



City Council
Health & Human Services Meeting

36 Court Street
Springfield, MA 01103
<http://www.springfieldcityhall.com>
Brian Santaniello (Chair)

~Final~

April 28, 2026

1:00 PM

City Hall - Room 200

Roll Call

In Person

Councilor Santaniello (Chair)
Elizabeth Rogers (Baystate Health)

Virtual

Yamilca Nogue (Helix Human Services)
Mark Paglia (Helix Human Services)
Councilor Davila
Council President Whitfield

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Arrived
Brian Santaniello	City Councilor At Large	Present	
Gerry Martin	City Councilor — Ward 7	Excused	
Maria Perez	City Councilor — Ward 1	Excused	
Malo Brown	City Councilor — Ward 4	Excused	
Zaida Govan	City Councilor — Ward 8	Absent	
Kateri Walsh	City Councilor At Large	Excused	
Justin Hurst	City Councilor At Large	Excused	
Victor Davila	City Councilor — Ward 6	Virtual *L	1:06 PM
Michael Fenton	City Councilor — Ward 2	Excused	
Jose Delgado	City Councilor At Large	Excused	
Lavar Click-Bruce	City Councilor — Ward 5	Excused	

Melvin Edwards	City Councilor — Ward 3	Absent	
Tracye Whitfield	City Councilor At Large	Virtual *L	1:17 PM

Call To Order

1:00 PM Meeting called to order on April 28, 2026, in Hybrid Room 200, 36 Court Street, Springfield, MA 01103.

Public Portion

1. Child Abuse – Discussion on Resources and Reporting

Minutes:

The Health and Human Services Committee met on April 28, 2026, chaired by Councilor Brian Santaniello, to discuss child abuse prevention, reporting procedures, and related child welfare and mental health resources in Massachusetts, including system capacity and emerging risks to youth.

Mark Paglia from Helix Human Services reported Massachusetts child abuse reporting rates at approximately 14 per 1,000 children compared to 7 per 1,000 nationally, attributing the higher rate to stronger mandated reporter laws and education rather than a confirmed higher incidence. He outlined the DCF reporting process, including 51A initial reports of suspected abuse or neglect and 51B investigations to determine substantiation. He defined abuse as physical, emotional, sexual, or neglectful harm, intentional or unintentional, and stated reports are made via the DCF hotline or 911 in emergencies. He described available supports, including MassHealth-funded outpatient services, DCF community-based services, emergency placement options such as foster or residential care, and Helix Human Services programming serving approximately 11 to 12 foster youth. He noted risks from social media and online gaming, including cyberbullying and exploitation, emphasized the limited effectiveness of parental controls without active monitoring, and identified behavioral changes, such as withdrawal, as potential warning signs. He confirmed coordination with law enforcement occurs in serious cases, but did not confirm staffing or funding levels.

Elizabeth Rogers from Bay State Family Advocacy Center described services including forensic interviews, trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy, and case management for victims up to age 24, with culturally competent care and multidisciplinary support. She reported staffing shortages, funding constraints, and space limitations contributing to service delays and active hiring needs.

Council President Whitfield, a former kinship foster parent, described challenges in navigating DCF processes and concerns about system complexity and the trade-off between reunification

and stability. Councilor Davila raised concerns about social media's impact on youth mental health, including bullying and suicide risk, and requested future discussion. Councilor Davila requested data on age-specific abuse risk in the Springfield area.

Committee discussion identified broader system constraints, including staffing shortages, funding reductions (including VOCA impacts), and service wait times, alongside the need for increased public training and awareness for mandated reporters and community members.

Next steps include reviewing DCF staffing and investigative capacity, including funding impacts; distributing free mandated reporter training resources referenced by Elizabeth Rogers; scheduling a Helix Human Services site visit with full council participation; organizing a future-focused meeting on social media impacts on youth; and Mark providing the requested Springfield-area age risk data.

[MIN_SIGNATURES]