

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
February 24, 2025

Present: Abby Curran Horrell, Samantha Pedrosa, Josh Barnathan (Chair), Karen Carter (Vice Chair), Maura Miller, Allison Greenleaf, Shawna Gary, Michael de La Guardia, Jordan Nally, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff), Kate Garvey (DCHS Staff)

Absent: Ann O' Hanlon, Ashley Caison

Call to Order/Welcome:

The meeting was called to order by Josh Barnathan (Chair) at 7:03 p.m. and SSAB members were welcomed to the February meeting.

DCHS Updates Kate Garvey, DCHS Director:

- DCHS received about sixty million in federal grants that are distributed through the State of Virginia.
- The Social Services block grants in Virginia are where most of the funding comes from for child services.
- Since there is a potential loss of federal funding, DCHS has been focusing on preparedness and on understanding what the impact would be. This allows for DCHS readiness to serve directly impacted community members. In the meantime, the funding that is there will continue to be used and DCHS will continue to draw down grants that are available.
- The American Public Human Services Association (APSHA) has developed a side-by-side to the announced federal budget that highlights potential impacts on social services.
 - Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) will share it with SSAB board members.

Immigration policy and potential local impact:

- The City of Alexandria follows all Federal Law and is not a sanctuary city. The City of Alexandria's Police Department focuses on enforcing the law but has no role in carrying out immigration policy.
 - DCHS follows HIPAA laws and does not engage in activity that shares client information.
 - Due to immigration policy, there may be diminishing trust or contact with certain communities who qualify for services. In case that does occur, DCHS is considering satellite offices as alternatives to service delivery to ensure access to community members who qualify for DCHS services.
 - There has been staff training throughout the city to ensure staff preparedness if ICE arrives at a city facility, and Know Your Right cards are available if clients need access to them.

Federal workforce support:

- There will be a job and resource fair on March 8th at Wakefield High School that was created through regional collaboration. It will have a broad focus with resources that support job search, food distribution, and awareness of mental health supports a broader focus but also when efforts are arising in the City of Alexandria.
 - DCHS Workforce Development Center will be a part of these efforts.
 - This will also be an opportunity to show vacancies within DCHS that may be filled by people from various backgrounds and experiences.
 - There will be more regional efforts, with a focus on the federal departments that have been impacted the most by layoffs/firings.
- The Center for Economic Support is tracking the number of new unemployment insurance filings and the number of people that are coming in due to mass layoffs or firings. There is also a person from the Virginia Unemployment Commission who is also working on site to help with unemployment insurance assistance.
- There is a Community Resource Group that convenes monthly to ensure information sharing and support, focusing on community needs.
- A recent COG report estimates that 15,000 federal workers live in the City of Alexandria, which is about 20% of the federal workforce of the region. These residents could see an increase in the need to access benefits such as SNAP. In the past, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was also a rise in domestic violence.

Discussion on potential federal shutdown:

- The City of Alexandria Office of Management and Budget is looking at what resources will be available in a worst-case scenario.
- The state has shared that they would meet for a short session to look at budget amendments in order to be responsive to the immediate impact.

Town Hall SSAB Members Discussion:

- SSAB members discussed ways to create engagement with impacted federal workforce and contractors that may be facing a difficult time.
 - Ideas included engaging the council through town hall listening sessions or coffee talks. Locations that would engage people in different locations, such as community centers, school buildings, and areas that are available that are non-traditional spaces.
 - Consideration of partnering with other boards, such as the employment commission.
 - SSAB members discussed the idea of having a prepared message that all board members would be able to refer to.

Approval of minutes: The January meeting minutes were unanimously approved with no changes by SSAB members.

Knowledge transfer space:

- SSAB members discussed Google Space as a space where they can keep track of connect materials that help meet the board's six-hour requirement and other efforts such as the previous legislative package.

DCHS Appreciation Effort for February and March:

- Recap of previous efforts where homemade thank you cards were made and shared with staff. Additionally, there were voluntary donations collected and used to purchase gift cards of \$10 or \$15 to give to supervisors or managers to share with staff.
- SSAB member Abby Horrell will coordinate breakfast with Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) and contributions for the gift cards for March that will be distributed.
- Members will gather outside the SSAB to create handwritten appreciation cards. A doodle pool will be sent out by Josh Barnathan (Chair) to see what date works best with SSAB members for the team-building activity.

Updates from previous City Meetings:

- The City of Alexandria council retreat focused on building relationships with the council and Alexandria City Public Schools.
- The City Council's priorities will remain the same as last year except for community engagement, which will be found in each priority.
- The state board of social services' upcoming meeting will cover social service block grant and Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) will share the meeting invitation if SSAB members are interested.

Upcoming City Meetings:

- City council meetings in late Feb/March will be focused on the budget release. There will be community engagement opportunities throughout the City of Alexandria.
- Vice-Mayor Sarah Bagley will be meeting with Josh Barnathan (Chair) in March to follow up on the positions that were most challenging to fill.
 - Shauna Gary has created an Excel sheet that members can look at for some information on the region.
- Members discussed having a personalized approach with the City Council.
 - Members decided that they would continue to think about which Council member they would like to be the main point of contact for.

Guest Speaker Suggestion:

- SSAB members discussed reaching out to the ACLU to see if a speaker would be available for the next meeting.

Action Items:

- SSAB members will follow up to see if there are any volunteer opportunities for the March 8th Regional Resource Fair to support federal workers and contractors.
- Josh Barnathan (Chair) will continue to work on opening communication with boards in neighboring localities. The focus is on how localities can collaborate to address region-wide issues, including federal workers and contractors that have been impacted by recent layoffs/firings.

Upcoming SSAB Meeting Date:

March 17th in-person

- Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff) will contact ALIVE to see if the March meeting can be held there.

April 21st

May 19th

Meeting adjourned at 8:30p