for the upcoming year:
- Friday October 24, 2025**  
**Friday January 23, 2026 - Virtual**  
**Friday April 24, 2026**  
**Friday July 24, 2026 – Virtual**
- V. CASA Program Update:** The committee was previously provided with a written update regarding the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program. The following additional updates were discussed.
- Virginia Case Studies Pre-Service Training Curriculum:** Committee members received a presentation on the Virginia Case Studies Pre-Service Training Curriculum. The presentation provided details on the collaboration between DCJS and the State Leadership Team's training committee in their efforts to update and revitalize the curriculum. Additional information was provided on the next steps for rolling out the revised curriculum statewide, including regional Training of Facilitator events.
- CASA Program Guidance Policy Review:** Committee members were provided with a copy of the current CASA/CJA Advisory Committee CASA Program Guidance Policies in advance of the meeting. Committee members reviewed the policies during the meeting, discussed potential updates that may be needed, and will continue the discussion at the next meeting.
- VI. CJA Program Update:** The CASA/CJA Advisory Committee was provided with a written report detailing significant activities of the CJA program this quarter. Committee members noted the staffing change with Jenna Foster, CJA Program Coordinator who has left the position to take another position within DCJS. Committee members recognized her excellent work as the CJA Program Coordinator and wished her well in her new position.
- VII. Citizen Review Panel Presentation:** Laurie Crawford, Director of the Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy at the Virginia Department of Social Services, provided a

presentation to the committee. She addressed specific 2025 Citizen Review Panel recommendations, including the development and integration of best practices from the Science of Hope framework in work with children and families. Ms. Crawford also shared the department's workforce retention efforts aimed at supporting staff and improving worker retention.

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

**IX. Adjourn:** Pat Popp made a motion to adjourn the meeting, and Davey Fearon provided the second. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 11:57 AM.

**Next meeting dates:**

**Friday October 24, 2025**

**Friday January 23, 2026 - Virtual**

**Friday April 24, 2026**

**Friday July 24, 2026 – Virtual**

# **Report to the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee**

**October 24, 2025 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.**

## ***Children’s Justice Act (CJA)***

**Prepared by Jenna L. Foster**

### **I. Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Statewide Membership Database**

The initial call for participation in the MDT Statewide Database received an enthusiastic response, with over 250 individuals submitting their information. Staff are currently reviewing and analyzing the submissions to assess the breadth of MDT representation across the Commonwealth. As part of this process, they are identifying geographic regions where no individuals have been reported as serving in any MDT-related role, which will help inform targeted outreach and support efforts moving forward.

### **II. Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Trainings**

The first in-person *MDT Good to Great* training was successfully held on September 9th in Danville, drawing participation from a diverse group of multidisciplinary team members across the region. The session focused on strengthening team collaboration, enhancing case coordination, and sharing best practices for MDT effectiveness. The next training is scheduled for October 28th in Tappahannock, serving the Eastern Shore and surrounding areas. Additional *MDT 101* and *Good to Great* trainings are being planned for early 2026.

Good to Great: Enhancing MDT Effectiveness and Functioning (In Person)

Tappahannock, VA - Tue, 10/28/2025 - 10:00am – 4:00pm

Good to Great (in-person) Registration: <https://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/training-events/good-great-enhancing-mdt-effectiveness-and-functioning>

### **III. Children’s Justice Act Priority Area – Children with Disabilities**

The CJA program is actively exploring existing systems and resources that support children with varying disabilities who are suspected victims of child abuse or neglect. This includes identifying current services, programs, and partnerships that provide specialized care or advocacy for this vulnerable population. In addition, the program is seeking comprehensive information on how cases involving children with disabilities or serious health-related conditions are currently assessed and investigated. The goal is to better understand existing practices, identify potential gaps, and find opportunities for the CJA program to support this vulnerable population.

# **Report to the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee**

**October 24, 2025, 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.**

## ***Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Programs***

**Prepared by: Melissa O'Neill, CASA Coordinator - DCJS**

### **I. CASA Network State Leadership Team Updates**

The CASA Network State Leadership Team (SLT) is a partnership between the CASA Network and DCJS. DCJS participates on some but not all the committees. DCJS facilitated one meeting of the SLT during this reporting period.

The following is a highlight of accomplishments of the SLT committees during this reporting period.

#### **A. Training Committee**

The Virginia Case Studies Pre-Service Curriculum Training of Facilitators will begin with a virtual kick-off session scheduled for December 5, 2025. This initial session will be followed by a series of regionally based, in-person two-day training events to be conducted at three designated locations across the Commonwealth throughout the month of January. To support the effective implementation of the curriculum and to foster the development of a cohesive cohort of participating programs, additional follow-up sessions will be delivered virtually. DCJS is currently accepting registrations from local programs and anticipates that between 12 and 16 programs will participate in the Training of Facilitators sessions.

The Training Committee completed the development and approval of the CASA College Advo-Chat training series for Fiscal Year 2026. The series will include sessions addressing emerging substance use trends specific to Virginia, the implications of prenatal substance exposure on child and family well-being, and best practices in educational advocacy within special education systems. Additional sessions will focus on trauma-informed strategies for engaging families and effective communication techniques for interacting with children who have experienced trauma.

The CASA College hosted a CASA Conversation meeting for program staff on September 11, 2025, focused on updates from the 2025 General Assembly session, with an emphasis on legislation impacting child welfare. An additional session is scheduled for October 28, 2025, featuring representatives from

Anthem who will provide information on the new healthcare plan for youth in foster care.

B. Data Committee

The Data Committee convened during this reporting period and is currently focused on the development of a judicial survey for local programs. The survey template will be utilized by local programs to gain feedback and assess judicial satisfaction with CASA program operations, as perceived by the judges served by each program.

The CASA Manager User Group (CMUG) met twice during the reporting period. DCJS continues to monitor technical support requests from local programs regarding CASA Manager. The CASA Manager company has new owners. Services have not been disrupted. Overall, there are not any major technical issues or trends noted.

C. Marketing Committee

The SLT Marketing Committee is currently seeking additional leadership to help advance the committee's initiatives. This topic will be included on the agenda for discussion at the upcoming Network Retreat in November.

D. Legislative Committee

The Legislative Committee is chaired by a local CASA program director and meets monthly. The committee monitors state and federal legislation of impact to the CASA programs.

II. Annual Judicial Conference of Virginia for District Courts

DCJS was pleased once again to serve as an exhibitor on behalf of the CASA programs at the annual Judicial Conference of Virginia District Courts held in October 2025. This engagement provided a valuable opportunity to connect with judges from juvenile and domestic relations district courts who currently partner with CASA programs, as well as those exploring the potential for program development. Feedback from judges overwhelmingly reflected deep appreciation for the dedication of CASA volunteers and the objectivity and value of the reports submitted to the court.

III. Network Support Meetings

DCJS facilitated three CASA Network Support meetings and three New Director Support calls using virtual technology during this reporting period. These meetings assist local programs with navigating program operations and management concerns.

#### IV. Funding Formula Focus Groups

A key recommendation from the CASA Expansion Study was to review the current CASA funding formula. In response, DCJS examined the existing formula and conducted a comparative analysis of funding models utilized in other states. To gather additional stakeholder input, DCJS will host a series of virtual focus groups with local CASA programs in October, organized by program size and type. Upon completion, the findings will be compiled into a report for review by the State Leadership Team and the Advisory Committee.

#### V. CASA Regulatory Revision

The approved draft of the proposed changes to the CASA regulations is pending review by the Attorney General's office.



# **CASA/CJA Advisory Committee Guidance Policies for Court Appointed Special Advocate Programs**

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services  
Division of Programs and Services  
1100 Bank Street, Richmond Virginia 23219  
804-239-0473

*The following guidance documents were developed and approved by the Court Appointed Special Advocate/Children's Justice Act (CASA/CJA) Advisory Committee. The CASA/CJA Advisory Committee advises the Department of Criminal Justice Services and its Board on matters related to the CASA program. The Guidance Policies are not binding on local CASA programs but, rather, are intended as guidance on topics that are not articulated in the Code or regulations. Local programs are encouraged to consult with their attorneys if they have questions about interpretation or application of the Code of Virginia.*

## I. Appropriate Roles and Activities for CASA Volunteers

The *Code of Virginia* states the following regarding the duties to Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) who have been appointed to a case:

### **§ 9.1-153. Volunteer court-appointed special advocates; powers and duties; assignment; qualifications; training.**

- A. Services in each local court-appointed special advocate program shall be provided by volunteer court-appointed special advocates, hereinafter referred to as advocates. The advocate's duties shall include:
1. Investigating the case to which he is assigned to provide independent factual information to the court.
  2. Submitting to the court of a written report of his investigation in compliance with the provisions of § 16.1-274. The report may, upon request of the court, include recommendations as to the child's welfare.
  3. Monitoring the case to which he is assigned to ensure compliance with the court's orders.
  4. Assisting any appointed guardian ad litem to represent the child in providing effective representation of the child's needs and best interests.
  5. Reporting a suspected abused or neglected child pursuant to § 63.1-248.3.

CASA volunteer case activities should be linked to one of the five codified duties described above. If the activity is not directly related to performing one of these duties, the volunteer should not engage in the activity. Examples of inappropriate activities include:

- taking the child shopping;
- arranging for outings to events such as the circus or ballgames;
- giving gifts to the child or family (beyond what has been authorized by the CASA Program); and
- providing for basic needs of the family.

CASA volunteers are not assigned as mentors and should not function as such. If a child needs a mentor, this should be included in the recommendations section of the CASA report.

Further, CASA volunteers should not engage in providing direct services to children or families. The regulations state: **6VAC20-160-80(B)** *CASA volunteers should not become inappropriately involved in the case by providing direct service delivery to any parties that could (i) lead to conflict of interest or liability or (ii) cause a child or family to become dependent on the CASA volunteer for services that should be provided by other agencies or organizations.*

Examples of direct services include:

- providing supervised visitation;
- conducting home studies;
- providing tutorial services; and
- providing transportation to appointments.

In accordance with 6VAC20-160-40, each local CASA program shall have policies and procedures that direct the activities of CASA volunteers and provide for effective volunteer supervision to minimize potential risk management concerns. Programs are required to adhere to the sections of the *Code of Virginia*, state regulations, and local program policies that govern CASA volunteer activities, responsibilities and roles.

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## **II. The Use of CASA Volunteers in Circuit Court**

### **CASES ON APPEAL FROM THE JUVENILE AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS DISTRICT COURT**

When cases are appealed to the Circuit Court from the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court and CASA has been appointed in the Juvenile Court proceedings, CASA volunteers may be re-appointed by the Circuit Court. CASA programs cannot accept the case unless a formal appointment has been made with a new court order that is signed by the Circuit Court judge.

### **CASES THAT ORIGINATE IN CIRCUIT COURT**

Unless it is a juvenile court case on appeal, a Circuit Court order of appointment is not valid because the *Code* does not give a Circuit Court judge authority to appoint CASA volunteers except on cases that have been appealed from the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. Circuit court judges are granted all powers and authority of the juvenile and domestic relations district court in cases of appeal [§ 16.1-296(I)].

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

### III. A Confidentiality and Information Sharing

1. CASA volunteers have access to records and information related to the child upon presentation of a valid court order of appointment. Va. Code §9.1-156(A).
2. CASA volunteers may share with the Guardian ad litem information gathered on the child. Va. Code § 9.1-153 (A)(4).
3. In order to have access to any records or information related to a child's parent or guardian or any other individual, the CASA volunteer must obtain an authorization for the release of information signed by that parent or guardian or other individual. Further, if the CASA volunteer intends to share that information outside of the official court report, the release of information form must specifically state with whom this information may be shared. Authorizations for the disclosure of health records and information, including mental health records, must comply with the provisions of 45 C.F.R. § 164.508, under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ("HIPAA").

*CASA volunteers must encourage the child's parent, guardian to consult with counsel prior to signing releases of information.*

4. CASA volunteers may attend and participate in collaborative meetings as defined in the *Code of Virginia* in § [9.1-153](#)(C). Further, in § [9.1-156](#)(B), the *Code of Virginia* states the following:

*An advocate shall not disclose the contents of any document or record to which he becomes privy, which is otherwise confidential pursuant to the provisions of this Code, except (i) upon order of a court of competent jurisdiction or (ii) if the advocate has been assigned pursuant to subsection C of § [9.1-153](#) to attend and participate in family partnership meetings as defined by the Department of Social Services or in meetings of family assessment and planning teams established pursuant to § [2.2-5208](#), multidisciplinary child sexual abuse response teams established pursuant to § [15.2-1627.5](#), individualized education program teams established pursuant to Article 2 (§ [22.1-213](#) et seq.) of Chapter 13 of Title 22.1, or multidisciplinary teams established pursuant to §§ [63.2-1503](#) and [63.2-1505](#), the advocate may verbally disclose any information contained in such document or record related to the child to which he is assigned at such meetings, provided that such information shall not be disclosed further.*

CASA volunteers may attend and participate in Family Partnership Meetings, Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) meetings, Individualized Education Program (IEP) team meetings, or Multidisciplinary Child Sexual Abuse Response team meetings.

The following guidance is offered when CASA volunteers attend and participate in these specified meetings.

### **Applies to all meetings:**

- CASA volunteers shall follow the guidance and policies provided by the entity convening the meeting.
- The *Code of Virginia* allows CASA volunteers to share information regarding the child only.
  - If a release of information is signed to permit the CASA volunteer to share information on a parent or guardian, then the CASA volunteer may share that information (see #5).
- Confidentiality must be maintained and CASA volunteers must not share information learned in one meeting at another meeting (i.e., information learned at a MDT is not shared at an IEP meeting).
- CASA volunteers may orally disclose information from direct observations and information learned through the course of CASA appointment.
- CASA volunteers may not share or distribute records.
- CASA volunteers should proactively share information that is in the best interest of the child at meetings.
  - CASA volunteers should consider sharing information that is additive, exceptional and necessary, taking care to remain within the duties outlined within the *Code of Virginia* for CASA volunteers.
- CASA volunteers should include the following information from meetings attended in CASA court reports:
  - Date of the meeting
  - Participants
  - Decisions made and outcomes of the meeting.

### **Family Partnership Meetings (FPM)**

CASA volunteers should become familiar with the [Virginia Department of Social Services Child and Family Services Manual, Section A Practice Foundations, Chapter 2](#). This section explains Family Partnership Meetings.

### **Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT)**

- When a child assigned to a CASA volunteer is referred to a FAPT, the CASA volunteer may attend and participate in the meeting.
- CASA volunteers should adhere to the confidentiality requirements for FAPT meetings found in the [Code of Virginia](#).

### **Multidisciplinary Child Sexual Abuse Response Teams (MDT)**

- CASA programs should evaluate the purpose of CASA participation in MDTs. CASA volunteers are prohibited by regulation (6VAC20-160-60(C)) from inquiring about any precipitating incident of abuse or neglect. Therefore, CASA volunteers should not be involved in any aspect of the investigatory phase of a child abuse case.

### **Individualized Education Program (IEP)**

- The *Code of Virginia* allows volunteers to access student records without parental consent. They may also fully participate in IEP team meetings.

- The *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act state that, at the discretion of the parent(s) or local education agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel can be invited to an IEP team meeting. This determination can be made by the parent or the local school division as defined by 8VAC20-81-10. Thus, in order for CASA volunteers to participate in an IEP team meeting, they must be invited by either the parent or the school division.
- School divisions must comply with the Family Educational Records Protection Act (FERPA) in the protection of disclosure of personally identifying information including in an IEP meeting. If a CASA volunteer is not invited, it may be that the school division was not able to obtain parental consent or was not able to identify an appropriate exception to FERPA.

5. CASA programs are encouraged to obtain release of information forms to allow for the sharing of information with the Department of Social Services. A sample release of information form is distributed with this guidance policy. Programs are also advised to address specific needs of local agencies related to information sharing as they arise.

6. Programs are advised to not disclose documents and records obtained during the investigation except as provided in paragraph #2 and #3 above.

7. CASA programs must adhere to the Code when distributing CASA Court Reports. The Code of Virginia states the following regarding the distribution of CASA Reports:

***§ 16.1-274. Time for filing of reports; copies furnished to attorneys; amended reports; fees.***

*A. Whenever any court directs an investigation pursuant to subsection A of § [16.1-237](#), § [16.1-273](#), or § [9.1-153](#), or an evaluation pursuant to § [16.1-278.5](#), the probation officer, court-appointed special advocate, or other agency conducting such investigation shall file such report with the clerk of the court directing the investigation. The clerk shall furnish a copy of such report to all attorneys representing parties in the matter before the court no later than seventy-two hours, and in cases of child custody, 15 days, prior to the time set by the court for hearing the matter. If such probation officer or other agency discovers additional information or a change in circumstance after the filing of the report, an amended report shall be filed forthwith and a copy sent to each person who received a copy of the original report. Whenever such a report is not filed or an amended report is filed, the court shall grant such continuance of the proceedings as justice requires. All attorneys receiving such report or amended report shall return such to the clerk upon the conclusion of the hearing and shall not make copies of such report or amended report or any portion thereof. However, the chief judge of each juvenile and domestic relations district court may provide for an alternative means of copying and distributing reports or amended reports filed pursuant to § [9.1-153](#).*

This particular Code section allows the chief judge to provide for an alternate means of distribution of court reports. If a CASA program is going to engage in an alternate means of distribution of CASA reports, CASA programs should obtain approval for this distribution policy in writing from the Chief Judge of the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court. Further, as this subsection of the Code indicates, copies of the reports can only be distributed to attorneys and any alternative distribution plan should be inclusive of all parties involved in the case.

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## Court Appointed Special Advocate Program

Anytown Road • Happy Place, Virginia 22345

Phone(903) 343-0000 •

Email: info@greatcasa.org

### Consent to the Release of confidential Information

#### 1. INDIVIDUAL CONFIRMING THE AUTHORIZATION

Full Legal Name

Date of Birth

#### 2. THE USE AND/OR DISCLOSURE AUTHORIZED

I authorize CASA

Volunteer's Name

to use, disclose, and/or exchange my protected information received from any state or local agency, department, authority or institution, school, physician, public or private mental health provider, hospital, current and/or previous employer, *CASA Program Services Board*, and court-referred programs and services. I understand that this disclosure may be verbal and/or written. I give this authorization voluntarily.

Purpose for disclosures and/or exchanges: To assist in preparing court reports and monitoring the Court Order.

In order to assist the CASA volunteer in his/her work with other agencies that may be involved with me, and to assist the Court in making decisions regarding my child's case, I authorize the CASA volunteer and/or *CASA Program* to re-disclose this information to:

       the Court             the G.A.L. for my child(ren)             Dept. of Social Services

       my attorney             Other: \_\_\_\_\_

       I also authorize the CASA volunteer and CASA to release to the persons, providers, and agencies, which I have identified above, information known to the CASA volunteer about me and/or my family, which the CASA volunteer and/or CASA decides will help these persons, providers, and agencies in providing services to me and my family.

**I understand that my records are protected under federal and state confidentiality laws and regulations and cannot be disclosed without my written consent unless otherwise stated in the laws and regulations.**

### **3. ENDING AUTHORIZATION AND/OR CHANGING YOUR MIND ABOUT THIS INFORMATION**

I further acknowledge that the information to be released was fully explained to me and that this consent is given of my own free will. This consent includes information to be placed on my records after execution of this release form as well as past and current records obtained by the CASA volunteer. I also understand that I have the right to revoke this consent at any time, but that my revocation is not effective until delivered in writing to the person who is in possession of my records. The revocation would not include records or information previously disclosed. If not previously revoked, it is my understanding that this consent will expire one year from the date of signing.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian (*in case of minor*)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Parent/Guardian (*in case of minor*)

## **IV. Request for Home Visits -from Other States**

### **Background**

CASA programs throughout Virginia are sometimes asked to provide home visits (courtesy home visits) and case related assistance to children who are placed in Virginia from other states for out of state programs.

### **Guidance**

CASA staff and volunteers have no authority to investigate any matter other than those that have been assigned by a Virginia court of competent jurisdiction. Accordingly, CASA Programs in Virginia are advised to decline requests for courtesy home visits. Procedures under the Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC), administered by the Virginia Department of Social Services, govern accessing such a service. Further, CASA staff and volunteers in Virginia cannot operate in an official capacity in any matter without a valid court order. A court order from another state will not suffice as a valid court order for CASA appointment. There is considerable concern for the liability of CASA programs, volunteers and staff when engaging in the practice of providing such visits.

### **Resources**

The Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services, through the Division of Family Services, is responsible for approving and monitoring interstate placements of children. For further information about a specific state's procedures, requirements, interpretations and ICPC applications, email [vaicpcoffice@dss.virginia.gov](mailto:vaicpcoffice@dss.virginia.gov) or call 804-489-0591. Additional information on the Virginia ICPC program can be found by accessing information at Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children [website](#).

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## V. The Use of CASA Volunteers in Custody Related Cases

The use of CASA volunteers in Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court custody cases is an acceptable practice if there are allegations of abuse and neglect. CASA programs are encouraged to only accept appointments to custody cases if a Guardian ad litem has also been appointed. Local programs should ensure that all cases will comply with the *Code of Virginia*, § 9.1-151 (A) which states “*The Program shall provide services in accordance with this article to children who are subjects of judicial proceedings involving allegations that the child is abused, neglected, in need of services or in need of supervision, and for whom the juvenile and domestic relations district court judge determines such services are appropriate.*”

A case that involves allegations that the child is abused, neglected, in need of services or in need of supervision, may include one or more of the following:

1. There is a past valid complaint of abuse or neglect which identifies a primary caregiver of the child as the perpetrator.
2. There is a current complaint which has been referred to or is being investigated or undergoing a family assessment by the local Department of Social Services.
3. There is information presented during the court process which would indicate that the child may be abused or neglected, including emotional abuse.
4. The child appears to be in need of services or supervision which are not currently being provided.

Local Programs are encouraged to develop written policies and protocols in consultation with the Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court Judge(s) on the acceptance of CASA appointments to custody related cases. These policies and protocols should address the following issues:

1. Criteria the program will use to define what constitutes an “allegation of abuse or neglect” and how this criteria will be documented in the court record
2. As identified in the Rules and Regulations governing CASA programs, policies should be in place which articulate the priority of acceptance of cases assigned to CASA volunteers.
3. A Guardian ad litem will be appointed to the case to represent the best legal interest of the child.

Finally, local CASA programs must remain cognizant of funding sources which will not fund activities which are not related to abuse and neglect cases (i.e. Victims of Crime Act funding will only fund cases when the child is identified as a victim of child abuse or neglect).

For VOCA funding eligibility, funds must be used for direct services to victims of child abuse and neglect. Examples of eligible victim groups are:

- Children who have been identified by local departments of social services as victims of child abuse and neglect.
- Children who have been referred to local departments of social services as possible victims of child abuse and neglect if the referral results in an investigation or family assessment (must be determined a valid complaint).
- Children identified by the court as a victim of abuse or neglect.

Programs must evaluate the numbers of children served and the ability of the program to fund such services.

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## **VI. Managing Staff Vacancies in CASA Programs**

The regulations require that programs provide one full time equivalent supervisor for every 30 volunteers actively assigned to cases. When a vacancy occurs in a program, particularly if it is sudden, this can be problematic for local programs. The following suggestions are offered to serve as a guide for local programs to manage this transition effectively and to maintain compliance with the regulations.

- In programs where there is only one staff person, the local program is encouraged to adopt a policy that requires a minimum of 30 days' notice before a resignation or retirement.
- Local programs are encouraged to engage in succession planning to establish procedures that will allow for an efficient and timely hiring process.
- If there is a vacancy and the hiring process does not get completed prior to the staff member's departure, the Executive Committee of the operating Board of Directors should consider the following:
  1. Notify the Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS) immediately of any pending staffing changes.
  2. If existing staff is insufficient to accommodate the need, cease to accept any new referrals.
  3. Explore the potential of recruiting an experienced volunteer who could manage a portion of the supervisory responsibilities during the interim.
  4. Meet with the judge to discuss the status of the program, particularly the timeline for hiring a new staff member.
  5. If the program is structured under an umbrella agency, consider utilizing other staff members to serve on an interim basis.
  6. Request technical assistance from DCJS to assist in the hiring and/or training of a new staff member.
  7. Communicate with the volunteers on a regular basis and keep them informed of the program's status and plans.

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## **VII. Monitoring Cases after Case Closure**

Many CASA programs are asked to provide monitoring services to assigned cases after the court closes the case. This presents several challenges. The following guidance is provided to programs that receive these requests.

- CASA programs should not accept monitoring appointments after the case is closed by the court and removed from the court's docket.
- If despite the above the court requires CASA volunteers continue monitoring cases, CASA programs are advised to develop policies with their courts that include keeping the case open for the duration of the monitoring assignment. Further, DSS and the GAL should also remain active on the case until the monitoring is completed. Monitoring orders shall include a case closure date in the future in the absence of new allegations or concerns.

**Reviewed and Approved October 25, 2025**

## **VIII. The Role of CASA Volunteers When Termination of Parental Rights is Achieved**

Permanency in the lives of the children that CASA programs serve is a primary goal. CASA programs seek to ensure that children have the opportunity to grow up in safe, permanent homes. Many CASA programs close cases once Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) is achieved, most often because of the need to assign volunteers to cases that are on a waiting list. Other programs strongly advocate that permanence is not achieved until the child's adoption is complete. Questions arise, however, around what the role of the CASA volunteer is during the adoption phase. There is not a clear, "one size fits all" response for every case a CASA volunteer will be assigned to. Each case will be different. First and foremost, the CASA volunteer's continued appointment is a judicial decision. Once the judge has determined that the CASA appointment will continue, the CASA program director will need to evaluate each case based on the unique needs and circumstances of that case. Programs should consider the following guidance as they continue to serve on cases beyond TPR.

- When children are placed in adoptive homes, care and consideration should be given to the developmental needs of the child and the impact of continued involvement of the CASA Volunteer. At a time when the focus is on bonding and attachment with adoptive parents, the presence of the CASA Volunteer *may* indicate to the child continued instability. As long as the CASA appointment continues, the volunteer would monitor the court's orders for the child. However, the role of the CASA Volunteer with the adoptive parents needs to be clear, and it is not to "investigate or monitor" the adoptive parents' home. Further, it is clearly the role of the Department of Social Services to identify and monitor adoptive placements.
- CASA Volunteers can assist in monitoring the filing of the Adoption Progress Reports, ensuring that they are properly completed every six months, and achieving the directives of the court.
- If it is in the child's best interest, CASA volunteers should continue to visit the children they are assigned only as long as necessary to facilitate transition to permanency. Depending upon the developmental needs and circumstances of the child, it may be best to reduce the number of visits so that the adoptive parents can begin to establish stability and permanency for the child.

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## **IX. The Use of Transportation in Local CASA Programs**

CASA Programs are advised to adopt policies that do not allow volunteers to transport children in a vehicle and/or with any person related to the case under any circumstances. CASA programs that permit transportation may incur considerable liability and potential litigation costs that would divert resources from the advocacy work with children.

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## **X. Continued Appointments of CASA Volunteers for Young Adults Age 18–21**

### **Background**

While the total number of children in foster care has been on the decline in Virginia recently, the number of young adults aging out of foster care has grown. The term “aging out” is often used to refer to young adults within the foster care system who are still in the system upon reaching the age of 18 to 21. These young adults have not found permanency with an adoptive family or reunification with their birth family before aging out. Young adults aging out of the system face multiple challenges and their outcomes are poor. Research shows that, when compared with their peers, young people aging out of foster care are, on average:

- less likely to have a high school diploma
- less likely to be pursuing higher education
- more likely to have experienced homelessness
- less likely to be earning a living wage
- more likely to have had a child without being married
- more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system

Given these harsh realities, Virginia has dedicated significant resources to help eliminate or alleviate poor outcomes for this vulnerable population.

In 2010, the Virginia General Assembly enacted changes to allow youth in foster care to continue receiving independent living services until age 21 (*Code of Virginia* § 63.2-905.1). This change in statute is one example of this support. Since then, localities have worked to encourage young adults to “opt in” and continue receiving support and services.

During the 2014 General Assembly Session, legislation was passed clarifying the ability of judges to continue the appointment of CASA volunteers on cases when a young adult opts to receive independent living services beyond age 18.

More significant, however, was the 2016 enactment by the General Assembly of the Fostering Futures<sup>1</sup> program (2016 Appropriations Act, HB30, Item 346, subsection L), which allows foster children who age out of foster care to continue receiving certain foster care services if they qualify. To qualify, the young adult must be:

- (a) completing secondary education or an equivalent credential; or
- (b) enrolled in an institution that provides post-secondary or vocational education; or

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<sup>1</sup> CASA programs should note the Fostering Futures program bears the same name as the National CASA Association Training module designed to train CASA volunteers to advocate effectively with older youth.

- (c) employed for at least 80 hours per month; or
- (d) participating in a program or activity designed to promote employment or remove barriers to employment; or
- (e) incapable of doing any of the activities described in subdivisions (a) through (d) due to a medical condition, which incapability is supported by regularly updated information in the program participant's case plan.

The Fostering Futures program is voluntary. If the young adult chooses to participate, an agreement is entered into by the young adult and the local department of social services that outlines the specific services to be provided the young adult. By participating in Fostering Futures, the young adult would have access to and benefit from the following:

- Ongoing caseworker support (including monthly visits and six-month reviews)
- Funding support for any services or supports that would be deemed “foster care maintenance”. This would include housing.
- The ability to enter and leave the program at any point, any number of times during the age 18–21 window, as long as they still qualify.
- Appointed counsel and continued appointment of CASA, if the court retains jurisdiction.

As just noted, continuing the appointment of the CASA volunteer is a support available to young adults who remain under the jurisdiction of the court as they prepare for independence. Whereas there is a general philosophy that youth should not linger in foster care, if a youth turns 18 and has not been placed in a permanent home and family, the state recognizes that receiving continued services from 18–21 will be a benefit to their future.

The following is offered as guidance to local CASA programs when judges continue appointments of CASA in such instances.

## **Legal Considerations**

When continuing appointments by the court on cases when young adults are age 18–21, CASA programs are advised to assure the following actions are taken:

- Appointments are made prior to the young adult’s 18<sup>th</sup> birthday if the young adult chooses to continue receiving independent living services. Appointments under Fostering Futures occur at the initial court hearing approving the young adult’s agreement with the local department of social services.
- Appointments are continued only when the juvenile court judge schedules an annual review after the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, so that court jurisdiction continues over the case.

- The CASA volunteer's continued appointment only occurs with the young adult's approval, as evidenced by their signature on the "Young Adult's CASA Appointment Agreement" form.
- The CASA program secures a signed release of information from the young adult who has turned 18 years of age before accessing information on his/her behalf.
- The CASA volunteer will work in conjunction with the young adult's court appointed attorney, if any.

### **CASA Volunteer Role**

CASA volunteers will continue to perform the same duties enumerated in the *Code of Virginia* in [§ 9.1-153](#), when a young adult turns 18. CASA volunteers must also follow the same rules, regulations, standards and policies regarding activities that are prohibited. As young adults transition to adulthood, CASA volunteers should be mindful of the following principles as they advocate for young people who are making preparations to emancipate from the foster care system.

1. **Youth Driven Advocacy** – As young people age, there should be a deliberate shift in the CASA volunteer's focus to encourage youth led, youth driven advocacy. Preparation for adulthood should be the central goal for a CASA's work with young adults and encompasses both developing skills for self-sufficiency and interdependency as well as establishing permanent connections. CASA volunteers should make certain that the young adult is leading the process and not other professionals. CASA volunteers will continue to carry out four primary activities on each case: assessment, facilitation, advocacy and monitoring. The results of the assessment will be reported to the court along with outcomes of the court's orders, if any have been issued. CASA volunteers will also assist the young adult in completing Independent Living Assessments and their incorporation into the case plan. The CASA volunteer must clearly explain his/her role to the young adult and empower the young person to lead his/her own advocacy efforts.
2. **Facilitating Youth Driven Plans:** For young children under the court's protection, the focus is on achieving permanency in a home where adults will take care of children's needs. However, for a young adult the goal shifts to creating permanence through the development of a network of caring, committed adults who will serve as long-term support for the youth. Note – the CASA volunteer is **not** expected, required or encouraged to assume this role, but should support the young person as he/she identifies and builds this critical network. Of equal importance is the need to help the young person become self-sufficient through the development of confidence, self-advocacy skills and a sense of responsibility. The CASA volunteer will monitor and encourage youth engagement in the administration of Independent Living Assessments and their incorporation into the case plan.
3. **Responsibilities of the CASA Volunteer:** When working with a young adult, CASA volunteer responsibilities are largely the same. CASA volunteers will still review records, interview the young adult and other appropriate parties in the case, determine if a permanent plan has been created for the young adult and that services are provided as ordered by the court, submit court reports with recommendations at each court hearing, maintain complete

records about the young adult and the case and return all case records to the CASA program when the case is closed. However, since the young adult's permanent plan is independence, the focus shifts to ensuring that resources and services are in place to prepare the young adult for successful independent living.

4. **CASA Volunteer's Relationship with the Young Adult:** When advocating for a young adult, the CASA volunteer's relationship will be different because the young adult will be actively involved and leading their case. The CASA volunteer will partner with the young adult as they learn to advocate for themselves. The expectations for contacts will remain the same as prescribed by the local program; however, if an increase in frequency of contacts is required due to the nature of the context of advocacy, this is to be agreed upon between the advocate and the young person.
5. **Relationship Boundaries with Siblings and Families:** If a CASA volunteer is assigned to a case involving siblings, one of whom is turning 18, the volunteer must be mindful of the distinction between the best interest analysis applied to the younger children and the youth driven strategy being employed for the young adult.

### Best Practice Guidance

CASA programs should consider the following Best Practice guidelines when working on cases involving young adults ages 18–21:

- **Youth led advocacy** – The young adult should be engaged in the creation and implementation of his/her plan. CASA volunteers should encourage the young adult to speak up for herself/himself.
- **CASA volunteer duties remain the same** – The basic CASA volunteer duties as identified in the *Code of Virginia*, DCJS regulations, and NCASAA standards will not change. Volunteers should continue to objectively identify and advocate for the young person's needs.
- **CASA volunteers do not provide services** – Per the Virginia CASA Regulations (6VAC20-160-80(B)), CASA volunteers should not engage in direct service delivery or the provision of assistance that should be provided by the Department of Social Services or other service providers.
- **Key Functions** – The key to success is to ensure that planning is continuous, collaborative, customized, focused, and that advocacy efforts are youth directed.
- **Stability and Securing Permanency** – CASA volunteers should work with the young adult and other system partners to ensure that key issues surrounding future stability, independence, and success are addressed. These may include but are not limited to:
  - Education
  - Independent living skills
  - Mental and physical health care – Medicaid coverage, insurance

- Housing
- Community resources
- Understanding rights and laws
- Employment
- Permanent connections
- Legal documents (birth certificate, social security card, driver's license, etc.)
- **Voluntary Agreement** – Continued involvement of the CASA volunteer is subject to the young adult's approval. The young adult should sign the agreement form annually. The form sets forth agreements and expectations of the CASA program/volunteer and the young adult.
- **Information Release** – Since the youth is legally an adult, CASA programs must ask the young adult to sign a release of information form to access personal information and records.
- **CASA volunteers should:**
  - Respect and honor the young person's history and confidentiality.
  - Remember that although the focus has changed from "best interest" to "youth led planning," the relationship is one of an advocate and is bound by the professional boundaries set forth in the CASA program guidelines.
  - Maintain professional boundaries with the young person at all times.
- **A CASA volunteer may not:**
  - Provide financial assistance to a young adult.
  - Guarantee a loan or otherwise legally obligate themselves to a young adult.
  - Allow a young adult to live with them.
  - Vacation with a young adult.
  - Socialize with a young adult.
  - Develop an intimate relationship with a young adult.

## Training

Working with young adults age 18–21 requires specialized training for CASA volunteers. CASA programs whose appointments continue into young adulthood should expand and enhance training for staff and volunteers to include the following:

- NCASAA Fostering Futures Curriculum
- Specific training for CASA volunteers working with young adults (18–21) in addition to Fostering Futures Guidelines articulating CASA's role in working with DSS and other system partners
- Information and an understanding of resources and funding sources available

- Information and an understanding of educational opportunities and resources available
- Training on the role of Independent Living service workers
- Working knowledge of VA DSS Child and Family Services Manual, E. Foster Care, Section 14 *Achieving Permanency for Older Youth*
- Any other training deemed relevant and applicable by the local CASA program

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**

## **XI. The Use of Social Media and Social Networking in CASA Programs**

### **Purpose**

Local CASA programs must develop clear communication guidelines for use of social networking and social media both inside and outside of the work environment. This policy is not intended to provide guidance on the use of social networking and social media as a tool for fund raising, volunteer recruitment or marketing or the use of social media in CASA investigations. Further, this policy does not provide guidance on the use of electronic communication such as email, texts and voice mail or internet based telecommunications.

### **Scope and Application**

The policy is intended to provide guidance for acceptable communication when using social media and social networking as it relates to local CASA program employees, volunteers, and board members.

Social media and social networking include, but are not limited to, websites and all forms of online community activities such as social networks, message boards, blogs, conversation pages, web based apps and chat rooms.

Postings include, but are not limited to, content (includes text and photographs) an individual shares on a social media site or the act of publishing content on a site. This includes postings on official CASA program social networking sites or personal social networking sites.

No user shall have any expectation of privacy in any message, file, image or data created, sent, retrieved or posted utilizing social media regardless of privacy settings.

### **Policy**

- A) CASA employees, volunteers and board members are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with all other requirements for ethical standards of conduct and professional behavior as determined by the CASA program's policies and procedures. This includes all interactions in person and on social media.
- B) Local CASA programs should develop policies ensuring compliance with this policy by staff members and volunteers.

**Reviewed and Approved October 24, 2025**



## VOLUNTARY AGREEMENT FOR YOUNG ADULTS

### CASA Volunteer:

I understand that my role, should the youth decide to continue the appointment of CASA is to:

- promote youth led advocacy,
- ensure tasks are completed and that advocacy efforts are youth directed,
- promote stable and secure permanency with the youth,
- monitor the Court's orders for compliance,
- submit reports to the court.

**CASA Volunteer Name**

**(Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**CASA Volunteer**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Youth:

- I understand if I continue the appointment of my CASA volunteer that:
- My CASA volunteer will work with my court appointed attorney, if any.
- I must sign a release of information to allow for the CASA program to access personal information and records.
- CASA services will terminate when I turn 22 years of age or at any point if I choose to voluntarily end my involvement in the program.

I understand if I choose not to continue the appointment of my CASA volunteer:

- CASA services will terminate when I turn 18 years of age

### Other Agreements:

- ☐ **Yes**, I understand the above requirements for my CASA volunteer and me. I do **WANT** a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) to continue to be appointed to my case.
- ☐ **No**, I do **NOT** want a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) to continue to be appointed to my case.

**Youth Name**

**(Printed):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Youth**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

October 6, 2025

Sent Electronically

Melissa O'Neill

CASA/CJA Citizen Review Panel Coordinator

Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services

1100 Bank Street, Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Ms. O'Neill:

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) commends the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program and Children's Justice Act Committee for their work as a active Citizen Review Panel (CRP) as part of Virginia's Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) Plan. The feedback for our child welfare programs by our Citizen Review Panels is crucial to the improvement of our services for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

The Division of Family Services (DFS) oversees child welfare programs and promotes well being, safety, and permanency for children, families, and individuals in Virginia. DFS provides supervision, development, and enhancement of child welfare policies, programs, and practice. DFS supplies guidance, training, technical assistance, and support to LDSS. It collaborates with state-level partners (including state agencies and community-based organizations) in the following program areas:

- Prevention (prevention services, safe and stable family services, domestic violence resources, and In-Home services),
- Child protective services (child abuse and neglect),
- Permanency (adoption, foster care, resource family, independent living, and interstate/inter-country placement of children),
- Quality assurance and accountability (title IV-E review and Child and Family Service Review (CFSR), and
- Legislation, regulations, and guidance.

In SFY 2024, there were 53,440 children reported as possible victims of child abuse or neglect in 33,847 completed reports of suspected child abuse or neglect. Of those children, 2,905 were involved in founded Investigations, 5,859 were involved in unfounded Investigations, and 25,083 in Family Assessments (differential response). In SFY 2024, Family Assessments accounted for 74% of all CPS reports accepted by local Departments of Social Services and 30 children died because of abuse or neglect. There were 15 children involved in 10 Human Trafficking Assessments, which are required when a report alleges a child is a victim of human trafficking, sex, or labor, and does not meet the validity criteria for an Investigation or Family Assessment.

Over the last year, VDSS continued to prioritize working towards meeting our federal outcomes related to child protection. This included efforts to improve the implementation of the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) and the Parental Child Safety Placement program (PCSP), and strengthen and support the child protection labor force.

We have reviewed your recommendations and thank you for your input. VDSS offers the following responses to your recommendations:

## **1. Child Abuse Prevention**

### **a. Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)**

VDSS is continuing implementation of FFPSA and expanding the availability of evidence-based services across the state. VDSS is focused on building community pathways over the next couple years which will focus on primary and secondary prevention efforts and connecting families to evidence-based services “upstream” to prevent child welfare engagement. There are several workgroups focused on this effort to include community partners from the schools, service providers, LDSS, lived experience, other government and advocacy groups. VDSS is looking at engaging schools more and they are part of the community pathway work. Community pathways will also assist in providing concrete supports to eligible families. Unfortunately, FFPSA does not include respite services for the family unless it is part of the evidence-based service model. VDSS has discussed the integration of aspects of the Science of Hope framework in relation to FFPSA.

#### **b. Parental Child Safety Placement Program Implementation**

In 2024, the Virginia General Assembly, through House Bill 27 and Senate Bill 39, established the Parental Child Safety Placement Program (PCSP). This statutory framework allows a parent, guardian, or legal custodian to voluntarily arrange for a short-term placement of their child with relatives or fictive kin when the local department of social services (LDSS) determines the child cannot safely remain in their home.

The PCSP is a structured, time-limited intervention that prioritizes kinship care and is designed to protect children while parents engage in intensive services aimed at reunification within 90 days. One of the key tenets of the PCSP is the establishment of a Parental Child Safety Placement Agreement, which provides the guardrails needed to:

- Protect children while preserving parental rights
- Promote family-driven decision-making
- Establish consistency in practice across LDSS
- Strengthen the delivery of In-Home Services

Implementation of the PCSPP has required close collaboration across all child welfare program areas, Child Protective Services, In-Home Services, Foster Care, and Resource Family, while also fostering stronger relationships between caregivers, children, and LDSS. VDSS has supported this transition through revisions to practice guidance, regulatory actions, training, change management, and updates to the child welfare information system.

As the program approaches its one-year milestone, utilization continues to grow statewide. Between July 2024 and June 2025, 631 agreements were established, of which 306 have closed. Among these closed agreements:

- 106 ended in reunification with the parent or guardian (the most common outcome).
- 23 resulted in foster care entry, reflecting cases with ongoing safety concerns.
- Nearly 20% of agreements were extended beyond the initial 90 days, underscoring the need for continued support for some families.

While reunification remains the program's primary outcome, the rate has fluctuated over time. For example, cumulative reunification declined from 37.6% in February 2025 to 33.2% in April 2025, then increased slightly, reaching 35.1% in June 2025. These shifts reflect the complexity of cases and the evolving needs of families, rather than a change in the program's effectiveness.

Overall, early results indicate that the PCSPP is achieving its primary goal: supporting safe, timely reunification while minimizing unnecessary foster care entry. The program has also highlighted the importance of kin-first solutions and family-centered decision-making.

VDSS will continue to strengthen practice by:

- Implementing consistent statewide guidance for Parental Child Safety Placements

- Conducting both quantitative and qualitative case reviews
- Using data to inform recommendations and guide continuous improvement
- Examining safety assessments, caregiver engagement, service delivery, and long-term permanency outcomes

These efforts will provide deeper insight into the circumstances leading to placements, the support offered, and how the PCSPP is shaping child and family well-being across Virginia.

### **c. Child Abuse Prevention Services Model**

VDSS has recently embarked on a renewed focus on tracking and enhancing key performance metrics for High and Very risk CPS referrals being opened to In-Home Services cases. Specifically, recent data underscores the critical importance of prioritizing the safety and well-being of children 3 years of age and under in our child welfare practice. This effort includes the identification of LDSS practice strengths and areas needing improvement, and development and monitoring of a technical assistance plan for the LDSS facilitated by Regional Practice Consultants. These reviews will help identify key factors influencing performance, highlight areas where program guidance can be clarified or improved, and inform broader technical assistance and support for LDSS.

Training and technical assistance have reinforced the critical role of documentation in supporting case-opening decisions for high and very high-risk referrals. This important decision-making point of opening an In-Home Services case following CPS involvement involves how the Structured Decision Making (SDM) Risk Assessment informs the decision to open an In-Home Services case, as well as how to frame and document the conversation and decision a family makes when offering and encouraging participation in services. By refining practice around these areas, we are advancing a consistent, prioritized response to referrals involving children 3 years of age and under. Strengthening case-

opening decisions and service provision for this age group is vital to reducing preventable child fatalities and ensuring long term safety and well-being.

More broadly, continued adaptive work is needed in the areas of service provision and the delivery of ongoing In-Home services. This extends beyond promoting collaborative, evidence-based service delivery to ensuring a deliberate focus on the provision of meaningful, behaviorally specific support to children and families. It involves right-sizing interventions and aligning services appropriately with identified needs to ensure both relevance and impact.

In response, programmatic efforts are centered on strengthening how service workers implement concrete strategies to effectively identify and assess parental behavioral changes, particularly those related to protective capacities and their direct impact on a child's safety, permanency, and well-being. VDSS continues efforts to ensure that all parties, including the child, the child's parents, or kin caregivers, have input into service plan development, primarily through the use of Family Partnership Meetings (FPMs) or Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTMs). Technical assistance on implementation and practice is being provided by Regional Practice Consultants and program staff on the Kin First Now and father engagement. Additionally, VDSS is incorporating case review processes with support from the Quality Assurance and Accountability (QAA) team, in integrating both qualitative and quantitative components related to the provision of title IV-E prevention services funding for evidence-based services to support families involved in In-Home Services cases. This adaptive work also includes how to prioritize a range of needs-driven, evidence-based, and trauma-informed services through a collaborative process of assessment and planning with the family and their support networks. This includes the initial identification of needs, as well as the ongoing review and adjustment of service delivery based on progress made and newly emerging needs.

Foundational Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) processes will support

continuing efforts to improve service delivery, ensure effective use of resources, and achieve desired outcomes for In-Home Services. VDSS planning efforts will continue to align with Virginia's overall movement toward evidence-based programming, while implementing additional services that are approved for title IV E funding in the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse and the identified needs in Virginia. The Protection and Prevention programs, CQI team, and Regional Practice Consultants will also collaborate and identify opportunities to monitor performance and alignment with practice expectations. The following data highlights offer an overview of the population served and related indicators of practice-oriented areas of focus in In-Home Services cases.

### In-Home Outcomes

- In calendar year (CY) 2024, 9,135 CPS referrals were rated as High and Very High-Risk. Of those, 2,801 (or 30.7%) were opened to In-Home Services cases before closure.
- During CY2024, an estimated 5,777 children were determined to be reasonable candidates for services, based on the Candidacy Determination form creation date and redetermination date. A reasonable candidate is identified when a service worker assesses that the child is at risk of foster care placement if services are not provided.
- During CY2024, an average of 4 clients per quarter were determined to be candidates for foster care. A candidate for foster care is a child identified in an In-Home Services service plan as being at imminent risk of entering foster care, but who can remain safely in the child's home or in a kinship placement as long as services or programs identified in Virginia's approved federal title IV-E Prevention Services Plan that are necessary to prevent the entry of the child into foster care are provided.
- In CY2024, 2,831 Initial Service Plans were completed for In-Home Services cases opened. Of these, 2,098 or 74.1% were completed timely (state target of 90%).
- In CY2024, the In-Home Services client population (estimated at 19,158

clients) was represented as follows:

- o 62.8% - White
- o 24.8% - Black/African American
- o 5.9% - Two or more races
- o 11.9% - Hispanic (any race)
- o <2% - AIAN, Asian, Multi-Race and NHPI
- o Race was unknown in 5.4% of children and ethnicity was unknown in 7.7% of children

## **2. System Improvement**

### **a. Workforce Support and Development**

#### Safe Kids, Strong Families

Strengthening the child welfare workforce has been identified as a key pillar in Governor's Youngkin's Safe Kids, Strong Families initiative. The initiative is recommending consideration of:

- Providing competitive compensation to Family Services Specialists and Family Services Supervisors;
- Broadening the recruiting pipeline for Family Services Specialists;
- Expanding professional development;
- Piloting programs to increase retention of LDSS staff; and
- Enhancing the employee experience.

#### CPS and In-Home Workload Study

In 2022, the Virginia Office of the State Inspector General (OSIG) conducted a performance audit of the VDSS child protective services (CPS) that resulted in findings related to caseload and impact of agency staffing on work quality. A recommendation of the study was to complete a workload analysis to determine appropriate workload standards for CPS staff.

VDSS has partnered with an outside vendor, Evident Change, to complete the workload study on both CPS and In-Home programs. Evident Change will use a

research methodology that is “case-based as opposed to worker-based” that will help to identify time required to complete practice and policy standards. VDSS has created a Workload Design Committee that includes LDSS Supervisors and Family Services Specialists for CPS and In-Home programs. This committee will be active for about 4 months and assist in creating the study design process. Once the process is established, the vendor will provide in person trainings across the state. These trainings will accommodate 25-40 participants and last about 3-4 hours. Upon completion of the training, staff will then be asked to begin tracking data using forms created by the Workload Design Committee.

The vendor plans to collect data over a 2-month period. After data collection is complete the vendor will analyze the results and provide a report and final recommendations. The workload study is expected to be completed by August 2026.

#### Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy

The Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy (OTRP) at VDSS supports a trauma informed, healing centered culture through training, policy guidance, and workforce well-being initiatives. The OTRP specializes in statewide training, the Community Resiliency Model®, and promoting the Science of Hope across the agency. Training Initiatives Fundamentals of Trauma To provide VDSS employees with a foundational understanding of trauma, the OTRP developed an e-learning module titled The Fundamentals of Trauma in 2024. This eLearning module helps provide a strong foundational understanding of trauma, helps the learner understand the prevalence of trauma, our brain and body’s responses to trauma, and what all of this information means at an individual level. To date, 214 members of the DSS workforce have completed the training. This year, the course was also made available more broadly statewide, and another 198 state and local employees with access to the Commonwealth of Virginia Learning Center completed the course.

## Vicarious Trauma

In response to the unique challenges human services professionals face, the OTRP created Vicarious Trauma: An Overview, a 1.5-hour facilitated workshop. This training explores the effects of secondary exposure to trauma, how it impacts individuals and organizations, and how to mitigate these impacts, both individually and organizationally. Since its launch in September, the OTRP has facilitated quarterly virtual and in-person sessions, with a total of 341 DSS staff trained.

## Community Resiliency Model (CRM)©

The OTRP has begun promoting the implementation of the evidence-based Community Resiliency Model© to help staff regulate their nervous systems and recover from stress and trauma. Following the recommendations of the Capstone Report on Vicarious Trauma in the Workplace (2024), two OTRP staff members completed 40 hours of CRM Teacher Training and have since been certified as instructors. They have introduced the model to over 1,000 VDSS staff and led two workshops Trauma Resource Institute, creators of the Community Resiliency Model© page 4 with nearly 20 participants. A full six-session workshop series, already at capacity with waitlists, is scheduled to begin in August 2025.

## **b. Cross System Collaboration**

### Multi-Disciplinary Teams

VDSS remains a key partner in the Virginia Mult-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Stakeholder Group. The Virginia MDT Stakeholder Group is a collaborative partnership between Virginia Dept Criminal Justice Services; Children's Advocacy Centers of Virginia, Virginia Department of Social Services; and Commonwealth Attorney Services Council. The Virginia MDT Stakeholder Group is committed to strengthening and sustaining MDTs throughout the state. They believe that training, resources, and support targeted at MDTs at key points along their developmental pathway have the greatest potential to cultivate

effective teams who are best equipped to help children and families impacted by abuse.

The Virginia MDT Stakeholder Group developed two MDT trainings for local child abuse and neglect multi-disciplinary teams—MDT 101 and Good to Great. The trainings are hosted around the Commonwealth several times per year.

#### MDT 101 - Building a Strong Foundation for MDT Success

This training is designed to provide a comprehensive introduction to the Multidisciplinary Team model to leaders from new and developing MDTs. Participants will learn about the benefits of collaborative community response to child abuse allegations.

#### Good To Great - Enhancing MDT Effectiveness and Functioning

This training is intended to support MDTs who have been operating in their current composition for 3-5 years. It is often at this point that we begin to see MDTs experience growing pains and encountering challenges around collaboration, engagement, and commitment to the model. This training seeks to empower teams to take responsibility for their own effective functioning and offers tools and approaches that support healthy collaboration. This training is designed to be attended by groups of team members from the same MDT.

#### Family Partnership Meetings

VDSS is working diligently to continue to increase LDSS implementation of Family Partnership Meetings (FPMs) at mandated critical decision points. FPMs are one of the key practice elements discussed at Kin First Now meetings. Additionally, a planning team of VDSS home office, regional staff and LDSS partners host the Commonwealth Facilitator's Forum (CF3) every other month as an opportunity for facilitators to discuss the unique needs that facilitators experience, while providing a platform to discuss improving practice, share resources, and continue honing skills. The Kinship Policy Specialist and Kinship Practice Specialist are also currently gathering information from events like CF3

and the Permanency Advisory Committee (PAC) in order to propose the creation of two new training courses-- one focused on training non-facilitators on FPMs, and the other as a refresher course for approved facilitators. The intent of these courses will be to ensure that programs across the child welfare continuum are working together toward family engagement and holding FPMs at all mandated critical decision points.

Kin First Now has worked to strengthen efforts to enhance Family Partnership Meeting (FPM) practices by targeted and intentional collaboration between VDSS Home Office, Regional Office, and Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS). Kin First Now has helped LDSS increase engagement and participation of both paternal and maternal relatives in FPMs, ensuring that extended family networks are actively involved in decision-making. It has guided LDSS in preparing families more effectively, clarifying the purpose of FPMs, setting expectations, and fostering trust so families arrive informed and empowered. Kin First Now also supports LDSS in clearly presenting placement options to family during meetings, enabling families to drive decisions that reflect their values and strengths. Additionally, it has contributed to expanding the pool of trained facilitators and ensuring FPMs are consistently conducted around all five critical decision points. Kin First Now has helped LDSS brainstorm across program areas to determine areas of strength as well as opportunities to improve kin-centered outcomes for children and families.

### **c. Data Collection and Evaluation**

VDSS has renewed contracts with the Center for Evidence-Based Partnerships (CEP-Va) to continue to build capacity of evidence-based providers across Virginia. A lot of outreach has been done over the past year to grow EPB providers. CEP-Va receives a little over 1 million each year to train providers in EBPs. CEP-Va has already allotted the training funds for this year due to the high level of interest in providers being trained in EBPs. This year's funding is allotted to train or provide ongoing support to the following number of teams. This

number below does not include the total number of teams, but those teams that CEP-Va is providing funding for training or support this year.

| EBP Model                               | Number of Teams Trained |
|-----------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| High Fidelity Wrap Around (HFW)         | 4 teams                 |
| Family Check Up (FCU)                   | 3 teams                 |
| Homebuilders (HB)                       | 4 teams                 |
| Functional Family Therapy (FFT)         | 5 teams                 |
| Multisystemic Therapy (MST)             | 3 teams                 |
| Brief Strategic Family Therapy (BSFT)   | 9 teams                 |
| Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) | 10 teams                |

CEP-Va and VDSS will review data from providers to ensure the fidelity of the service and to monitor service outcomes.

While our current legacy system (OASIS) is not compliant with the federal CCWIS (Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System) regulations, updates have been made to meet federal reporting requirements. The legacy system is indeed antiquated which makes gathering outcome data difficult. Funding was initially approved in the SFY 2023 budget appropriation bill. In the time since, the Department has been required to change course on both our federal planning document approach as well as our procurement approach. This has resulted in substantial delays. Currently, the Department has a Request for Proposals (RFP) for CCWIS development in final draft and currently under OAG and VITA review. The procurement announcement has been posted to eVA and we expect the full RFP to be published in late November or early December. The release of the RFP is contingent on state and federal approval.

Sincerely,

Nikole Cox

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nikole Cox". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'N' and a long, sweeping underline.

Director, Division of Family Services

Cc: Seth Persky, Children's Bureau

**The Court Appointed Special Advocate/Children's Justice Act Advisory  
Committee (CASA/CJA)  
POLICY FOR THE REMOTE PARTICIPATION OF MEMBERS**

**1. AUTHORITY AND SCOPE**

- a. This policy is adopted pursuant to the authorization of Va. Code § 2.2- 3708.3 and is to be strictly construed in conformance with the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA), Va. Code §§ 2.2-3700—3715.
- b. This policy shall not govern an electronic meeting conducted to address a state of emergency declared by the Governor or the Board of Supervisors. Any meeting conducted by electronic communication means under such circumstances shall be governed by the provisions of Va. Code § 2.2-3708.2. This policy also does not apply to an all-virtual public meeting.

**2. DEFINITIONS**

- a. "Advisory Committee" means the Court Appointed Special Advocate/Children's Justice Act Advisory Committee (CASA/CJA Advisory Committee) or any committee, subcommittee, or other entity of the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee.
- b. "Member" means any member of the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee.
- c. "Remote participation" means participation by an individual member of the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee by electronic communication means in a public meeting where a quorum of the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee is physically assembled, as defined by Va. Code § 2.2-3701.
- d. "Meeting" means a meeting as defined by Va. Code § 2.2-3701.
- e. "Notify" or "notifies," for purposes of this policy, means written notice, such as email or letter. Notice does not include text messages or communications via social media.

**3. MANDATORY REQUIREMENTS**

Regardless of the reasons why the member is participating in a meeting from a remote location by electronic communication means, the following conditions must be met for the member to participate remotely:

- a. A quorum of the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee must be physically assembled at the primary or central meeting location; and
- b. Arrangements have been made for the voice of the remotely participating member to be heard by all persons at the primary or central meeting location. If at any point during the meeting the voice of the remotely participating member is no longer able to be heard by all persons at the meeting location, the remotely participating member shall no longer be permitted to participate remotely.

**4. PROCESS TO REQUEST REMOTE PARTICIPATION**

- a. On or before the day of the meeting, and at any point before the meeting begins, the requesting member must notify the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee Chair (or the Vice-Chair if the requesting member is the Chair) that they are unable to physically attend a meeting due to (i) a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that prevents the member's physical attendance, (ii) a family member's medical condition that requires the member to provide care for such family member, thereby preventing the member's physical attendance, (iii) their principal residence location more than 60 miles from the meeting location, or (iv) a personal matter and identifies with specificity the nature of the personal matter.
- b. The requesting member shall also notify the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee staff liaison of their request, but their failure to do so shall not affect their ability to remotely participate.
- c. If the requesting member is unable to physically attend the meeting due to a personal matter, the requesting member must state with specificity the nature of the personal matter. Remote participation due to a personal matter is limited each calendar year to two meetings or 25 percent of the meetings held per calendar year rounded up to the next whole number, whichever is greater. There is no limit to the number of times that a member may participate remotely for the other authorized purposes listed in (i)— (iii) above.
- d. The requesting member is not obligated to provide independent verification regarding the reason for their nonattendance, including the temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition or the family member's medical condition that prevents their physical attendance at the meeting.
- e. The Chair (or the Vice-Chair if the requesting member is the Chair) shall promptly notify the requesting member whether their request is in conformance with this policy, and therefore approved or disapproved.

## **5. PROCESS TO CONFIRM APPROVAL OR DISAPPROVAL OF PARTICIPATION FROM A REMOTE LOCATION**

When a quorum of the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee has assembled for the meeting, the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee shall vote to determine whether:

- a. The Chair's decision to approve or disapprove the requesting member's request to participate from a remote location was in conformance with this policy, and
- b. The voice of the remotely participating member can be heard by all persons at the primary or central meeting location.

## **6. RECORDING IN MINUTES**

- a. If the member is allowed to participate remotely due to a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition, a family member's medical condition that requires the member to provide care to the family member, or because their principal residence is located more than 60 miles from the meeting location the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee shall record in its minutes (1) the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee's approval of the member's remote participation; and (2) a general description of the remote location from which the member participated.

- b. If the member is allowed to participate remotely due to a personal matter, such matter shall be cited in the minutes with specificity, as well as how many times the member has attended remotely due to a personal matter, and a general description of the remote location from which the member participated.
- c. If a member's request to participate remotely is disapproved, the disapproval, including the grounds upon which the requested participation violates this policy or VFOIA, shall be recorded in the minutes with specificity.

#### **7. CLOSED SESSION**

If the CASA/CJA Advisory Committee goes into closed session, the member participating remotely shall ensure that no third party is able to hear or otherwise observe the closed meeting.

#### **8. STRICT AND UNIFORM APPLICATION OF THIS POLICY**

This Policy shall be applied strictly and uniformly, without exception, to the entire membership, and without regard to the identity of the member requesting remote participation or the matters that will be considered or voted on at the meeting. The Chair (or Vice-Chair) shall maintain the member's written request to participate remotely and the written response for a period of one year, or other such time required by records retention laws, regulations, and policies.

Approved October 27, 2023