

Virginia League of Social Services Executives (VLSSE) Roadmap

FY2024



The Virginia League of Social Services Executives (VLSSE) is a professional organization comprised of the leaders of the 120 local Departments of Social Services in the Commonwealth. VLSSE holds quarterly board meetings and conducts two conferences per year for members. In addition, VLSSE oversees content committees that focus on improving the provision of federally and state mandated social services to the citizens of the Commonwealth. Content committees collaborate with the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), the Office of Children's Services (OCS), the Department of Education (DOE), and other governmental and non-profit organizations such as the Virginia Commission on Youth, the Virginia Poverty Law Center, and VOICES to jointly develop system improvements. The content committees set goals for VLSSE and make recommendations to the entire membership about VLSSE positions on changes to legislation, regulation, and guidance promulgated by federal and state partners. Identified below are the primary obstacles facing social services in Virginia, designated by mandated program area, with proposed solutions outlined. By addressing these issues, VLSSE believes the Commonwealth can improve its social services programs and ensure the best service delivery possible to Virginia's citizens.

Adult Services

There are five main issues impeding the work of serving vulnerable adults in Virginia:

1. Timely completion of Adult Protective Services Investigations
2. Availability of public guardians for incapacitated persons
3. Improving Accountability Efforts for Adult Guardianships
4. Increase in LTSS screening requests
5. Increase in receipt of duplicate Adult Protective Services reports and system redundancy

Increase the timeframe for completion of Adult Protective Services Investigations

As was reported in the 2023 Roadmap, Adult Protective Services investigations have increased statewide. In addition, the cases have increased in complexity, and local departments of social services are experiencing higher vacancies than ever. The increase in investigations, many of which have a myriad of complex issues, coupled with local department staffing shortages causes a delay in final dispositions. Financial exploitation investigations involve gathering bank records and other financial records, which is a lengthy process, which also impacts the timeliness of dispositions. In order for staff to do a more thorough job and collaborate with community partners in an investigation, they need more time to complete investigations.

Proposed Solution:

- Increase the timeframe for completing Adult Protective Services investigations from 45 to 60 days; or allow for an extension of up to 60 days when an investigation cannot be completed in 45 days.

Availability of public guardians for incapacitated adults

Virginia's public safety net includes public guardianship for adults who are:

- Incapacitated;

- Indigent; and
- In need of someone to help them make medical, financial, or daily living decisions, but who have no suitable person to serve as their guardian.

The Division for Community Living contracts with human service agencies across the Commonwealth to provide public guardianship services. A public guardian visits with each client, personally, at least once a month, and depending on the client's needs, supervises medical care, oversees residential care, monitors social service benefits, and advocates on the behalf of the client. At the direction of a Virginia Circuit Court, a public guardian can also serve as a conservator for individuals who are indigent and in need of public guardianship but have some minimal financial assets that need to be disposed of or managed. While the public guardianship program is a vital service for incapacitated adults, there are not enough public guardianship slots for those in need. With Virginia's aging population, this need will only continue to grow.

On October 18, 2021, the Joint Legislative and Audit Review Commission (JLARC) released a study about guardianship and conservatorship in Virginia. Recommendations that should be implemented are summarized below.

Proposed Solutions:

- Recommendation 23 of the JLARC report proposes individual care visits for a subset of private guardianship cases on an ongoing basis. As local departments of social services (LDSS) currently manage guardianship cases on an ongoing basis and may be directed by future legislation to conduct individual care visits, the VLSSE requests additional funding for staff and operations based on locality guardianship caseloads. In addition, many of the recommendations in the report, if implemented, will lead to an increase in Adult Protective Services (APS) reports and an increase in administrative oversight duties. The VLSSE requests funding to support the additional requirements.
- The VLSSE supports Recommendation 33, which will increase LDSS access to bank accounts for victims of financial exploitation.

- VLSSE supports Recommendation 34, which will increase the number of public guardianship slots in Virginia. While 300 additional slots were created in the 2023 legislative session, the number of those needing public guardianship still exceeds the amount available.
- Regarding Recommendation 2, many rural communities in Virginia currently have few attorneys currently qualified to act as guardians ad litem for guardianship cases. Increasing training and reporting requirements for guardians ad litem for cases without including an increase in hourly reimbursement rates could lead to even fewer attorneys willing to serve in this specialized role.
- Regarding Recommendation 3, VLSSE supports guardians ad litem having access to any APS reports in which a prospective guardian is named as an alleged perpetrator. However, the creation of a central registry system for APS cases would impact cases beyond guardianship and conservatorship cases and lead to a major shift in policy regarding APS. Procedures to the APS substantiated case appeal process would need to be modified as, currently, qualifying appeals are made to the LDSS Director only and do not rise to an appeal structure at the state level or the Circuit Court as do other LDSS appeals such as Child Protective Services. In addition, the majority of substantiated APS cases involve self-neglect. Clients in this category could potentially become part of a central registry system even though they are the identified victim in the case.
- In regard to Recommendations 18, 20 and 21, the VLSSE posits the engagement of family members to serve as private guardians may become more difficult if the additional training and reporting requirements are implemented. This action may increase the demand for public guardianship slots. Exceptions should be considered to certain future guardian requirements for family members serving as guardians.

Improving accountability efforts for adult guardianships

In the fall of 2021, Hannah Byrum, Master's Student of Public Policy from the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy at UVA completed a research project focusing on ways to work toward raising awareness of the

duties and responsibilities of guardians. This project was finalized on March 23, 2022, and presented to the VLSSE Adult Services Committee. The project highlights the lack of data collection available in PeerPlace, the lack of adequate and accessible training available to guardians, and the lack of accountability and oversight of guardianship cases as three areas for improvement in Virginia's current system.

DARS is already taking steps to improve data collection with PeerPlace through the implementation of a business analytic software, Just for Soft, which will be available to DARS in the summer of 2023. They have also hired a Quality Assurance Program Manager who will develop a case review process and work directly with the public-facing Dashboard for APS.

While multiple solutions were presented through the project, two specific solutions address the lack of adequate and accessible training for guardians as well as the lack of accountability and oversight of guardianship cases.

Proposed Solutions:

- VLSSE recommends updating the guardianship reporting process to include an electronic filing option.
- In reference to guardianship training, the VLSSE advocates for the development of a "Guardian Training Manual" that is easily accessible to current guardians and be provided to new guardians upon appointment by the court system in an effort to minimize and/or eliminate unintentional neglect by guardians.

Increase in LTSS Screening Requests

LDSS are experiencing an increase in requests for Long-Term Services and Supports (LTSS) Screenings. Adult Services staff are mandated members of the LTSS screening teams, along with our partners from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS). Adult Services staff are key members in that they are skilled in assessing an individual's needs; however, they are not ultimately making the decision for the level of care for an individual. VDH and DMAS are responsible for determining the level of care. Both LDSS and VDH are experiencing higher than normal

vacancy rates, which can impact the timeliness of LTSS screenings, often delaying service provision to the individual.

When a screening request is made, the individual may also apply for Long-Term Care Medical Assistance. These applications are cumbersome, and individuals are required to submit a variety of verifications in regard to income and resources. Adult Services staff work with Benefit Programs staff in completing the applications and obtaining verifications necessary to determine eligibility. Each locality is served by an Area Agency on Aging (AAA), whose staff are trained to assist individuals in completing Medical Assistance applications; however, these AAA staff may not collaborate with screening teams. Once a screening is complete, Benefit Programs staff have no way of checking the outcome of the screening without relying on another member of the screening team.

Proposed Solutions:

- Work collaboratively with DMAS to grant Benefit Programs staff access to the MES system so that they can verify LTSS Medicaid at the time of intake, as well as screening outcomes and print the necessary forms to process the Medical Assistance application.
- Work collaboratively with DMAS to maintain an updated and reliable listing of Medicaid-approved providers on the DMAS website.
- Create a workgroup made up of LDSS, DMAS, VDH, and AAA to explore ways in which to streamline the screening process. The workgroup should consider the role of Adult Services staff in completing the screenings and explore ways to improve screening capability and ensure timely screenings, so the vulnerable individuals have timely access to services.

Increase in receipt of duplicate Adult Protective Services reports and system redundancy

Over the past three years, there has been a gradual increase in the number of total Adult Protective Services reports received by LDSS from 37,398 in fiscal

year 2020 to 40,371 in fiscal year 2022. Additionally, LDSS have experienced unprecedented vacancies in Family Services positions that perform adult welfare duties. As a combined result of increased workload and staffing shortages, the issue of receiving duplicate APS reports has become overwhelming for LDSS.

There is currently no allowance or mechanism for LDSS to screen out identical APS reports when there is already an active APS investigation. Because the subjects of APS reports often encounter multiple mandated reporters, LDSS often receive duplicate reports on the same individuals that meet validity requirements within a short amount of time. Currently when a subsequent valid report is received that is like or identical to a previous report, the LDSS must investigate and document the report. The Adult Services Committee has identified two main issues. One, there is no provision in APS Regulation, VA Code or state policy that specifies or defines a duplicate APS report. Child Protective Services policy states the following in reference to the receipt of new allegations in an existing family assessment or investigation:

When a report has been accepted as valid and the investigation or family assessment response is initiated and subsequent allegations are made, the type of allegation and the time elapsed since the initial report will determine whether the new allegation is treated as a new report or assessed within the context of the existing response. If the allegations do not provide any new or different information, they may be added into the initial investigation or family assessment. If the additional allegations address new types of abuse or neglect and five (5) or more days have elapsed since the first report, the additional allegations should be taken as a new report and screened using the CPS Intake Tool. (VDSS Child and Family Services Manual, C. Child Protective Services, 3.4.3.1)

Accepting multiple identical APS reports about the same individual causes the LDSS to have more than one open report in the system. Staff must therefore document much of the same investigative work in more than one report, an onerous and administrative staff burden that leads to a fragmented client case record. Additionally, as APS reports increase and vacancies persist, this administrative requirement further detracts from the core of APS investigative and protective client centered work. Creating or allowing a provision in State

Code that defines a duplicate report would provide LDSS the allowance to integrate the duplicate information received into the existing investigation in lieu of opening an entirely new report.

The second issue identified is that the PeerPlace system does not allow for the merging of similar or identical reports from multiple reporters, nor does it have a screen out functionality. LDSS staff are currently keeping multiple reports open, and only documenting in one report. The work that is being done is only being captured in one investigation, and showing as incomplete in all others, even though the casework is actually covering all open reports in the system. This reflects poorly on LDSS because it appears that the work is not actually being completed. Due to a recent system change, and to satisfy this system limitation, the need for additional administrative documentation was increased for LDSS. Failure to address these system limitations has direct implications for the newly established APS state dashboard and results in an inaccurate picture of LDSS APS performance.

Proposed Solutions:

- When an Adult Protective Services Report is received and there is a current Adult Protective Services Investigation open, if the allegations do not provide any new or varying information, they may be added to the initial investigation.
- Add functionality to PeerPlace to allow for duplicate Adult Protective Services Reports to be merged and/or screened out.

Benefit Programs and Employment/TANF

Barriers to effectively providing benefit programs and employment/TANF services:

1. VACMS

VaCMS

VaCMS supports the Child Care Subsidy program, Medicaid eligibility, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW), and the three Energy Assistance Programs (EAP) components. Approximately 6,000 local department of social services workers use the system to determine eligibility and provide case management. The VaCMS code base is close to 15 years old and expensive to change when new federal and state legislative and programmatic mandates are required. Additionally, because of the age of the system, there are severe downtimes that affect case processing timeliness. In order to address the key social determinants of health (food security, housing security, health care access and employment), comply with state and federal requirements, and ensure no disruption to citizen services, the legacy system must be migrated to a modern, supportable technology platform.

Additionally, system replacement could take three to four years to accomplish. Accordingly, the VLSSE is asking that the state provide guidance to local agencies for operating in a faulty system.

Proposed Solution:

- VLSSE fully supports the VDSS legislative priority for the replacement of the VACMS system.

Child and Family Services

The Child and Family Services Committee has identified the following seven priorities regarding Family Services which encompasses child welfare services delivered by LDSS.

1. Alternative Living Arrangements and the court process
2. Increased VEMAT rates for high-acuity placements
3. Aligning additional foster care funding with Safe and Sound Taskforce initiatives
4. Resource Parent Barrier Crime Bill
5. Alignment of the definition of caretaker for CPS referrals
6. Alignment of CPS timeframes
7. LDSS Employee Child Protective Services Referrals-Assignment

Safety Plans/Alternative Living Arrangements and the court process

Safety plans developed between caretakers and LDSS that include alternative living arrangements for children are standard practice of foster care prevention efforts when safety concerns are present. The Office of the Children's Ombudsman has been working on a to create a process to address alternative living arrangements for children when LDSS deems a safety risk is imminent in their home of origin. This process could include updated guidance for LDSS and potential legislative changes.

Proposed Solution:

VDSS and VLSSE will continue to work together to provide insight and input into any proposed legislation to address this issue. A formalized structure for when cases are referred to court has been proposed to VDSS. Additional administrative and/or case management support for LDSS will need to be considered should changes be enacted.

Increased VEMAT rates for high-acuity placements

Youth with high acuity needs and difficult to secure appropriate placements are being addressed through multisystemic efforts to combat barriers to placements. Continuing the initiative to pay resource parents additional daily supervision rates to care for children in need of higher levels of care, akin to

what a child would receive in a residential facility, could prevent placement disruption, furthering the foster care placement crisis.

Proposed solution:

The additional monthly rate has been used since January 2023 to support resource families financially to preserve and initiate placements. Agency resource homes who receive the additional funding will possess additional training, certification, or experience. When this rate is used, the Family Services Specialist will document skills of the resource home to substantiate the additional funding. VDSS should continue offering additional funding to resource parents for youth with high acuity needs in foster care.

Aligning additional foster care funding with Safe and Sound Taskforce initiatives

The Governor's Safe and Sound Taskforce has highlighted the need for additional funding to address systemic foster care needs. If approved, the infusion of additional foster care funding should focus on ensuring the Governor's priority to alleviate the foster care placement crisis for youth in foster care with high acuity needs and support statewide kinship initiatives including payments for kinship families who take children into their homes to prevent foster care placements.

Proposed Solution:

Efforts should focus on creating a universal referral for local departments of social services to use when referring a child in foster care to a residential facility and/or therapeutic foster care agency. The funding should also address resource needs of workers in the field including the consideration of providing additional administrative support with a focus on defining the specific requirements for Family Services Specialists. Additional administrative and/or case management support for LDSS will need to be considered should changes be enacted to address locating placements for youth with high acuity needs and to adequately case manage kinship placements.

Foster Parent Barrier Crime Bill

Virginia's current barrier crime legislation for resource parents differ from Federal standards. Relatives have been denied the opportunity to raise their

kin and remove them from foster care or become foster parents for their relative children in foster care.

Proposed solution:

VDSS propose legislation that will align Virginia’s resource parent certification standards with federal requirements.

Alignment of the definition of caretaker for CPS referrals

HB 1334 amended the definition of an abused or neglected child to include a child who is sexually exploited or abused by an intimate partner of the child’s parent or caretaker and allows a complaint of child or abuse or neglect to be deemed valid by a LDSS in these instances. Code should be amended to include all forms of abuse or neglect by the aforementioned parties as valid for a LDSS report.

Proposed Solution:

VDSS should propose legislation that will align all forms of abuse or neglect by an intimate partner of the child’s parent or caretaker to be deemed valid by a LDSS.

Alignment of the timeframes for completion of CPS reports

CPS timeframes for investigations and family assessments are not currently in alignment. Section 63.2-1506 of the Code of Virginia requires the LDSS to complete and document the family assessment within 60 calendar days of receipt of the complaint or report. However, the Code of Virginia requires the LDSS to complete and document a CPS investigation within 45 calendar days of receipt of the complaint or report. While there are three exceptions for extending investigations, the baseline timeframe for family assessments and investigations should be reconciled for consistency.

Proposed Solution:

VDSS should propose legislation that will align the baseline timeframe for abuse or neglect investigations with the 60-day timeframe assigned to family assessments.

LDSS Employee Child Protective Services Referrals-Assignment

§63.2-1509 (20) indicates if an employee of the local department is suspected of abusing or neglecting a child, the report shall be made to the court of the county or city where the abuse or neglect was discovered and upon receipt of the report, the judge shall assign the report to a local department that is not the employer of the suspected employee for investigation or family assessment.

Proposed Solution:

A Code change is needed to include that the LDSS Director would request another LDSS to complete the investigation or family assessment and the VDSS Regional Child Protective Services Practice Consultant would be notified of the request. If the LDSS cannot find another agency to conduct the investigation or assessment, the Regional Child Protective Services Consultant would be responsible for locating an agency to complete the family assessment or investigation.

Child Care

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is the state agency responsible as of July 1, 2021, for overseeing the Child Care Subsidy Program in Virginia. Staff from VDOE have consistently attended VLSSE Child Care Committee meetings and will join the VLSSE Legislative Committee. Continued clear communication between VDOE, VDSS, and VLSSE will ensure that a smooth transition of oversight duties continues.

Tremendous growth of caseloads

Since 2021 there have been many changes in the Child Care program such as rate increases, additional allowable absence days, a major expansion of eligibility and the removal of the 72-month service clock as well as waiting lists. This has led to many agencies with caseloads which have doubled or tripled in size with no accompanying increase in the number of workers.

Lack of Availability of Affordable Childcare Centers

There continues to be a lack of availability of affordable childcare centers for working families. Many communities have become “childcare deserts”, especially as many centers have closed due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. A national effort was undertaken in recent years to “map” childcare deserts; however, Virginia was not included in the report. Communities in Virginia need to be analyzed to discover childcare deserts rather than relying on anecdotal information. The national study did tie childcare deserts to rural localities and found that childcare was tied to equity issues based on race and income:

<https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/earlychildhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>.

Proposed Solutions:

- An increase in funding for the addition of childcare workers to meet the new demand.
- The establishment of a caseload measurement tool.

Local Agency Administration

The Local Agency Administration Committee continues to work on the following issues to improve the operations of Local Departments of Social Services:

1. Funding for LDSS Staff and Operations
2. Monitoring/Advocacy for IT Projects
3. Title IV-E Shared Fiscal Accountability
4. Audit Requirements
5. Workload Measures

Funding for LDSS Staff and Operations

There continues to be a lack of adequate funding for local agencies to meet administrative and program requirements. While the requirements placed on local agencies continue to increase, in both number and complexity, adequate funding has not kept pace. Adding to the concern is the recent decline in the Pass-Thru Rate as a result of lost Medicaid revenue resulting from the Public Health Emergency guidance. Now that local agencies have begun to complete Medicaid renewals, it is anticipated that the Pass-Thru Rate will return to the pre-Public Health Emergency level. Also, to equitably fund local agencies, the Administrative Funds Distribution methodology needs to be reviewed and updated.

Proposed Solutions:

- Continue working with VDSS and other VLSSE committees to identify opportunities for new and expanded funding for LDSS. The VLSSE Child Care committee has identified a need for funding for additional Child Care staff to handle rising caseloads.
- Continue to partner with VDSS-Finance to review and offer input on the distribution methodology for new funding sources.
- VDSS to update the Administrative Funds Distribution methodology to achieve greater equity and to take into account shifting demographics over the past thirty years.

Monitoring/Advocacy for IT Projects

Through the work of an IT Subcommittee, the Local Agency Administration Committee will provide feedback and suggestions to VDSS-IT on high-level IT related projects.

A. Financial Management System for LDSS

LDSS currently administer finances at the local level using a variety of financial management systems. A majority of agencies utilize Thomas Brothers. Thomas Brothers has not shared a long-term sustainability plan calling future modernization and update efforts into question. The committee continues to work with VDSS to explore alternative financial management options for locals.

B. Network Upgrade for LDSS Offices

C. Full Support v. Shared Support Models

D. Advocacy for funding for a VaCMS Replacement

Proposed Solutions:

- Continue working with VDSS-IT to explore alternatives that are sustainable long term.
- Work with VDSS on security issues relating to alternative financial management systems.

Title IV-E Shared Fiscal Accountability

Title IV-E is a federal program designed to provide funding to states to ensure proper care for eligible children in foster care and to provide ongoing assistance to eligible children with special needs receiving adoption subsidies. The program is authorized under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, and it is funded by federal and state/local matching funds. Administration is handled by state and local public child welfare agencies. Title IV-E is a program under which the Commonwealth of Virginia is entitled to reimbursement for certain foster care and adoption expenses. The Children's Bureau of the

Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducts regular reviews of Virginia's Title IV-E foster care program. If a percentage of cases reviewed are determined to be non-compliant, the amount of federal funds to be disallowed to the state will be determined by the extent to which a Title IV-E agency is not in substantial compliance with recipient or provider eligibility provisions of Title IV-E. LDSS contends that several of the adjustment sources for fiscal errors should not be solely designated to LDSS agencies to pay back with local only funding. Given that Virginia is the only state in the country without access to an automated system to process Title IV-E applications and payments, it is the contention of VLSSE that VDSS should share in funding reimbursement of payment errors when such errors would have been prevented by access to an automated system. VLSSE maintains that the LDSS repayments due to errors that would have been a result of the lack of access to an automated system should be divided evenly (50/50) between LDSS and VDSS until such time as an automated processing system is provided to LDSS.

Proposed Solutions:

- VLSSE will continue to partner with VDSS to advocate for an automated payment processing system. The new Child Welfare Information System must include a robust Title IV-E eligibility and case management component. This goal is more urgent given that additional Title IV-E funding is now available through the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).
- Repayment responsibilities will be reexamined by VLSSE at such time as an automated payment processing system becomes available.
- A joint VLSSE/VDSS workgroup successfully partnered to revamp the Performance Management Plan (PMP) and Corrective Action Plan (CAP) processes to be more focused on creating a learning environment and performance improvement to ensure successful outcomes on federal reviews.
- The joint VLSSE/VDSS workgroup successfully reached consensus on repayment responsibilities relating to:
 - a. "Cutoff" Date for CSA funding
 - b. Due Diligence Definition for CSA funding
 - c. Judicial Reviews and Court Errors
 - d. Citizenship Requirements

Audit Requirements

Most of all the work performed by LDSS is subject to review and audit by local, state, and federal oversight entities. This is due in part to the nature of the work being performed and the expenditure of local, state, and federal funds. The audits, while important and beneficial to the operations of the LDSS, are very time consuming and arduous for local staff. Oftentimes, there are multiple audits taking place simultaneously in the same office. The goal is to coordinate the audit requests coming from VDSS (and our federal partners) to reduce or eliminate the scenario where multiple reviews are being conducted at the same time in the same office.

Proposed Solutions:

- The Committee will continue to work with VDSS to refine and enhance the system for coordinating audits/reviews across VDSS Divisions/Programs to minimize the number and frequency of audits taking place simultaneously and or back-to-back.
- This will reduce the burden on local staff and create an environment where the reviews are much more meaningful.
- VDSS, in partnership with VLSSE, is coordinating with VCU's Performance Management Group (PMG) to identify and implement efficiencies.

Workload Measures

Critical to determining adequate local agency funding is an accurate and flexible workload measurement system. A thorough and consistently updated workload measurement instrument is essential to advocating for appropriate funding levels.

Proposed Solutions:

- Work with VDSS to purchase and/or develop a workable and practicable workload measurement system, comprehensive of all LDSS functions and responsibilities.

Personnel Committee

It is the Personnel Committee's goal to make measurable improvements to the area of Human Resources as it relates to onboarding, recruitment, retention, data analytics, and marketing. Through a strong partnership, most of the projects listed below are well underway.

1. Administrative HR Manual Update
2. Compensation
3. Marketing
4. Degree Requirements
5. Worker Safety

Administrative HR Manual Update

Human Resources is updating all chapters of the LDSS Administrative HR Manual. Chapter updates are being discussed regularly at the Personnel Committee meetings. Progress is reported monthly and committee members serve as a part of the sub-committee in this effort.

Compensation

The Personnel Committee would like to see the minimum and maximum salary ranges as well as annual raises continually be funded and supported by the State Board. The increase to a minimum and maximum ranges will increase salaries for employees of agencies who are only able to hire at the minimum salary and therefore unable to keep up with competing agencies.

Marketing

Personnel Committee would like marketing strategies that target Generations Y and Z specifically. This strategy should address the role of LDSS, how employees can develop in the agencies, and address outcomes. Additionally, the committee request marketing support for the internship portal.

Degree Requirements

Degree requirements are being reviewed to determine if the acceptable degrees should be expanded. The Personnel Committee members are part of the subcommittee.

Worker Safety

Worker Safety is a project that is shared with the Professional Development Committee. The Personnel Committee will look into measures to protect and promote worker safety at the LDSS.

Professional Development Committee

The Professional Development Committee has identified two issues that are vital in ensuring staff are equipped with the knowledge to effectively do their jobs. It is not only critical for everyone in our communities' seeking services and benefits but also to better ensure staff satisfaction, retention, and safety.

1. Need effective training programs for the entire LDSS system (family services, benefits, administration, leadership) that are regularly updated to stay current in policy, best practices, and established trends.
2. Need for expansion of Stipend program

Effective training programs for the entire LDSS system

For many years leading up to March 2020, the responsibility for providing adequate training in the various departments (family services, benefits, administrative etc.) were left to the individual portfolios. This model was difficult to maintain and led to inequities in the delivery of training across divisions. VDSS created a training department just before the start of the pandemic. Before they had a chance to assess and prioritize the training needs of the local departments, they were forced to take the entire training program and convert it to an online/virtual platform. This consumed all resources for the remainder of 2020 and much of 2021. It also exposed many deficiencies in the training content as well as the available technology including bandwidth access.

Prior to all this there was already concern about the length of time it was taking to adequately train staff so that they could effectively and safely work a caseload. There has never been a clear funding path for delivery of training which has meant that there are never enough trainers, and it is difficult to quickly update training to keep it current with all the many policy and guidance changes that happen throughout the year.

The PDC has long believed that the ability to successfully onboard new staff is directly linked to the ability to recruit and retain staff.

Proposed Solutions:

- Fund and build a “training academy” model for all program areas (family services, benefit programs, administration, supervisors, overall professional development). This would include identifying a central location that would include simulation labs. There would be continuous classes offered to meet the needs statewide which means the need to hire additional training staff. Consideration must also be given to how to fund the travel costs for staff attending the academy (both State staff as well as enrollees).
- Provide funding to ensure adequate technology to accommodate both in person, virtual and blended training options. Understanding that the development of a training academy model will take time and the reintroduction of in person training at the regional offices has begun, VDSS needs to ensure that its regional offices have the proper equipment and that the local agencies have improved broadband access to the internet.

Expansion of the Stipend Program

This program serves as an effective recruitment effort as BSW and MSW graduates are trained to assume child welfare positions within LDSS. Unfortunately, the program is limited to five (5) Universities throughout the State which limits the number of graduates and is a barrier for localities who may not have a university near their locality. Not all students are willing to move far from their home base. It has also been a challenge to attract and connect stipend graduates to smaller, more rural agencies. There are often times when there are students who have not found employment by graduation and many localities who have vacancies.

Proposed Solutions:

- Expand the stipend program to allow for more student slots at existing universities and allow new colleges and universities to offer the program. It is recommended that a better coordination with State partners and NACO (National Association of Counties) to better advocate and lobby to get this issue in front of needed officials.

- Increase coordination efforts to match up graduates and agencies with vacancies. Right now, the process appears too disjointed and up to individual students and agencies when there could be a “coordinator” that works across all universities to assist with placement.
- Explore ways to ensure local agencies who invest time in training stipend students as a placement agency while they are obtaining their BSW or MSW somehow benefit at the completion of training. Possibly create a workgroup to address this issue and the previous coordination issue.

Overview of Proposed Policy Recommendations:

Adult Services

- Increase the timeframe for completing Adult Protective Services investigations from 45 to 60 days or allow for an extension of up to 60 days when an investigation cannot be completed in 45 days.
- The VLSSE requests additional funding for staff and operations based on locality guardianship caseloads.
- Increase LDSS access to bank accounts for the victims of financial exploitation.
- Increase training and reporting requirements for guardians ad litem.
- Update the guardianship reporting process to include an electronic filing option.
- Development of a “Guardian Training Manual” that is easily accessible for current and prospective guardians.
- Training responsibilities and accompanying financial resources should move from VDSS to DARS as that agency can offer more expertise and attention to worker training needs.
- Increase the number of specialized trainings for experienced workers including Financial Exploitation.
- Work collaboratively with DMAS to grant Benefit Programs staff access to the MES system so that they can verify LTSS Medicaid at the time of intake, as well as screening outcomes and print the necessary forms to process the Medical Assistance application.
- Work collaboratively with DMAS to maintain an updated and reliable listing of Medicaid approved providers on the DMAS website.
- Create a workgroup made up of LDSS, DMAS, VDH, and AAA to explore ways in which to streamline the screening process.
- Increase the number of public guardianship slots in Virginia.

Benefit Programs and Employment/TANF

- VLSSE fully supports the VDSS legislative priority for the replacement of the VACMS system.

Child and Family Services

- Craft changes to current practice to outline standards for out-of-home placements that occur in Child Protective Services cases that prevent the placement of children into foster care.
- Recommend a formalized structure for Safety Plans and Alternate Living Arrangements when cases are referred to court.
- Increase VEMAT rates for high-acuity placements. The additional date rate will be paid to support the resource family in coordination and support of the child. Agency resource homes that receive the additional funding will possess additional training, certification, or experience. When this rate is used, the Family Services Specialist will document the skills of the resource home to substantiate the usage of this policy.
- Recommend creating a universal referral for local departments of social services to use when referring a child in foster care to a residential facility and/or therapeutic foster care agency. Funding should also address resource needs of workers in the field including the consideration of providing additional administrative support with a focus on defining the specific requirements for Family Services Specialists.
- Recommend VDSS propose legislation to better align Virginia's resource parent certification standards with federal requirements.
- Recommend VDSS propose legislation to align all forms of abuse or neglect by an intimate partner of the child's parent or caretaker to be deemed valid by an LDSS.
- Recommend VDSS propose legislation that will align the baseline timeframe for abuse or neglect investigations with the 60-day timeframe assigned to family assessments.
- Request a code change to direct the LDSS Director to request another LDSS to complete the investigation or family assessment and the VDSS Regional Child Protective Services Practice Consultant would be notified of the request in the event an employee of the local department is suspected of abusing or neglecting a child.

Child Care

- Recommend requesting an increase in funding for the addition of childcare workers to meet demand the establishment of a caseload measurement tool.

Local Agency Administration

- Continue working with VDSS and other VLSSE committees to identify opportunities for new and expanded funding for LDSS staff and operations.
- Continue to collaborate with VDSS-Finance to review and offer input on the distribution methodology for new funding sources.
- VDSS will update the Administrative Funds Distribution methodology to achieve greater equity and to take into account shifting demographics over the past thirty years.
- Continue working with VDSS-IT, through the implementation phase, of a financial management system for LDSS that is sustainable long term.
- Work with VDSS on security issues relating to alternative financial management systems.
- VLSSE will continue to collaborate with VDSS to advocate for an automated payment processing system for Title IV-E expenditures. This goal is more urgent given that additional Title IV-E funding will be available through the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA).
- Repayment responsibilities will be reexamined by VLSSE until an automated payment processing system is provided by VDSS.
- Continue to work with VDSS to revamp the current Performance Management Plan (PMP) and Corrective Action Plan (CAP) process to be more supportive of LDSS.
- Continue to work with VDSS to identify a system for coordinating audits/reviews across VDSS Divisions/Programs to minimize the number and frequency of audits taking place simultaneously and or back-to-back.
- Work with VDSS to purchase and/or develop a workable and practicable workload measurement system, comprehensive of all LDSS functions and responsibilities.

Personnel Committee

- Work with VDSS Human Resources to update all chapters of the LDSS Administrative HR Manual.
- Support the continuing expansion of the minimum and maximum salary ranges as well as annual salary increases.
- The implementation of marketing strategies to target younger generation which address the role of LDSS, how employees can develop in the agencies, and address outcomes.
- Review the degree requirements to determine if the list of acceptable degrees needs to be expanded.
- Implement measures to protect and promote worker safety.

Professional Development (PDC)

- Fund and build a “training academy” model for all program areas (family services, benefit programs, administration, supervisors, overall professional development). This would include identifying a central location that would include simulation labs. There would be continuous classes offered to meet the needs statewide, which means the need to hire additional training staff. Consideration must also be given to how to fund the travel costs for staff attending the academy (both State staff as well as enrollees).
- Provide funding to ensure adequate technology to accommodate both in-person, virtual and blended training options.
- Expand the stipend program to allow for more student slots at existing universities and allow new colleges and universities to offer the program. It is recommended that a better coordination with State partners and NACO (National Association of Counties) to better advocate and lobby to get this issue in front of needed officials.
- Increase coordination efforts to match up graduates and agencies with vacancies. Right now, the process appears too disjointed and up to individual students and agencies when there could be a “coordinator” that works across all universities to assist with placement.
- Explore ways to ensure local agencies who invest time in training stipend students as a placement agency while they are obtaining their BSW or MSW somehow benefit at the completion of training. Possibly create a workgroup to address this issue and the previous coordination issue.