City of Alexandria, Virginia

Department of Community and Human Services

Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes

June 22, 2026

Present: Karen Carter (Co-Chair), Shawna Gary, Ann O' Hanlon, Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair), Ashley Caison (Virtual), Abby Curran Horrell, Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff), Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) (Virtual)

Absent:

Call to Order/Welcome:

The June meeting was called to order by Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) at 7:13 p.m.

Approval of minutes: The April and May meeting minutes were reviewed and approved without any changes.

Review, discuss, and formulate actions plan for next two years:

Member Engagement:

- SSAB members discussed engaging a prospective new member. Abby Curran Horrel updated a posting on Volunteer Alexandria, and a prospective member expressed interest. Abby Curran Horrel followed up and sent application for a new member. Lesa Gilbert discussed receiving new member email as well.
- SSAB members discussed what has kept them on the board. Members highlighted learning about the community, a desire to raise awareness of the circumstances the community is facing, and the board offers an opportunity to be involved in serving the local community.
- The board will not have a new member seated until Council resumes sessions in September. This allows continued recruitment efforts in the interim, though formal approval will be delayed.

Member retention:

- SSAB members discussed whether increased engagement opportunities would improve member retention.
    - Bylaws update has provision for committees while the opportunity to use them, yet it will allow members to engage in different issues with increased responsibility which will increase buy-in since people are seeking to volunteer with a purpose.

New Member Orientation:

- SSAB members discussed updating the orientation process to do include an in-person touchpoint meeting, Co-Chairs Karen Carter and Jenna Mayer will divide meetings depending on the area.
    - One person will take meetings in the West End and the other in the Del Ray area as the new on boarding process.
- The process will continue to include a signed welcome letter, copies of agendas, and minutes for the last three months will be sent to the new members.
    - Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) will review the existing welcome email to determine whether revisions are needed, in coordination with the new broader onboarding touchpoint process.
- New members will still be required to log on to state system to have SSAB state training.

Public benefits:

- SSAB members discussed how the board will focus on sharing information and educational information with larger groups, boards, and other community members in terms of changes in public benefits.
    - Members will be assigned individual tasks and report back to the larger group.
- The board discussed the importance of not being exploitative of community members' circumstances; if residents are asked to contribute their time, the board should consider appropriate compensation.
- SSAB members emphasized using existing surveys and available data.
    - DCHS is developing a survey specifically about residents and public benefits. The department can present this survey to the SSAB to solicit board input.
- Community picnics were identified as an opportunity to engage with residents and gather feedback.
    - Lesa Gilbert will order a banner for the SSAB for future community events that SSAB would like to attend.
    - The board discussed forming a small committee to brainstorm this initiative further, including clarifying its goal.
        - During which time the committee can identify whether the goal is to focus on membership recruitment or general feedback collection.

DCHS staff support:

- The board discussed who should be involved in shaping the conversation around staff retention, including topics such as telework policy and staff compensation (previous conversations focused on factors beyond pay), as well as continuing staff appreciation days (e.g., Social Workday, Public Benefits Day).
    - This may include outreach to businesses near the Mt. Vernon location that could contribute to these events, as well as sending a letter to City Council highlighting the SSAB's efforts and any businesses providing support.

- The board also discussed following up on previous compensation studies and connecting with new leadership to continue these conversations.

Education/advocacy:

- The board discussed connecting with community associations, such as the West End Business Association.
- The board discussed beginning conversations early each year for the Legislative Agenda to anticipate the annual cycle in advance, given the typically short turnaround.
    - This includes preparation for the City Budget Letter.
    - Lesa Gilbert will follow up with the City's Legislative Aide, as the process typically begins in the September/October timeframe.

Updates from Board Members:

- The board welcomed a new member; Lesa will coordinate with Karen Carter (Co-Chair) and Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) regarding onboarding.
- Ann O'Hanlon and Karen Carter (Co-Chair) conducted an exit interview, which yielded the following recommendations: a standing practice of nametags; and the development of brief member bios, to serve as introductions and help members get to know one another.

Next Meeting: September 21, 2026

- Unless an emergency meeting is needed for legislative agenda setting
- Next meeting location: Community Lodgings
    - Lesa Gilbert will reach out to Executive Director and see if that timeline works.

Meeting adjourned: 08:10 PM