City of Alexandria, Virginia

Department of Community and Human Services

Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes

April 27, 2026

Present: Karen Carter (Co-Chair), Shawna Gary, Ann O' Hanlon, Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair), Ashley Caison, Abby Curran Horrell, Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff), Josh Barnathan (virtual), Melanie Gray (Christ Church)

Absent: Allison Greenleaf, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff)

Call to Order/Welcome:

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

Guest Speaker: Melanie Gray, Director of Mission and Outreach at Christ Church Alexandria

Christ Church

- Christ Church is considered a historic church because it was George Washington's church and the Ministry was developed by the clergy in response to the number of people who would come to the church in need of support.
    - Lazarus Ministry began in the 1990s. In the beginning, it was completely run by volunteers. Currently, there are over 200 volunteers from Christ Church, with a couple of paid positions.

Lazarus Financial Ministry:

- The financial ministry has a helpline in English and Spanish for when people call Christ Church looking for assistance with rent, utilities, and medical bills.
    - At times, the ministry has been able to provide support with security deposits and storage unit spaces.
- The program serves approximately 22 families or individuals per week, by appointment.
    - Prior to appointments, families/participants are asked to submit their ledgers and bills, and financial counselors process their information.
    - Financial counselors meet with people at Fairlington Presbyterian Church as it easily accessible by bus and has parking if needed.
- In 2025, the ministry paid 611 bills, and 42% were paid in full. The average bill was $404.
    - 71% of those who reach out for support do so because of rent, 23% for utilities, and the remaining 6% for miscellaneous needs such as medical bills, security deposits, or storage.

- Funding for the ministry comes from Christ Church. The ministry operates with a zero-based budget, and fundraising throughout the year helps support the community.
    - The ministry has applied for grants with the Alfred Street Foundation and St. John's at Lafayette Square and has received a Burke and Herbert grant. Foles Church has also made donations. The ministry relies on other faith communities for additional support.
- As of last week, 138 of the people served in 2026 were in the eviction process, with 12 having imminent writs of eviction.
    - The level of support is determined by the client's ability to be self-sufficient the following month.
        - If self-sufficiency is not possible, support is provided to help pivot to next steps, such as securing a storage space for belongings and reaching out to family members for temporary housing.
- New roles were created in 2025 to adapt to changing conditions. A client advocate position now provides case management support for those with higher needs.
    - Two volunteers go to court every week and partner with Legal Services of Northern Virginia to help people understand the eviction process and answer legal questions.
    - New challenges have arisen due to the increased presence of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the impact of individuals fearing going to work, or having a family member detained or deported, affecting their ability to pay rent. This has caused a ripple effect, increasing the number of cases of eviction on the docket.
- If new grants are secured, the funding will be used to implement a new intake system that asks more holistic questions to offer broader support and connect residents to other community partners.
- Key faith partnerships include St. Paul's Lazarus Ministry and St. Vincent de Paul's Ministry out of the Basilica of St. Mary's.
    - The ministry also participates in a Friday meeting with these ministries and Daphne Dorange from DCHS OCS to triage cases and best support people in need.
    - A suggestion was made to the SSAB board to have Daphne Dorange more present in community spaces to deliver services, or for additional staff with similar skills to be hired, to maintain the high level of care currently provided.

Demographics of People Served

- It was reported that the primary zip codes served are as follows: 35% in 22304, 22% in 22314, 17% in 22311, and 12% in 22305.

    - Of those served, 27% are employed full-time, 26% are employed part-time, and 49% have no employment.
    - 73% were female
    - 17% were enrolled in Section 8 housing assistance.
    - 56% of those served identified as African American, 25% as White, and 23% as Hispanic.
        - The totals may exceed 100% as individuals may select multiple racial or ethnic identities.
- Additionally, 55% of individuals seen in 2025 had never previously sought services from the Lazurus Financial Ministry.
- It was reported that the ministry is spending an average of $7,667 per week this year, compared to $4,976 per week last year.

Lazarus Food Pantry

- The food pantry operates every Thursday morning beginning at 9:00 a.m. The only requirement for access is that individuals must be residents of the City of Alexandria.
    - The pantry serves approximately 40 individuals per week, with most families and individuals being over the age of 60.
- It was described that the food pantry is structured as a pop-up store. Visitors are asked to bring their own bags, and a volunteer assists them shopping. Available items include fresh meat, halal meat, fish, fresh produce, butter, eggs, and non-perishables.
    - Donations come from parishioners, and the ministry maintains an ongoing Amazon wish list through which individuals can purchase and donate items directly to the pantry. Additional donations are received from Trader Joe's, Mom's Organic Market, and Panera Bread.
- The food pantry offers full-size toiletries and cleaning supplies on the last Thursday of each month. The ministry's acquisition of a new grant of approximately $20,000 will cover the cost of these items for the year.
- Additionally, the food pantry partners with the Virginia Cooperative Extension Office to conduct cooking demonstrations focused on healthy recipes utilizing vegetables that are less commonly selected but are available in abundance at the pantry.
- Beginning May 9th, the ministry will begin gleaning at the Old Town Farmers Market, where 11 vendors have committed to donating from May through October.
    - Volunteers coordinate the pickup of the donations and if any it will spoil prior to Thursday it is donated to other pantries throughout the City that will have earlier distribution dates.

- Christ church now maintains a stock of emergency food bags containing water, portable protein, and other items recommended by the health department. Each bag includes a resource sheet listing locations where individuals can access breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Support Requested

- It was requested that the board continue to advocate for dedicated support to assist community partners in understanding the ongoing changes to benefits and services.
    - That the board advocates for the placement of frontline staff in the Arlandria community to ensure that residents can continue to access the services needed.
- Additionally, the board continues to support the hiring of mental health workers.
    - It was noted that staff and volunteers are witnessing firsthand the mental health challenges facing community members, and that mental health workers have demonstrated the ability to engage individuals experiencing homelessness with dignity and respect, and to effectively de-escalate situations.

Approval of minutes: The February meeting minutes were reviewed and approved with one amendment: the removal of SSAB members names serving on the Fund for Human Services Grant Review.

SSAB Employee Appreciation Discussion:

- SSAB member Abby Curran Horrell provided updates regarding the Employee Appreciation efforts from March.
    - Thirty-two gift cards were purchased ranging from $10-$15 and were dropped off to Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) wrapped with bows. Most gift cards were to establishments where employees could purchase food or coffee.

Bylaws Updates Discussion:

- SSAB members discussed the updated version of the by-laws and what needed to be done for the revisions to be finalized.
    - The revisions include a new leadership structure of co-chairs, and that term limits have been expanded to two years.
    - The inclusion of the new co-chairs' names for signature, and then once signed will be distributed to the rest of the SSAB members.

SSAB Member Updates and Recruitment Discussion:

- SSAB members discussed developing a recruitment announcement to circulate to attract new members.
    - The SSAB members will share the announcement through their professional networks via LinkedIn or other platforms of their choosing.
- SSAB members discussed scheduling one to two meetings dedicated to developing a board work plan. It was noted that the work plan would serve as a roadmap for the SSAB's priorities and would identify tangible milestones the board would like to achieve.

    - SSAB members shared that this approach would support recruitment efforts, help set clear expectations, and sustain member engagement in the board's purpose.
- SSAB co-chairs provided updates indicating that they will alternate responsibility for meeting organization and agenda setting.
- SSAB members thanked Ann O'Hanlon for her service as her term has come to an end.
- SSAB members thanked Josh Barnathan for his service as he will be relocating to Washington, DC and no longer able to continue participating on the board.

SSAB Member Additional Engagement Opportunities Discussion:

- SSAB members discussed the idea of highlighting a different organization or cause at each meeting and sharing ways in which contributions could be made, whether through financial donations, material donations, or volunteering time.
    - Co-chairs highlighted that participation would not be an obligation but rather an opportunity for members to further engage if they choose.
    - SSAB members expressed support for this idea, citing prior donations made to ALIVE following presentations and even Lazarus Food Pantry prior to presentation.

Upcoming Meeting:

- May 18th in-person Del Pepper Community Resource Center
- SSAB members discussed offsite meeting locations but will wait until after the visioning session to decide which place is best.
    - Interest was expressed in Casa Chirilagua as a potential future offsite location.

Meeting adjourned: 8:18 pm