

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **APHSA Honors Carl Ayers, Deputy Commissioner for the Virginia Department of Social Services, with the Jerry W. Friedman Human Services Impact Award**

**Arlington, VA — June 15, 2026:** The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) is proud to announce that Carl Ayers, Deputy Commissioner of Human Services for the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), has been selected as the recipient of the 2026 Jerry W. Friedman Human Services Impact Award, recognizing his exceptional leadership and enduring contributions to advancing human services systems that improve outcomes for children, families, and communities. The award was presented during the [APHSA National Human Services Summit](#), held June 14–17, 2026, in Arlington, Virginia.

Established by APHSA in 2016, the Jerry W. Friedman Human Services Impact Award honors the legacy of former APHSA Executive Director Jerry W. Friedman, whose work centered on ensuring all people have the opportunity to reach their full potential. The award recognizes individuals who have made significant, lasting contributions to the human services sector by advancing integrated, human-centered systems of service delivery.

With more than 27 years in public child welfare and human services, Ayers exemplifies the adaptive leadership, innovation, and commitment to continuous improvement that defined Friedman’s career. Throughout his service at the local, state, and national levels, Ayers has consistently championed family-centered approaches that strengthen communities while transforming the systems that support them.

As Deputy Commissioner for VDSS, Ayers oversees Family Services, Benefit Programs, Local Engagement and Support, Training, and Continuous Quality Improvement, aligning policy, practice, and performance within a cohesive, person-focused continuum of care. His leadership has driven major cross-system innovations, including the rapid deployment of the Virginia Emergency Nutrition Assistance (VENA) initiative, which protected food access for more than 850,000 Virginians, and Virginia’s nationally recognized implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act, securing historic investments in prevention and strengthening supports that help families remain safely together.

Ayers’ impact is especially evident in his commitment to family-centered system design. He has helped remove barriers to kinship care, establish sustainable financial and service supports for caregivers, and build infrastructure that strengthens families while reducing reliance on foster care. He also led the development of the Virginia Children’s Services Practice Model, a workforce-

driven framework that translates organizational values into measurable, outcome-focused expectations and continues to shape practice across the state.

“For more than two decades, Carl has been a tireless advocate for children, families and communities, helping to shape a child welfare system that is more responsive, family-centered, and focused on lasting outcomes. His leadership has strengthened services across Virginia and the nation, and we are grateful for his service,” said Duke Storen, Commissioner of the Virginia Department of Social Services.

Ayers’ leadership journey began on the front lines of public service and reflects a career dedicated to learning, collaboration, and innovation. Starting as a frontline worker, he advanced through supervisory and leadership roles to become Director of the Floyd County Department of Social Services, later serving as Director of Virginia’s Division of Family Services and now Deputy Commissioner of Human Services. His influence extends well beyond Virginia. As Senior Director of Strategic Consulting at Casey Family Programs, he helped drive transformative child welfare reforms in Pennsylvania and New Mexico, demonstrating his ability to foster meaningful systems change across diverse jurisdictions.

Today, Ayers continues to shape the national human services landscape as Board Chair of the Child Welfare League of America, where he is a trusted voice for family preservation, kinship care, and collaborative system reform. Colleagues across the country recognize him not only for his strategic vision but also for his dedication to mentoring others, cultivating leadership, encouraging innovation, and fostering a culture of accountability and excellence.

The Jerry W. Friedman Human Services Impact Award recognizes leaders whose work strengthens the human services sector and inspires others to meet evolving challenges with creativity, courage, and purpose. Through decades of service, Carl Ayers has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to advancing integrated, human-centered solutions that improve lives and create lasting impact nationwide. APHSA congratulates Carl Ayers on this well-deserved recognition and thanks him for his extraordinary contributions to strengthening human services systems and improving outcomes for children, families, and communities.

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### **About APHSA**

The American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) supports leaders from state, county, and city human services agencies to advance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities nationwide. As the premier bipartisan membership association for public human



services, they work with their members to generate pragmatic solutions grounded in lived experience. Visit [aphsa.org](https://aphsa.org) to learn more.

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