



VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

June 8, 2010
10:00 a.m.
House Room C

MINUTES

Attending:

Senators Yvonne Miller, Harry Blevins, Edward Houck
Delegates Mamy BaCote, Robert Brink, Christopher Peace and Beverly Sherwood
Citizen member Marvin Wagner

Not Attending:

Delegates Mark Cole and Anne Crockett-Stark
Citizen members Anthony Dale and Joy Myers

Staff Attending:

Amy M. Atkinson, Leah Hamaker, Joyce Garner, Lindsey Strachan

I. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Senator Yvonne B. Miller, Chair

Senator Miller called the meeting to order at 10:00 and welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Commission's 2010 study year.

II. Activities in State Government Related to Youth and Families

Amy M. Atkinson, Executive Director

Ms. Atkinson introduced the 2010 Activities document and reviewed in detail those initiatives impacting the Commission's current areas of concern.

III. Children's Services System Transformation

Matthew M. Cobb, Deputy Secretary

Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources

Deputy Secretary Cobb presented an overview of the Transformation's mission and vision, including the phases of the reform and how it has impacted the Commonwealth's child welfare, juvenile justice, education and mental health systems. In addition, his presentation provided members an update on the progress of the 13 pilot sites and current/future initiatives for the Transformation.

The Deputy Secretary discussed some of the statistics that impact the Children's Services System Transformation: the percentage of youth receiving mental health treatment; the number of juveniles in the court system requiring mental health treatment; the number of foster care youth in kin placements; and the percentage of youth in foster care currently aging out of the system.

Since December 2007, 13 Virginia localities have partnered in CORE (Council on Reform) in an initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. In reviewing CORE's key outcomes to date and the Transformation strategy for change, Commission members Senators Miller and Blevins and Delegate BaCote discussed issues related to kinship care: Virginia's low ranking in the U.S. and the attitudes which drive kinship care placements.

Senator Houck requested information about the Pines Residential Treatment Center and an update on what was being done to safeguard children in residential care treatment in the future. Ms. Atkinson indicated that Commission staff would request the Secretary to address the issue at the Commission's next meeting.

The Deputy Secretary noted that Virginia ranks 50th in its standing of youth aging out of foster care. Delegate Peace, upon reviewing of the Virginia Children's Service Practice Model, asked how financial incentives have affected numbers. Discussion followed among members and the Deputy Secretary on how to best balance successful outcomes with the Commonwealth's practices and policies, keeping in mind their financial impact. He responded that the Secretary will continue to watch the numbers very closely.

In response to a question about what data is available on positive outcomes and which are transferable models, Mr. Cobb indicated that a Transformation Executive Team meets twice monthly to examine these issues and encourage open communication among all parties.

Delegate Peace asked that there be more attention given to financial incentives about the merits of culture vs. financial considerations in match rate deliberations.

Delegate Brink urged that Ray Ratke's position be filled with someone able to coordinate the "alphabet soup" of agencies, lest momentum be lost. The Deputy Secretary addressed his questions about health care coverage available to youth aging out of foster care, as well as a question from Senator Houck about how youth can access medications for which they have prescriptions, but no money.

IV. Juvenile Offender Re-entry

Helivi L. Holland, Director
Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice

Banci E. Tewolde, Prisoner Re-entry Coordinator
Office of the Secretary of Public Safety

Director Holland and Ms. Tewolde, at the Commission's request, presented an overview of Virginia's juvenile justice system, including demographic and statistical information on the following:

- The Department of Juvenile Justice's operating expenditures;
- An Virginia's community and correctional programs;
- Virginia's juvenile re-offense rates; and
- The Administration's activities and initiatives related to juvenile re-entry.

Delegate BaCote asked Director Holland whether GED classes are offered in adult jails also housing juvenile offenders. Cindy Cave of the Department of Education (DOE) answered that jails are under local, rather than state, jurisdiction so GED offerings would likely vary. One point of clarification was offered for purposes of discussion: "commitment" is the correct term for detention for youth ages 11-21.

Senator Miller asked what statistics the Department of Juvenile Justice has on the demographics of Juvenile Correctional Center (JCC) admissions.

Ms. Tewold, who has been tasked by the Governor with developing a re-entry plan for adults and juveniles, outlined the events leading up to the formation of the Juvenile Offender Re-entry Council. On May 11 the Governor signed Executive Order 11, which amended and altered the Virginia Prisoner Re-entry Policy Academy, which had been established by Executive Order in 2009. The new Executive Order changed the name of the Policy Academy to the Virginia Prisoner and Juvenile Offender Re-entry Council. She assured the Commission that Governor McDonnell was committed to developing a comprehensive program.

A primary goal of the Council is to improve collaboration with all impacted agencies and help identify programming based on risk assessment. A report of the Council's progress, including legislation and budget proposals, will be made in December. Various issue groups have been formed. These issue groups are Mental Health/Substance Abuse, Housing, Workforce Development, Family/Community Reintegration, and Offender Re-entry Preparation. Each issue group will utilize a policy team which, in turn, will gather and share research and best practices on their topic of interest. The Re-Entry Council is reaching out to faith-based organizations, and also focusing on factors leading to juvenile re-offending.

V. Kinship Care in Virginia

Paul McWhinney, Director, Division of Family Services
Virginia Department of Social Services

Mr. McWhinney indicated that Family Engagement is what DSS is working towards and reviewed the Practice Model for Family Engagement, which has been designed to improve permanency outcomes. At stake is a positive outcome where foster youth have someone to call when they make a good grade, to cheer at graduation or to walk the young person down the aisle.

The Practice Model includes attention to Family Meetings, Family Search, Family Support and Kinship Care, all making efforts towards permanency planning.

Mr. McWhinney informed the Commission that the Department is not involved in private, informal kinship arrangements. Family members often feel that involving the state in the care of an absent parent's child indicates they have given up hope on the parent's future ability to care for the child. Caregivers in informal kinship care arrangements may apply for state assistance (TANF), but there is no child welfare involvement unless the family requests services for the youth. Accordingly, it is extremely difficult to gather data on informal kinship care where there is no Department involvement.

There was full discussion of the Fall 2009 study conducted by the Division of Family Services' Outcome Based Reporting and Analysis Unit (OBRA). This study measured the number of children diverted from foster care, as well as the barriers to placing children in kinship care.

Delegate BaCote asked where youth ages 18-21 fit into the picture.

Delegate Brink expressed interest in the concept of fictive kin, persons who are not blood relatives but who develop close emotional ties to the youth.

Delegate Peace requested that Commission staff be invited to DSS' statewide townhall meetings and noted that Commission staff could be a valuable resource and vice versa.

VI. 2010 Meeting Calendar

VII. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m.

Public comment was not received at this meeting.