

Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Program Professional Standards Committee

Meeting Minutes

December 4, 2025, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.

Libbie Mill – Henrico County Public Library
2100 Libbie Lake East Street
Henrico, Virginia 23230

Members Present:

Judy Castelee, Executive Director, Project Horizon¹
Timika Cousins, Executive Director, The Faces Behind a Purpose for You²
Cori Davis, Program Director, Bedford Domestic Violence Services
Elvira De la Cruz, Chief Executive Officer, Latinos in Virginia Empowerment Center³
Nancy Fowler, Director, Office of Family Violence, DSS⁴
Avery Harper, Executive Director, The Phoenix Project
Leah Kipley, Assistant Director, National Safe Haven Alliance⁵
Tamy Mann, Director, Giles County Victim/Witness Assistance Program
Kelly McCoy, Executive Director, Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley
Faith Power, Executive Director, The Laurel Center
Heather Sellers, Director, Bedford County Victim/Witness Assistance Program
Brittany Stevens, Executive Director, Safehome Systems, Inc.
Kristina Vadas, Manager of Victims Services, DCJS
Laura Beth Weaver, Director of Advocacy and Member Support, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance

Members Absent:

Leonard Hall, Jr, Director, Millstone International Logistics
Markella Maschas, FVPSA Contract Administrator, Office of Family Violence, DSS

Professional Standards Team Members Present:

Amber Stanwix, Professional Standards Operations Coordinator, DCJS

¹ Judy Castelee left the meeting at 12:30 p.m.

² Timika Cousins briefly left the meeting at 11:05 a.m.

³ Elvira De la Cruz appeared virtually due to the illness of a family member and left the meeting at 12:00 p.m.

⁴ Nancy Fowler appeared on behalf of Markella Maschas.

⁵ Leah Kipley appeared virtually due to personal illness.

DCJS Staff Present:

Andi Martin, Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Initiatives Supervisor, DCJS

Members of the Public Present:⁶

LaShonda Carson, Program Director, Samaritan House, Inc.

Robin Gauthier, Executive Director, Samaritan House, Inc.

Welcome & Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 10:18 a.m. A quorum was present.

Review of Agency for Accreditation

Samaritan House, Inc.

After a presentation by Amber Stanwix demonstrating that Samaritan House, Inc. met all the Professional Standards, Judy Castele made a motion to approve the accreditation status recommendation, and Tamy Mann seconded the motion. The Professional Standards Committee voted 11-0 to grant full accreditation status to Samaritan House, Inc. as a domestic violence agency. Members of Samaritan House, Inc. informed the Committee that the accreditation process was very smooth, and the Professional Standards Team was open to discussion regarding how certain Standards could be met.

Kristina Vadas informed the Committee that that Andrea Sutton, the Professional Standards Compliance Coordinator, left DCJS to pursue an opportunity elsewhere. Ms. Vadas stated that DCJS is planning to fill the position, but the agency is evaluating how best to do so.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the May 28, 2025, Committee meeting were reviewed by the members. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Judy Castele, and Tamy Mann seconded the motion. After a vote, the minutes were approved 11-0.

Reapproval of Policy on Participation of Professional Standards Committee Members in Meetings by Electronic Means Pursuant to *Virginia Code § 2.2-3708.3*

Amber Stanwix explained that, by statute, the Committee's Electronic Participation Policy must be reapproved every year. She stated that no changes had been made to the Policy this year, however. Tamy Mann then moved to reapprove the Policy, and Kelly McCoy seconded the motion. After a vote, the policy was approved 11-0.

⁶ The members of the public attended virtually.

Report from the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance

Laura Beth Weaver provided a presentation on some of the projects of the Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance. She described a multi-year project involving 24/7 services and how agencies can be supported in providing them. She also discussed projects including Families Thrive Virginia, which will focus on paid sick leave, paid family and medical leave, and childcare support, as well as a Human Resources Needs Assessment, which has the goal of supporting sexual and domestic violence agencies that may need assistance with payroll, benefits, and other human resources services.

The Committee then discussed the need to continue providing 24/7 services while also making sure that those services are sustainable, both financially and in terms of impact on staff. The group discussed alternative sources of funding, as well as the need for sexual and domestic violence agencies to be seen as professional social services. Finally, Laura Beth Weaver emphasized that the Action Alliance is not recommending changes to any Professional Standards requirements at this time, but that the field does want to be heard on these issues.

Professional Standards Update

After a brief break, Amber Stanwix provided an update regarding the accreditation application process. She informed the Committee that 15 out of the 17 eligible agencies applied for reaccreditation. In addition, six agencies submitted Organizational Self-Assessment Summaries to begin the initial accreditation process. As DCJS staff can support up to 20 applications each round, five of the six new agencies were randomly selected to continue and, therefore, the current application round will have 20 applicants in total. Ms. Stanwix also provided some statistics regarding engagement with the application process.

A Committee member inquired whether any agencies have expressed concern regarding the attempted federal changes to the way that services are provided to undocumented immigrant communities. Kristina Vadas informed the group that, although there have been attempts to add conditions regarding services, no changes have been made to the Violence Against Women Act or the Victims of Crime Act. Therefore, provisions requiring that services be provided to anyone, regardless of immigration status, are still in effect. Nancy Fowler concurred.

A Committee member then asked Ms. Stanwix why agencies have not applied for accreditation. Ms. Stanwix responded that agencies have reported issues with staffing levels and the amount of time required to engage in the process. Ms. Vadas also pointed out that, while the Professional Standards Committee has been in existence since 2015, there have only been four rounds of applications for accreditation. She stated that, as the process continues, more agencies may be willing to apply.

Discussion Regarding Specific Requirements of the Professional Standards

At the previous meeting, a Committee member inquired about two sections of the Professional Standards. In particular, she asked about background check requirements and the requirement that staff be able to contact the Chairperson of an agency's board of directors.

Amber Stanwix provided information about these sections. First, she described the difference between the federal requirements for background checks as opposed to the requirements of the Professional Standards. She stated that the Professional Standards Team had recorded a brief information session relating to both requirements and that this presentation was sent to the field in September 2025.

Ms. Stanwix then spoke about the requirement that staff have contact information for the board of directors. She stated that the Professional Standards Team has interpreted this requirement very broadly. If staff have a way of bringing issues to the board of directors, the Professional Standards Team will be satisfied that this requirement is being met.

Discussion Regarding Revision Process

The Committee then turned to a discussion regarding the Professional Standards revision process. Members discussed a variety of methods for receiving feedback from the field, such as using surveys or having the Action Alliance gather feedback from the field. The Committee also discussed whether the Standards should represent a minimum requirement or be a reach for agencies.

The Committee discussed the need to ensure that the field has numerous opportunities to provide feedback on this process. The group agreed to begin with the development of a survey for members of the field. The survey will ask agencies what changes they would like to see to the Standards, as well as what obstacles there may be to applying. The Committee members will then use the survey as a starting point to determine the direction for the revision process. Amber Stanwix was asked to create a first draft of the survey and then present it at the next meeting. She also agreed to present information on any previous surveys that have been done.

Public Comment

There were no public comments.

Selection of Next Meeting Date

The Committee agreed that the next meeting will be held on January 21, 2026, from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. This meeting will be held virtually.

Closing Remarks

The Chairperson adjourned the meeting at 12:49 p.m.