

Final

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

July 30, 2021

A meeting of the Advisory Committee to the Court Appointed Special Advocate and Children's Justice Act programs was held on July 30, 2021 at the Libbie Mill Library in Richmond Virginia.

Members Present

Randy Bonds
Molly Dellinger-Wray
Katharine Hunter
Jennifer Newman
Jeannine Panzera
Giselle Pelaez
Pat Popp
Judge Thomas Sotelo, Chair
Ashley Thompson

Members Not Present

Regina Baker
Kim Barbarji
Robin Foster
Shardell Gerald
Allison Gilbreath
Shannon Hartung
Judge Jerrauld Jones
Sandy Karison

Staff Present

Jenna Foster (DCJS)
Melissa O'Neill (DCJS)
Kelly O'Brien (Intern – DCJS)

Guest

Eric Reynolds (Director, Office of the Children's Ombudsman)

- I. **Call to Order:** Judge Thomas Sotelo, Committee Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM. A verbal roll call was taken.
- II. **Welcome and Introduction of Guest:** Committee Chair, Judge Sotelo, introduced Eric Reynolds, the newly appointed Director of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman. Mr. Reynolds provided the committee with an overview of the Ombudsman's office. The statute authorizes the office to investigate citizen complaints regarding children involved in the foster care system. The office is required to submit an annual report to the General Assembly.
- III. **Approval of Minutes:** The committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the April 30, 2021 meeting. Ashley Thompson made a motion to approve the minutes. Jennifer Newman provided a second. The motion was approved.

- IV. **Meeting Dates for FY22:** Committee members considered the following dates for meetings in FY22:

Friday, October 29, 2021
Friday, January 28, 2022
Friday, April 22, 2022
Friday, July 22, 2022

Ashley Thompson made a motion to approve the meeting dates and Pat Popp seconded. The motion was approved.

- V. **CASA Program Update** - The committee was previously provided a written update regarding the Court Appointed Special Advocate Program.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing Guidance Policy: The committee was provided an updated draft of the Confidentiality and Information Sharing Guidance Policy. The updates will provide guidance for local programs on the implementation of the changes in the *Code of Virginia* allowing CASA volunteers to attend and participate in certain collaborative stakeholder meetings in between hearings. The committee provided feedback during the April meeting and DCJS sought additional input from stakeholder partners. After a brief discussion, Jennifer Newman made a motion to approve the Guidance Policy as written and Giselle Pelaez seconded. The motion was approved.

CAPTA Legislative Changes: Melissa O’Neill shared with the committee proposed changes to the Child Abuse Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA). This bill makes significant changes to CAPTA. Of particular interest to CASA organizations, the bill changes the language in the Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) provision and moves that provision to a different section of the Act. Those changes could make it so that states are not required to provide a best-interest GAL for children in abuse and neglect court proceedings in the same way they do now. Additionally, the bill creates a requirement for states to provide a client-directed “Attorney ad Litem” for all children in abuse and neglect court proceedings. The committee discussed the various impacts this change would have in Virginia should it pass.

- VI. **Children’s Justice Act Program Update** - The committee was previously provided a written update regarding the Children’s Justice Act Program. Jenna Foster highlighted areas of interest.

Other Specialized Training for Child Welfare: In Spring 2021, DCJS heavily focused on providing substantial training for child welfare professionals through collaborations and direct training offerings. A variety of training regarding Trauma was provided during the inaugural DCJS Trauma Summit in May. A three-part Substance Use and Abuse training was offered in May followed by a four-part Vicarious Trauma series in June. Other topics requested include community organizing, building collaborations, and sustainability. CJA is working to support MDTs to meeting the needs of the first two topics. The latter will be addressed directly via ongoing Sustainability training at DCJS to grantees and constituents.

Multidisciplinary Team Discussion: Recently, DCJS has received requests for specific support for established Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs). Assistance for onboarding new Commonwealth Attorneys to their MDT responsibilities is needed. DCJS is referring to the Commonwealth Attorney’s Services Council (CASC) for specific training and guidance for MDTs. The Committee discussed other opportunities to provide support for MDTs from the CJA standpoint. Jenna Foster led the committee in a discussion and facilitated session to solicit feedback on providing targeted technical assistance to Commonwealth Attorneys seeking support in the development of Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs).

Judge Sotelo moved that DCJS pursue development of a guidance document to set out a best practice vision for implementation of the MDT code based on best practice standards. The model will include flexibility for the needs of the locality and include training on the implementation and continuation of MDTs. Jennifer Newman seconded the motion. The motion was approved.

VII. **Child Protective Services/Citizen Review Panel**

A written report was provided by the Virginia Department of Social Services and will be distributed to the committee for review.

VIII. **New Business**

Remote Participation in Public Meetings: The committee discussed the requirements for remote participation in public meetings according the Freedom of Information Act. The first requirement is to develop a policy in accordance with the Act. Members were in agreement to develop a policy. DCJS will bring a draft policy for consideration to the next meeting in October. Jennifer Newman made a motion that the committee will develop a policy and Katharine Hunter seconded. The motion was approved.

IX. **Adjourn** – Giselle Pelaez moved to adjourn the meeting and Ashley Thompson provided the second. The motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 11:55 AM.

Next meeting dates:

- Friday, October 29, 2021
- Friday, January 28, 2022
- Friday, April 22, 2022
- Friday, July 22, 2022