

## POLICY 2.4

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN POLICY-MAKING ACTIONS

---

#### 2.4.1 Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to promote public involvement in the development, amendment, or repeal of policies of the State Executive Council for Children’s Services (SEC).

#### 2.4.2 Authority

[Section 2.2-2648](#) D 4 of the *Code of Virginia* states that the SEC shall:

“Provide for a public participation process for programmatic and fiscal guidelines and dispute resolution procedures developed for administrative actions that support the purposes of the Children’s Services Act ([§ 2.2-5200](#) et seq.). The public participation process shall include, at a minimum, 60 days of public comment and the distribution of these guidelines and procedures to all interested parties.”

[§ 2.2-2648](#) D 5 specifies that the SEC shall:

“... consult with the Virginia Municipal League and the Virginia Association of Counties about state policies governing the use, distribution, and monitoring of monies in the state pool of funds and the state trust fund.”

In addition, [§ 2.2-2648](#) enumerates specific areas in which the SEC shall be responsible for the development and implementation of guidelines and practices for the Children’s Services Act (CSA).

The Office of Children’s Services (OCS) is established pursuant to [§ 2.2-2649](#) A as the administrative entity of the SEC.

#### 2.4.3 Definitions

“*Basic law*” means provisions in the *Code of Virginia* that delineate the basic authority and responsibilities of an agency and/or governing body.

“*Commonwealth Calendar*” means the electronic calendar for official government meetings open to the public as required by [§ 2.2-3707](#) C of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.

“*Fiscal impact analysis*” means a systematic review of the potential fiscal impact of a proposed policy which includes an analysis of the impact on CSA state pool funds and other state funding sources, CSA local matching funds requirements, local government administration of CSA, and any potential federal funding sources.

“*Legal review*” means a review of a proposed policy by the Office of the Attorney General to ensure that the proposed policy is in compliance with all relevant state and federal laws and regulations.

*“Notice Stage”* means the first stage of an SEC policy development where the SEC indicates the intent to initiate a policy-making action.

*“Notification list”* means a list of persons, maintained by OCS, to be notified of SEC policy-making actions.

*“Open meeting”* means any scheduled meeting of a unit of state government empowered by an agency’s basic law to establish policies or decide cases related to a policy-making action.

*“Person”* means any individual, corporation, partnership, association, cooperative, limited liability company, trust, joint venture, government, political subdivision, or any other legal public or private entity and any successor, representative, agent, agency, or instrumentality thereof.

*“Policy”* means any requirement adopted by the SEC that governs the implementation of the CSA.

*“Policy-making action”* means the development, amendment, or repeal of a policy by the SEC.

*“Proposed Stage”* means the second stage of an SEC policy-making action where the SEC has drafted the proposed requirements for the operation of the CSA, OCS, or the SEC that is within the legal authority of the SEC under [§ 2.2-2648](#) of the *Code of Virginia* or which the SEC is directed to adopt by the General Assembly of Virginia.

*“Public comment”* means the mechanisms by which the SEC receives input from interested parties concerning policy-making actions.

*“Public hearing”* means a scheduled time at which SEC members meet to receive public comment on a policy-making action.

*“Public notice”* means informing the public of the policy-making activities of the SEC.

## **2.4.4 Notification List and Public Notice**

### **A. Notification List**

1. The OCS shall maintain a list of persons who have requested to be notified of policy-making actions being considered by the SEC.
2. Any person may request to be placed on the notification list by making a request to OCS via e-mail at [csa.office@csa.virginia.gov](mailto:csa.office@csa.virginia.gov) or 804-662-9815. Notification of persons on the notification list shall be made by electronic means unless the person specifically indicates a preference for notification via First Class mail.
3. When electronic mail is returned as undeliverable on two occasions, at least 24 hours apart, that person will be deleted from the notification list. A single undeliverable message shall be insufficient cause to delete a person from the notification list.
4. When mail delivered by First Class mail is returned as undeliverable on two occasions, that person will be deleted from the list.

5. The OCS may periodically request those persons on the notification list to indicate the desire to remain on or be deleted from the list and their preferred method of notification.
6. All members of the SEC and the State and Local Advisory Team (SLAT) ([§2.2-5201](#)), all persons registered via the CSA website rosters as chairpersons of CSA Community Policy and Management Teams (CPMT, [§2.2-5205](#)) and CSA Coordinators shall be placed on the notification list without the necessity of a specific request.

B. Additional Public Notice

1. In addition to the use of the notification list, OCS shall use the following mechanisms for informing the public of proposed policy-making actions of the SEC:
  - a. Prominent display of current information about policy-making activities of the SEC on its website at [www.csa.virginia.gov](http://www.csa.virginia.gov). The information shall indicate the stage of the action and when the SEC is scheduled to meet to consider the policy-making action.
  - b. Include notice of policy-making activities on the published agendas of public meetings of the SEC and any related committee, work group, or task force meeting.

### 2.4.5 Information to be Sent to Persons on the Notification List

- A. OCS shall send to persons on the notification list, and publish on its website, the following information:
  1. A notice of intent to develop policy (Initiation of the Notice Stage),
  2. A notice of the public comment period on a proposed policy-making action, including the specific proposed policy documents and/or information on how to electronically obtain a copy of the specific proposed policy documents, and information on how to submit public comments.
- B. The failure of any person to receive any notice of any documents shall not affect the validity of any policy if approved by the SEC.

### 2.4.6 Public Comment

- A. In considering any policy-making action not exempted in Section 2.4.8, the SEC shall afford interested persons an opportunity to submit data, views, and arguments, either orally or in writing. Such opportunity to comment shall include an on-line public comment forum maintained on the CSA website.
  1. The SEC shall provide a copy of the Notice Stage document to all persons on the Notification List as described in Section 2.4.4 A.
  2. Nothing herein shall prevent the SEC from developing and drafting policy-making actions prior to or during any opportunity it provides to the public to submit comments.

- B. The SEC shall accept public comments in writing after the issuance of public notice of a policy-making action in accordance with Section 2.4.4. Public comment in writing shall be accepted as follows:
1. For a minimum of thirty (30) calendar days following the issuance of the Notice Stage (see Section 2.4.7 B).
  2. For a minimum of sixty (60) calendar days following the preliminary approval of the proposed policy (see Section 2.4.7 C).
  3. For a minimum of sixty (60) calendar days following the approval of a re-proposed policy (see Section 2.4.7 E (1) (c)).
- C. The SEC may extend any of the comment periods listed in Section 2.4.6 B.
- D. Oral public comment on any policy-making action shall be accepted at all public meetings of the SEC and of any committee, work group, or task force established to consider the policy-making action. Notice of any open meeting shall be posted on the Commonwealth Calendar at least five (5) working days prior to the date of the meeting. The exception to this requirement is any meeting held in accordance with [§2.2-3707 D](#) of the *Code of Virginia* allowing for contemporaneous notice to be provided to participants and the public.
- E. Response to Public Comment

The OCS shall compile a summary description of and prepare a response to all public comments on the policy-making action. Such summary description shall be sent to members of the SEC and all members of the Notification List described in Section 4A, and published on the CSA website, at least five (5) business days before the meeting of the SEC at which final approval of the proposed policy will be considered.

In this summary description, the OCS shall indicate for each comment or group of comments that are of a similar nature whether the comment has been incorporated into the proposed policy or, if not, a brief explanation of the rationale for the action taken.

## 2.4.7 SEC Policy-making Process

- A. Petition for a Policy-making Action
1. Any person may petition the SEC to initiate a policy-making action. The petition shall state:
    - a. The petitioner's name and contact information; and
    - b. The substance and purpose of the policy-making action that is requested, including reference to any applicable SEC policies and/or reference to the legal authority of the SEC to take the action requested. However, the failure of a petitioner to include the legal authority shall not preclude consideration of the petition.

2. Petitioners shall submit a written petition to the Executive Director of the OCS. The petition shall be included in the documents provided in advance of the next scheduled meeting of the SEC. At this meeting, the SEC shall determine the disposition of the petition.
3. Disposition of such petitions may include:
  - a. Acceptance of the petition and initiation of a policy-making action.
  - b. A request for the petitioner to present the request for consideration to the SEC.
  - c. Denial of the petition.
4. Within ten (10) days of disposition, OCS shall notify the petitioner in writing of the disposition including the rationale for the decision if the request is denied.
5. Nothing in this policy shall prohibit the OCS or the SEC from receiving information or from proceeding on its own motion for initiation of a policy-making action.

#### B. Notice Stage

1. A determination to begin a policy-making action will be made by the SEC.<sup>1</sup>
2. At a minimum, the Notice Stage shall include (i) a summary of the intended policy-making action, a statement of the basis, purpose, and substance thereof; (ii) issues to be addressed therein; and (iii) a preliminary estimate of the fiscal impact of the policy-making action on both state and local governments.
3. Should the SEC approve the Notice Stage, it shall be issued via public notice and open for public comment as provided for in Section 2.4.6 B. The Executive Director of the OCS or designee shall be responsible for compiling, organizing, and presenting to the SEC public comments received.

#### C. Initiation of the Proposed Stage

1. The SEC shall consider the draft of the proposed policy-making action a maximum of six (6) months after the close of the public comment period of the Notice Stage.
2. The draft shall be made available via public notice no less than five (5) days prior to the scheduled meeting of the SEC at which the draft of the proposed policy-making action will be considered. When distributing the draft, the OCS shall also provide a summary of public comments with the agency's response as provided for in Section 2.4.6 E.

---

<sup>1</sup> [§2.2-2649.B.1](#) of the Code of Virginia provides that the Director of OCS shall "Develop and recommend to the state executive council programs and fiscal policies that promote and support cooperation and collaboration in the provision of services to troubled and at-risk youths and their families at the state and local levels." Section B 2 further requires to OCS to "Develop and recommend to the Council state interagency policies governing the use, distribution and monitoring of moneys in the state pool of funds and the state trust fund."

#### D. Approval of Proposed Stage for Public Comment

1. The SEC shall consider the issuance of the proposed policy for public comment. At this time, the SEC may take one of three actions:
  - a. Approve the issuance of public notice of the proposed policy for a period of public comment not less than sixty (60) days.
  - b. Reject the proposed policy-making action.
  - c. Take other action to gather further information prior to proceeding on the proposed policy under 1 or 2 above. Such actions may include the appointment of an ad hoc work group, consultations with groups and/or individuals with interest in the proposed policy, or other steps the SEC may deem appropriate.

#### E. Proposed Stage Fiscal Impact Analysis and Legal Review

If the SEC approves the Proposed Stage, (i) the OCS shall complete a fiscal impact analysis and (ii) a legal review shall be conducted for consideration by the SEC.

##### 1. Fiscal Impact Analysis

- a. Before taking further action on a proposed policy-making action the SEC shall consider the potential fiscal impact of the policy. The OCS, in conjunction with local government representatives, shall provide a thorough analysis of the fiscal impact of the proposed policy-making action based on the best available information.
- b. In completing the fiscal impact analysis, OCS, with the input of the SEC shall:
  - i. Convene a group of potentially impacted parties to define the parameters, sources of data, and analytic process to be utilized in completing the fiscal impact analysis. In accordance with [§2.2-2648.5](#) of the Code of Virginia, input shall be solicited from the Virginia Municipal League (VML) and the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO). VML and VACO shall be provided a minimum of thirty (30) business days in which to provide comments. The fiscal impact analysis shall include whether there is an estimated impact on the Commonwealth, localities or other potentially impacted entities, such as private service providers and/or recipients of services and identify any parties particularly affected by the proposed policy. If no parties are particularly affected by the proposed policy, the analysis shall so state.
  - ii. The fiscal impact analysis shall be made available via public notice no less than five (5) business days prior to the scheduled meeting of the SEC at which the proposed policy-making action will next be considered.

##### 2. Legal Review

- a. When the proposed policy-making action is posted for public comment, the OCS shall submit the proposed policy to the Office of the Attorney General to ensure statutory authority for the proposed policy-making action.

- b. Should the legal review of the proposed policy reveal non-compliance with relevant statutes and/or regulations, the SEC shall be so informed by legal counsel and shall make such revisions in the proposed policy as are necessary.

F. Final Approval

1. No less than five (5) business days prior to the scheduled meeting of the SEC for consideration of approval of the policy-making action, the following shall be sent via public notice:
  - a. A draft of the proposed final policy with any deletions indicated with strike-through notations and any new language underlined;
  - b. A summary of all changes and the rationale for the change;
  - c. A summary of all comments received and the agency's response as provided in Section 2.4.6 E; and
  - d. The fiscal impact analysis.
2. The SEC may take one of the following actions:
  - a. Approve the proposed policy and establish an implementation or effective date;
  - b. Reject the proposed policy;
  - c. Revise the proposed policy and initiate an additional period of public comment (re-proposed policy); or
  - d. Defer final action on the proposed policy in order to gather other specific information prior to taking additional action at a future meeting.

## 2.4.8 Exemptions

- A. The provisions of this SEC Policy 2.4 shall not apply to policy-making actions that:
1. Consist only of changes in style or form or are corrections of technical errors in existing SEC policies;
  2. Are necessary to conform to changes in Virginia statutory law or the appropriation act where no agency discretion is involved. However, notice of such policies shall be disseminated via public notice within ninety (90) days of the law's effective date;
  3. Are required by order of any state or federal court of competent jurisdiction where no agency discretion is involved; or
  4. Are necessary to meet the requirements of federal law or regulations, provided such policies do not differ materially from those required by federal law or regulation, and the Office of the Attorney General has so determined in writing. Notice of such policies shall be disseminated via public notice not less than thirty (30) days prior to the effective date of the policy.

## 2.4.9 Policy Review

This policy will be subject to periodic review by the State Executive Council for Children's Services.