

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
June 26th, 2023

Present: Abby Horrell (Chair), Matthew Walsh (Vice-Chair), Stephanie Kanwit, Rachel Dienna, Samantha Pedrosa, Allison Greenleaf, Ann O’Hanlon, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff), Miguel A. Hernandez (DCHS Staff)

Absent: Paul Almeida, Shawna Gary

Call to Order/Welcome:

The meeting was called to order by Abby Horrell (Chair) at 7:25 p.m. and welcomed the SSAB members to the June meeting.

Miguel A Hernandez updates on Childcare Programs:

Information about childcare programs:

- Childcare Programs help families afford childcare offered by providers.
 - Child Care Centers provide group care for children from six weeks old to five years of age.
 - The centers can either be home based, or center based i.e., a school.
 - Any provider that has more than four children in their care is considered a center and the quality of childcare is overseen by the State.
 - If a provider has fewer than four children, it considered to be a home-based center and the quality of childcare is overseen by the City of Alexandria.
- The two categories for care are before and after school childcare.
 - After school include programs that are for school age children that operate during holiday breaks, snow days, or provide summer programs.
 - Campagna Center is an example of a State licensed program and provides academic support to elementary school children with before or after school programs.

Virginia Preschool initiative:

- The initiative will provide families with funding for preschool.
 - The Virginia Preschool Initiative distributes state funds to schools and community-based organizations to provide quality preschool programs for at-risk four-year-olds unserved by the federal Head Start program.

Head start program:

- Provides comprehensive educational, case management, health, nutrition and mental health services to the children and families enrolled in the program.
- AHS is a federally funded, 10-month (September-June), center-based pre-school program designed to serve children ages three to five (or until eligibility for kindergarten) from families who meet the criteria for Head Start services including: low income; Alexandria residency; and age.

Virginia Birth to Five System-

- New system of quality assurance for all programs that receive public funds within the state that provide services to children.
- Must be observed twice a year, through local and outside observers.
- Evaluation will be measure if programs are providing age-appropriate stimuli for enrolled children.
 - Observers from the State will visit at least once a year.
 - Providers are given incentives if they meet the quality assurance requirements.
 - The ratings will start being published in the Fall of 2023.

Funding for programs:

- The State of Virginia defines how funding is provided for the programs.
 - The projection of children in the program drives the funding for the programs each fiscal year.
 - If number of enrolled children increases the state must increase funding.
 - Virginia has also changed the eligibility requirements to reach more children.
 - Income brackets eligibility have changed to expand services.

Subsidy program for families to afford childcare:

- Families may be eligible for a childcare subsidy for children aged 0-13 if both parents are working, going to school, or participating in training.
 - Families pay a single fee based on their income directly to the provider of care. The remainder of the cost of care is paid by the Department of Community & Human Services.

Current enrollment:

- There are currently four hundred seventy-four children enrolled in the City's childcare program. This is an increase from '22's enrollment of three hundred forty-nine families.
 - Based on proportionality of population the City of Alexandria has a higher rate of enrolled children participating in the childcare program compared to Loudoun County, Fairfax County, Arlington, and Prince William County.
- In March 16.9% of childcare applications were approved and 83.10% were denied.
 - The state has expanded acceptable proof of address to include a bill, an updated driver's license, or a landlord statement that does not need to be notarized.

- Additionally, DCHS was provided with the technology to look at DMV records to verify addresses rather than having to wait for a third party. These steps have expanded the number of eligible families.
- Due to these changes as of May 71.43%, applications were approved and 28.57% were denied.

Pathways to childcare:

- Office of community services receives funds for providing temporary childcare for 30 days or less in crisis need emergency childcare services.
- Families that are on TANF.
- Workforce Development Program provides opportunities a pathway for childcare for certain families.

Shift to coordinated enrollment:

- The State is moving towards a one application for all services.
 - If the family needs include childcare services and other services, there will be one application.
 - The idea is to collect information and different programs collaborating to coordinate enrollment in needed services.

Challenges in childcare program

- There is an increasing caseload due to expanded eligibility guidelines, an increased administrative burden of ongoing cases, and backlogs of families that must be recertified.
 - Previous workload measures study stated the number of family services employees should be 8 but the team consists of 4 employees.
- Challenges with the State's qualification guidelines for childcare services.
 - To qualify families must be working, doing a service/training, or going to school to approve childcare.

Suggestions for improving staff retention and growth in childcare program.

- Create an intern pipeline program to attract and retain staff.
- The opportunity to have additional professional level that staff can be promoted to would help retain staff.
- Difficult to compete with other jurisdictions because they have better telework options and offer a better language pay differential.

Approval of minutes: The minutes from May 15, 2023, were unanimously approved by present SSAB members.

Welcome New Members:

New member Anne O'Hanlon welcomed to the SSAB.

Update on SSAB letter to City Council and City Manager about DCHS staffing challenges:

- Abby Horrell (Chair) reached out to Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins, Councilman Kirk McPike and Councilmember Sarah Bagley.
 - Councilwoman Gaskins wants to continue to work with SSAB to provide support in addressing the staffing challenges.
 - Councilman McPike stated that the City of Alexandria included a compensation study in the FY'23 budget. The study should start in July.
 - Councilwoman Gaskins will look to see if DCHS will be included in the study. If not, she will make a to include in future.

Next steps:

- Keep on-going communication with City Council members Gaskins, McPike and Bagley.
- Abby Horrell (Chair) will try to get additional information from the City with support of council members in regards to vacancies and compensation information.
- Councilwoman Gaskins suggested to continue communication through sending letters through November as the City Council Budget retreat is scheduled for that time.

Review of draft document to share with community about housing:

- The SSAB will continue to provide information on listservs and in other neighborhoods within the City.
 - Councilwoman Gaskins suggested that during the summer the SSAB members can reach out to 5 people to share information.
- Zoning and Housing talking points will include cost of one bedroom and two bedrooms, and salary required to afford apartments.
 - Include an additional note about how evictions have increased.

Next steps:

- The Housing and Zoning talking points will be placed on Google Docs to ensure accessibility for all SSAB members to contribute.
 - The talking points will be used through different venues such as op-eds, budget meetings, or a social media carousel.
 - Abby Horrell (Chair) will share talking points and the communication between councilmembers with the rest of SSAB members.
 - It is important to continue spreading the information during the summer as City Council vote will happen during the Fall.
- SSAB members will continue to write letters to City Council regarding the staffing issue.

Discussion of future guest speakers:

- Lesa Gilber will reach out to someone in youth services to provide information about the youth opioid epidemic to the SSAB.

- SSAB members are also interested in information about detox facilities in the region.

SSAB member recruitment

- The SSAB currently has 4 open slots and will continue recruiting until slots are filled.
- Matt Walsh (Vice-Chair) will circulate the Volunteer Alexandria post with new SSAB members to continue sharing with respective networks.
- Members that are accepted are appointed by city council. SSAB appointment will last for 3 years.

2023 SSAB meeting schedule:

- FY '23 starts in July and SSAB meetings need to happen at least 6 times in this Fiscal Year. This includes the option of having 2 hybrid meetings.
- SSAB will take a summer break and reconvene September 18th, 2023.
- SSAB will continue discussion on which dates to have hybrid meetings during the next meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 8:43p.m.