



Virginia Commission on Youth

May 17, 2011
1:30 p.m.
House Room 3

MINUTES

Attending:

Senator Yvonne Miller, Delegate Christopher Peace, citizen member Gary Close

Not Attending:

Senators Harry Blevins and Edward Houck; Delegates Mamye BaCote, Robert Brink, Mark Cole, Beverly Sherwood, and Anne Crockett-Stark; citizen members Anthony Dale and Joy Myers

Staff Attending:

Amy M. Atkinson, Leah Hamaker, Joyce Garner

I. Call to Order and Opening Remarks

Senator Yvonne B. Miller, Chair

Senator Miller called the meeting to order at 1:30 and welcomed everyone to the second meeting of the Commission's 2011 study year.

II. Activities in State Government Related to Youth and Families

Amy M. Atkinson, Executive Director

Ms. Atkinson acknowledged the early successes of morning's Family Impact Seminar and thanked the Virginia Commonwealth University and GOSAP for their partnership. The Seminar, which was attended by members of the Commission on Youth, other members of the General Assembly, and executive branch and stakeholder groups. The Seminar focused on Workforce Development.

In the current Activities in State Government, Ms. Atkinson highlighted the State Executive Council planning retreat in which she participated, as well as the Custody Assistance Program.

III. Court Improvement in Virginia Courts

*Lelia Baum Hopper, Director of the Court Improvement Project
Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia*

Ms. Hopper presented a Powerpoint which provided an overview of the history, challenges and current issues of the Court Improvement Program (CIP). Established in 1995 through federal funding, the CIP has since helped make the Courts an integral part of foster care and helped, through Interagency Collaboration, to reduce the numbers of children in foster care in Virginia (8,118 in 2007 to 5,818 in 2011).

The CIP promotes "best practices" and provides training to judges and attorneys on them. Delegate Peace posed a question about "one judge, one family" in actual practice and the problems caused when there were substitute judges. The Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) advocates a seamless system which maintains continuity in the hearing process. The best practice court program, which began in 2002, helps show judges what is working/not working in Virginia's 37 Best Practice Courts. Delegate Peace

noted that Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court represented some of the most complex processes and that incoming judges in Virginia could be on the bench for several years before having command of the issues.

The OES currently offers a Virginia State Bar website on which attorneys with appropriate ID can access fillable child dependency court forms.

Gary Close asked who serves on the Best Practices Committee. Ms. Hopper indicated that the core committee is comprised of the lead judge, clerk of the court clerk, local DSS director, guardian ad litem, the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and Department of Social Services counsel. Mr. Closed asked further whether best practices flow into disposition sentencing. Ms. Hopper replied it did not; further judges would not cite best practices to not convict.

OES currently has one grant for training. The HHS/CIP grants are specific to the training topic. There currently is no funding for voluntary conferences. As part of its training initiatives, the OES publishes *Resources for the Courts and the Bar*. Further, the OES is emphasizing in its training that children should be removed from home only when it is unsafe and then returned when it becomes safe again.

IV. Update on Residential Facility Licensing

Les Saltzberg, Director, Office of Licensing

Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services

Mr. Salzberg outlined details of the April 29, 2011 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) which now governs The Pines' provision of services at three children's residential facilities. As history: The Pines has three campuses providing a total of 424 beds to serve youth aged five to 21. In 2006, Psychiatric Solutions assumed ownership, but sold in December 2010 to Universal. Problems have existed because there is a history of the facility taking the most difficult youth to treat and because the facility is so large. The Crawford campus, in particular, has demonstrated on-going problems complying with terms of licensure. Problems have escalated since Fall 2010. In April 2011, North Carolina removed its youth in treatment from The Pines. He explained that a facility must not accept children for which there does not exist a program. At the Pines, 80 percent are out-of-state residents. Therapists are seeing too many patients; a 1-10 ratio is manageable, but Pines' therapists are seeing up to 15. There are also difficult staffing issues, especially for line staff. This personnel must be adequately trained and supervised. At present, The Pines has frozen admissions and is operating under a provisional license. The Department will monitor compliance with the MOA.

Delegate Peace asked about the "tipping point" for continuing or ceasing to license The Pines. Mr. Saltzberg indicated that the Department expected to see positive change by the end of the probation period.

V. 2011 Meeting Calendar

Senator Miller thanked the members for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m.

VI. Adjourn

This had been publicized as an electronic meeting attended by Delegate Anne Crockett-Stark, but she was unable to participate. No public comment was received.