

**Virginia Department of Social Services**  
**Division of Family Services**  
**Parent Advisory Council Role Description**

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***PURPOSE, ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES***

**Purpose of the Parent Advisory Council**

The mission of the Parent Advisory Council (Council) is to actively collaborate with the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) Division of Family Services in building strategic partnerships between parents and staff, promoting parent leadership development, and helping expand the meaningful roles and voices throughout child welfare. The creation of the Council is to ensure parent voices are included in shaping programs, services, strategies and policies. VDSS is deeply committed to representing and reflecting the unique experiences, perspectives and viewpoints of parents on this Council. VDSS strives to champion diversity, equity and inclusion for all. For this Council's purpose, "parent" is defined as someone who is in a parental capacity, such a child's biological parent, legal custodian or guardian and was involved with child welfare while in a primary caretaking role. The Division of Family Services also has other advisory groups for kinship, foster and adoptive parents.

**Council Membership**

The Parent Advisory Council consists of a diverse group of up to 20 parents from across the state (two parents from the five VDSS Regions). Parents serving on the Council have had prior personal experiences with child welfare and have used community supports to strengthen their family and overcome challenges in their lives. Council members will serve as strategic partners with VDSS and share their insight and recommendations on ways to improve services and practices. The parents will provide VDSS with a greater understanding of family need, identifying services to meet those needs and improve access to those services. Members of the Council can be self-referred or referred by local and state DSS staff, a community-based service provider or other stakeholder with professional connections to parents who have experience with child welfare in Virginia.

**Role and Responsibilities of the Parent Advisory Council**

- Serve as a representative voice for parents in promoting improvements in services and practices that strengthen families and help to keep them safely together;
- Actively advise VDSS on developing meaningful parent roles in its various service areas of child protective services, prevention, foster care and adoption;
- Develop resources to assist state and local DSS staff in developing supportive, and strengths-based strategies in their work with parents;

- Develop resources to assist state and local DSS staff in providing equitable service delivery;
- Help families understand the child welfare process;
- Help child welfare leaders and stakeholders recognize and elevate the strengths of families;
  - Use the Children’s Trust Fund Alliance Protective Factors Framework
- Serve in various other roles based on the emerging needs of VDSS such as co-trainers, public speakers, reviewers of funding proposals, contributors to written materials, etc.;
- Participate, if interested and time permits, in the work of the Children’s Trust Fund Alliance’s Birth Parent National Network (BPNN), a diverse network of birth parents and organizations that promote policy and practice changes in the child welfare;
- Provide input into Virginia’s Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), a 5-year strategic plan that sets forth the vision and goals to strengthen Virginia’s child welfare system and the Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), which provides updates on the progress made towards the CFSP.

All work of the council will be done in partnership with VDSS and will further the mission and goals of the system.

### **Membership Requirements**

- The applicant is a parent who received case management or other services from DSS during an in-home or out-of-home case, with or without a dependency and/or court involvement. An in-home case may include child protective services family assessment or investigation, prevention, in-home, or CPS Ongoing and the child was not in foster care, but may have been at-risk for entering foster care. An out-of-home case means the child entered foster care.
- The applicant’s DSS case has been closed for at least six months with no new reports to DSS.
- The applicant has been in long term recovery (as defined by the parent; applicable to parents who have a history of a substance use disorder).
- The applicant is willing and able to participate in virtual and/or in-person monthly meetings or more frequently as needed and review materials in preparation for meetings.
- The applicant is willing to commit to serve on the Parent Advisory Council for a minimum of a two-year term.
- The applicant is willing to work in partnership with VDSS staff.
- The applicant is willing to work in partnership with other stakeholders from other organizations and communities, to include other advisory committees such as resource parents, kinship caregivers and adoptive parents.
- The applicant is willing to share their own personal experiences to inform policies and practice.
- The applicant is able to strategically share messages to diverse audiences.
- The applicant is able to communicate by e-mail and have on-line access.

- The applicant is strongly aligned with the goals of VDSS in safely reducing the number of children entering foster care and to best serve the diverse needs of children and families.

**Preferred, but Not Required**

Efforts are made to recruit parents who have some experience serving on other advisory or planning councils, or volunteering for community organizations that are working to improve the lives of children and families (e.g., family assessment planning team, foster parent training, school committees, faith-based programs, Boys & Girl Scouts, other youth serving organizations, etc.)

**Other**

VDSS is partnering with the Children's Trust Fund Alliance (Alliance) to assist in developing the Parent Advisory Council and providing initial training and support. The Alliance is the national membership organization for state Children's Trust and Prevention Funds (CTFs). Through its commitment to partnering with parents, the Alliance advocates for and supports strong parent voices related to strategies that ensure the safety and well-being of children throughout the country. The role of the Alliance is to help VDSS to best support the needs of council members, by promoting parent partnerships and practice change, and providing training, coaching, mentoring, and one-to-one support to staff.