

City of Alexandria, Virginia
Department of Community and Human Services
Social Service Advisory Board Meeting Notes
September 16, 2024

Present: Abby Horrell (Chair), Jordan Nally(virtually), Ann O’ Hanlon, Rachel Dienna, Micheal de La Guardia, Ashley Caison, Karen Carter, Joshua Barnathan(virtual), Shawna Gary, Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff)

Absent: Maura Miller, Allison Greenleaf, Samantha Pedrosa (Vice Chair)

Call to Order/Welcome:

The meeting was called to order by Abby Horrell (Chair) at 7:00 p.m. and SSAB members were welcomed to the September meeting. SSAB members thanked Rachel Dienna for her service, as this was her last meeting.

Approval of minutes: The minutes from June were approved with changes by SSAB members.

SSAB Bylaws Review:

- SSAB members reviewed the bylaws and discussed virtual meetings. A new provision from the State of Virginia allows up to 50% of meetings to be held virtually.
 - Public notification is required and items such as the agenda and documents relevant to in-person meetings must be accessible to the public.
 - Conditions for members to attend virtually on a permanent basis were discussed, emphasizing that a quorum is still needed to make decisions. The current quorum for SSAB members is six.
 - The new provision allows for different accommodation for members with disabilities, allowing for virtual attendance.
 - SSAB member Ann O’Hanlon volunteered to update SSAB bylaws with support from Lesa Gilbert (DCHS Staff)

City Council annual report discussion:

- SSAB members reviewed the annual report. An update was suggested to include information on the Carpenter’s Shelter visit and donations made by SSAB members to the shelter.
- Additional information to be included in the report is staff appreciation efforts, updating the proposal for the VMS system, providing input on the City’s legislative package and recruiting volunteers for the Farmer’s Market.

Discussion on SSAB Goals:

- SSAB members discussed current goals. They included continuing monitoring the ARISE income pilot, assessing the needs of staff and leadership at DCHS, promoting the SNAP

Double Dollars program at the farmers market and engagement with the community, identifying more advocacy opportunities to present before the City Council, and a continued focus on recruitment.

Action Items:

SSAB members are to provide any additional comments for the end of year report by the end of the week to facilitate submission by the end of September to Abby Horrell (Chair)

Annual legislative package discussion: (due October 4th)

Presentation by SSAB member Michael de La Guardia

- Overview of research on social policies and their relevance to Alexandria's SSAB.
 - Discussion on nutrition-free school lunches for all children, noting that a recent Virginia legislative session scaled down to a study. Currently, 7 out of 14 schools in Alexandria provide free breakfast and lunch, supported by the FRAC group.
 - Proposed increase in SNAP benefits from a minimum of \$23 to \$50, highlighting the high cost of food in Northern Virginia.
 - Identified barriers for seniors in accessing government benefits due to complex forms and processes.

Key Policy Areas Discussed:

- ***Working Virginia:*** Advocacy for fair wages, including minimum wage increases and paid family/medical leave (HB 737, SB 373).
- ***Healthcare:*** Continued expansion of access (HB 970) for undocumented individuals and seniors with disabilities. Proposal to raise the federal poverty level threshold from 80% to 100% and remove the Medicaid asset test to decrease administrative burdens.
- ***Childcare:*** Expansion of public programs and enhancement of the Virginia Preschool Initiative.
- ***Housing:*** Addressing zoning issues in Northern Virginia, including removing parking minimums.

Discussion of City Council Priorities:

- Discussion on how to align the SSAB legislative package with City Council priorities.

Domestic Violence Proposal discussion by Lesa Gilbert:

- Proposal to streamline information gathering electronically to avoid re-traumatization, with shared databases and timely service of protective orders. SSAB agreed to support this initiative.

Items to be included in the legislative package:

- SSAB members decided that submissions will include SNAP, school lunches, and domestic violence legislation.
 - Increase SNAP benefits advocacy, free school breakfast and lunch programs and recommend that the city advocate strengthening the SNAP program, particularly for seniors, to enhance quality of life.
- SSAB members shared that they would like to focus on increased collaboration for next year's legislative package.
 - SSAB highlighted homelessness as an opportunity for collaboration with other commissions. They emphasized the benefit of multiple commissions submitting similar legislative packages.

Continued Advocacy not included in the legislative package:

- SSAB agreed that ongoing support for improved pay and benefits for city employees should not be included in the legislative package but advocated for with the City Council.

Action Items:

SSAB members Michael de La Guardia will prepare the lunch programs portion, Ann O' Hanlon for the domestic violence/sexual assault portion, and Abby Horrell (Chair) for the SNAP portion. Michael de La Guardia will circulate information from the Poverty Law Center.

Group Discussion on New Initiatives:

- **Site Visits:** SSAB members discussed their interest in being more in the community. Highlighted a potential site visit to the ALIVE Community Center.
- **Holiday Share Program:** SSAB members will distribute information via email so that members can share with their respective networks. This will provide information on the program for new members as well.
- **ARISE Initiative:** SSAB members discussed their interest in hearing updates about the ARISE guaranteed income pilot.
 - Julie Mullen, Economic Mobility Officer, can update on economic mobility efforts and the development of a mobility plan after October.
- **Substance Use and Recovery:** Exploration of initiatives related to substance use and recovery was proposed.
- **Resettlement Agencies:** SSAB members interested in engaging with resettlement agencies to address immigrant needs.
- **Medicaid Unwinding:** SSAB members are interested in any updates regarding the Medicaid Unwinding that happened.

Review of upcoming meeting dates:

- Monday, October 21

- Monday, November 18
- Monday, December 16

Meeting adjourned at 8:36 p.m.