

**Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act  
Report of the Court Appointed Special Advocate/Children's Justice Act  
Advisory Committee (CASA/CJA) Citizen Review Panel  
June 2008**

**Background:**

The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) mandated the establishment of citizen review panels in 1999. The purpose of the panels is to provide opportunities for citizens to help ensure that States are meeting their goals of protecting children from abuse and neglect. The role of the citizen review panel is to examine child protective services' policies and procedures, and where applicable, specific child protective services cases in order to evaluate the following:

- CPS programs' compliance with the State Plan;
- Coordination with Title IV-E foster care and adoption programs;
- Review of child fatalities and near fatalities
- Other criteria the panel considers important to the CPS program.

The Commonwealth of Virginia has three citizen review panels:

- Governor's Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect (GAB)
- State Child Fatality Review Team
- Children's Justice Act/Court Appointed Special Advocate Committee (CJA/CASA)

Court Appointed Special Advocate/Children's Justice Act Advisory Committee (CASA/CJA)

The CASA-CJA Committee is a subcommittee of the Criminal Justice Services Board and advises them on the CASA program and the administration of the Children's Justice Act in Virginia. The Advisory Committee to Court Appointed Special Advocates and Children's Justice Act Programs has served as a citizen review panel since 1999 and its primary focus is evaluation and recommendations concerning Child Protective Services (CPS) regulations, policies, and practices. The CASA-CJA Advisory Committee assisted the Department on several aspects of the CPS program. The committee meets quarterly; and met in the past fiscal year as follows:

- July 21, 2007
- November 8-9, 2007
- January 25, 2008
- April 18, 2008

The committee's activities as a Citizen Review Panel included:

1. The committee provided feedback on the on-line training curriculum for mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect. Several committee members participated

in user acceptance testing of the on-line course. The online training was launched in February 2008.

2. The committee reviewed the 2007 annual report of the Differential Response System (DRS). Some of the findings include:

DRS outcomes this year are generally similar to those reported last year. Use of the family assessment track has stabilized. About two-thirds of referrals in the state as a whole are being placed in the family assessment track. There continues to be wide variation in track assignment in individual virtually all referrals that are not mandated for investigation. The percentage of family assessments increased slightly to 68 percent in 2006.

As in previous years, a little over one-third of families had identified service needs and the large majority of them received at least some services. Trend data for the past three years revealed that while more families are being determined to be at high or moderate risk for future abuse or neglect, a smaller percentage of high and moderate risk families are being identified as needing services. At the same time, the percentage of services going to high risk families has increased, and the percentage going to low risk families has decreased.

The initial exploratory study of delayed contact referrals in this year's report showed that in about two-thirds of all referrals, the first meaningful contact occurs within the timeframe established for complaints at that priority level. Contact tends to be most timely in cases with serious safety issues, complaints for physical abuse, and investigations. The case reviewer found a variety of reasons for delayed contacts, but could not determine the reason for delay in about half the cases reviewed. Local agencies often made vigorous efforts to achieve timely contact but could not do so for reasons beyond their control. In other cases, however, the level of effort was poor and there appeared to be no good reason for the failure to complete the contact on time.

The continuation of the study of invalid complaints confirmed the findings reported last year regarding the wide variation in screen-out rates. The case reviews produced evidence of the influence of agency philosophy on validity decisions, particularly in complaints for physical abuse with no visible injury.

Recommendations for the 2008 DRS report include further study of services to CPS families to determine what policies or procedures may need revision to improve service delivery to moderate and high risk families. There will also be additional study of delayed contacts in CPS referrals and additional technical assistance to local departments of social services to improve response time.

The CASA-CJA Advisory Committee agreed with the above recommendations and had no additional recommendations for the 2008 DRS report.

3. The committee reviewed proposed changes to the CASA Regulations currently under review. The CASA program serves abused and neglected children and provides input and recommendations to CPS to improve services. The Department reviewed the proposed changes to the regulations and made additional comments and recommendations for the CASA regulations. The CASA regulations support CPS regulations and policies.

4. The committee provided guidance and recommendations to the Department of Criminal Justice Services for the Three Year Plan for CASA and CJA beginning in 2008. The recommendations include continued participation as a Citizen Review Panel for the Department. In addition, several recommendations of this plan support interdisciplinary team development in local communities to respond to child abuse and neglect issues.

5. The committee received training on Citizen Review Panel requirements and responsibilities and agreed that the current focus of this committee is appropriate.