City of Alexandria, Virginia

Department of Community and Human Services

Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

September 21, 2026

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

Absent:

Call to Order/Welcome: The September meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m. by Karen Carter.; new members Michael Kutner and Benjamin Tally (Ben) were welcomed to board.

Presentation: A day in the life of a front-line DCHS team member was postponed until the next meeting in October.

Approval of minutes: Board members reviewed June meeting minutes, and Ben Tally moved to accept the June minutes, Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) seconded. Board members unanimously approved the minutes without any changes.

DCHS Staff Support:

Staff committee breakdown:

- Board members discussed a brief overview of past support/appreciation efforts, including gift cards, but are seeking to increase business support.
    - The board typically supports about 100 staff, which includes child welfare workers and benefits workers, during Social Worker and Benefits Worker Appreciation months.
        - Typically, that appreciation efforts include notes of appreciation or monetary donations.
- The board discussed that the group is small now but discussed that one person could be the main contact for staff support and legislative agenda.
- The board voted to have point people instead of a committee:
    - Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) moved to consider both staff support and legislative agenda point of contact. The board voted unanimously to accept this motion.
    - Abby Curran O'Horrell volunteered to be the point person for either effort, whichever would be most helpful.

- Ben Tolley has volunteered to take on the staff support/appreciation effort and will discuss with Abby Curran O'Horrell how to carry this effort with getting the community involved.

Board Member Biography Document:

Board members discussed filling out an electronic document or hard copy to learn more about each other. Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) will oversee collecting these and will send out the information to board members.

Legislative Agenda Discussion:

Legislative Agenda recommendations presented by Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) included:

- Staff retention and recruitment at DCHS
  - Michael Kutner shared that it is important to uplift the inefficiency of wait times of an hour, or even to get an appointment at DCHS.
- HR1 new SNAP and Medicaid work requirements
- Strengthening public benefit program administration

Board Discussion of Staff Retention and Recruitment Recommendation:

- Request that the General Assembly increase state reimbursement rates for local departments of social services eligibility workers and social workers (board motioned and agreement).
- Support the regional cost of competing salary adjustment for local DSS positions in Northern Virginia, comparable to the cost of competing adjustment already used in state school funding formulas (board agreement).
- Support continued and expanded funding for the state's supplemental local cost pools.
- Removed recommendation: support state investment in caseload relief measures, since last year's budget included money for that.

Board Discussion of Strengthen Public Benefit Programs Recommendation:

- The board members added language about cost-sharing to be kept at state level.
- Support state general fund appropriations to prepare for Virginia's prospective SNAP benefit cost-share obligation.
- Support continued state investment in SNAP quality control and payment accuracy tools and staff, updated to allow localities to update the policy bot with up-to-date policies.

    - Board discussion about modernization of the system and the use of AI within the department.
        - The state level has restricted the use of AI for benefits or decision-making.
        - State with VDSS quality assurance with vendors to have working products, and if not, then the vendor must pay a penalty.
- Support the budget amendments already introduced in the General Assembly to raise CHIP eligibility to 305%.
- Support legislation directing Medicaid and SNAP agencies to share eligibility and work-requirement compliance data with each other, reducing redundancy.
    - Share who is disabled to be verified; make it streamlined.
    - How notification is received and written, and other methods of notification, in simple language.

Board Discussion of Support Alexandrians Affected by HR1 Work Requirement Changes Recommendation:

- The board revised language for this recommendation as to request dedicated state funding and staffing support for local departments, certification periods are decreasing to six months, workforce-connection resources, support state investment in outreach, benefits navigation, and job training funding for work-based learning;
- Alexandria's inclusion in any state workgroup or technical assistance effort focused on mitigating coverage losses for children and families affected by HR1, consistent with proposals already raised in the General Assembly.
- Support continued or increased local flexibility and state matching support for locally funded safety net programs, such as the Alexandria Fund for Human Services, to help cushion residents against benefit interruptions during the work-requirement rollout (ensuring resources are available for people with different immigration status: refugee/asylum).

Vote for Legislative Agenda:

Ben Tolley introduced the motion to approve the legislative agenda with amendments and changes, seconded by Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair). All board members voted to approve.

Future Legislative Agenda Discussion:

- Ben Tolley discussed the opportunity for the board to focus on mental health and where the SSAB can fit in.
    - Members discussed the opportunity to collaborate on efforts with other commissions that exist and can discuss further in future meetings.

Budget Update:

- Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) will send out the City Manager's budget to the board to write its budget letter for October.
    - Shawna Gary asked for the top three priorities that are most important for local budget to be placed as next month's agenda item.

Action Items:

- Karen Carter (Co-Chair) and Jenna Mayer (Co-Chair) will meet with the new member Michael Kutner to prepare a presentation for the board on client experience.
- Michael Kutner and Ben Tolley will complete their state orientation.
- Legislative agenda was due September 18th Jenna Mayer will work on submitting the approved legislative agenda as soon as possible.

Next Meeting Date: October 19**,** Del Pepper Community Center

Meeting Adjourned: 8:59 p.m.