City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
February 9, 2026

Present: Josh Barnathan (Chair), Karen Carter (Vice Chair), Shawna Gary, Ann O' Hanlon, Allison Greenleaf, Jenna Mayer, Ashley Caison, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Angela Almonte (DCHS Staff), Helen Morris (ACAP)

Absent: Abby Curran Horrell

Call to Order/Welcome:

The February meeting was called to order by Josh Barnathan (Chair) at 7:03 p.m. and the SSAB members acknowledged the departure of member Jordan Nally.

Guest Speaker: Helen Morris Alexandria Community Action Program

- ACAP was established in the late 1990s and will soon be celebrating its 25th anniversary.
  - The organization was founded in response to disproportionately high rates of teen pregnancy in the area, initially launching as an educational campaign before expanding its scope and hiring a dedicated coordinator.
- Helen Morris began serving as the liaison in 2009. By 2012, a strategic decision was made for ACAP to become more robust and move beyond information delivery alone.
  - That same year, the ACHS Teen Wellness Center was established, creating an integrated model of teen health services within the schools.
  - High school peer advocates receive training on contraceptives and provide instruction at the middle school level, developing their own curriculum around specific topic areas. The coordinator is responsible for delivering instruction at the high school level.
- In 2015, ACAP was awarded the FISBE PREP grant, which elevated the organization's work both within schools and during out-of-school time.
  - The program addresses pregnancy prevention, sexual education, and youth development.
  - A youth advocate coordinator position was created, and there are currently 10 peer advocates, nearly all of whom are students at ACHS.
  - The current HHS grant totals $700,000 and is a three-year renewable grant; the current grant period ends in 2027.
  - A small working group has been formed to conduct a fiscal analysis of ACAP's programming area to assess the potential impacts should HHS funding be discontinued.
- The Teen Wellness Center provides services for pregnant teens.
  - Teen pregnancy rates in Alexandria remain elevated compared to neighboring jurisdictions, particularly among the Latino population, with the highest rates occurring in the 18–19 age group.
  - The health department tracks data beginning at ages 12 to 13.
- Key data sources include the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted annually, and the Developmental Assets Survey, which measures 40 positive factors that support healthy youth development.

    - All data is publicly available on the City's website and collectively informs the ACAP workplan.
- ACAP launched the Wrap Up Alexandria Campaign in response to rising STI rates.
    - The campaign includes the distribution of informational pamphlets on how to protect one's sexual health.
- Needs identified by ACAP include increased participation in working groups, with particular emphasis on Latino outreach; and continued monitoring of the $150,000 coordinator position funded by the City to ensure it remains included in the budget.

Approval of minutes: The January meeting minutes were reviewed by members and approved with one amendment: the addition of "virtual meeting" to the minutes.

SSAB Member Updates:

Boards and Commissions Meeting Update:

- The sign-up period for Alexandria Fund grant reviewers closes next week.
    - Reviewers will be responsible for reviewing and scoring grant proposals.
    - SSAB member Shawna Gary indicated that she would sign up to serve as a reviewer.

Mental Health Coalition Update:

- The Mental Health Coalition was convened on February 4th.
    - The group made significant progress, reaching agreement on five topic areas and corresponding workgroups; workgroup assignments are forthcoming.

SSAB Bylaws Review:

- The SSAB currently has 13 designated member positions, with 8 members currently on the roster.
    - There are 3 client positions designated for DCHS service recipients that are open.
    - Members discussed term limits, and leadership structure.
- A vote was held to amend the bylaws to adopt the structure of co-chair leadership, and two-year terms.
    - The amendments were approved and include the adoption of a co-chair leadership structure and the establishment of two-year terms.
    - Karen Carter and Jenna Mayer have been named co-chairs, effective March 16.

DCHS Updates: Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff)

SNAP updates that impact eligibility:

- Work requirements have been updated to 80 hours per month and now include education and volunteering as qualifying activities.
    - DCHS Boards and commissions are working to build resources and identify volunteer opportunities, with particular attention to individuals in the 55–64 age group.
    - Efforts are underway to formalize activities that participants are already engaged in as official volunteer opportunities.

- Chronic homelessness is defined as a period of six months or more, and applicants must demonstrate that their homelessness is the direct cause of their inability to work.
  - Individuals experiencing homelessness for six months or less do not meet the eligibility threshold.
- Veterans are no longer exempt from work requirements.
- Foster youth who are aging out of the system, ages 18 to 24, are also no longer exempt.

Impact on clients at DCHS:

- The number of applications received has declined from approximately 500 per month in December to just under 400 per month.
- The increased regulatory and administrative burden is straining staff capacity and preventing participants from accessing the benefits they are entitled to receive.

Economic Mobility Forum "Building Blocks of Mobility," guest speaker Dr. Craig Richardson:

- The presentation addressed the role of connectivity and cross-socioeconomic socialization in promoting economic mobility, and identified transportation as a significant disparity barrier, alongside education and childcare access.

Budget Update:

- A budget work session is scheduled for March 18th and will be available both virtually and in person. The budget is expected to be released on February 24th.

Upcoming Meetings Discussion:

Off-Site Location Discussion:

- A church location where meals are provided
- West End ALIVE! Hub (suggested by Jen)
- ALIVE! Transitional Housing
- Community Lodgings
- Domestic Violence (DV) shelter housing

Guest Speaker Discussion:

- Emergency Financial Assistance through Lazarus Ministries Melanie Gray
- ALIVE! Transitional Housing (on-site)
- Community Lodgings Lynn Thompson

Next Meeting Date:

- March 16th in-person at Del Pepper Community Resource Center

Member Appreciation Efforts Discussion:

- February and March have been designated as Social Workers and Benefits Employee appreciation months. Appreciation efforts in the past included thank-you notes and gift cards.

- Karen Carter (Vice Chair) will reach out to Abby Curran Horrell who has led past appreciation efforts.
- Josh Barnathan (Chair) will coordinate drop off of the gift cards to DCHS.

Meeting adjourned: 8:50 p.m.