

[Organization letterhead]

Dear Supervisor ____:

Voices for Virginia's Children is a statewide, nonprofit, privately-funded child advocacy organization promoting smart policies and investments for children and families. As Voices works to connect the dots and prioritize action at the federal and state level, we also support localities taking bold steps to invest in children. Fairfax County is poised to take more bold steps in FY16 for school readiness opportunities in child care and preschool. These decisions demonstrate that Fairfax is a leader in a comprehensive approach to school readiness. However, the proposed elimination of funding for Healthy Families Fairfax undermines the first step to school readiness, preparing parents to be their child's first teacher.

We thank the leaders of Fairfax County for introducing a budget that includes significant steps forward in expanding school readiness activities in support of community programs serving young children. It includes matching funds for an Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grant, an exciting and competitive federal grant awarded to Fairfax County. It also calls for increasing access to child care subsidy for low-income working families, plus additional funds to increase the reimbursement rates for child care subsidy. This would bring rates to the same level as the state funding. And, the proposal includes an additional \$150,000 to open two new school-age child care spaces.

Unfortunately, the budget proposal eliminates one of the important pieces of the school readiness continuum: home visiting through Healthy Families Fairfax. The elimination of local funds means that 613 current families will lose crucial services that have a proven track record of success.

We believe the proposal is also short on opportunities to expand access to high quality preschool. Although Fairfax makes a significant investment in preschool, and maintains Virginia Preschool Initiative matching funds for FY16, over 1,400 at-risk four-year olds in this community do not have the opportunity to participate in VPI because Fairfax does not meet the match to draw state-allocated funds. The new VPI-Plus grant is a great opportunity for approximately 70 four-year-olds in Fairfax County. More opportunities are needed, with local and state investments working together.

We urge the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors to approve the proposed investments in school readiness services, child care subsidy access and payment rates, and expansion of after-school capacity. We urge you to reject the elimination of Healthy Families Fairfax, and instead maintain the funds allocated to the program. We also ask that the county and school board work together to develop a plan to increase participation in the Virginia Preschool

Initiative and ensure access to preschool for all of the identified at-risk four year-olds in Fairfax.

Early care and education investments – including home visiting services – are crucial investments that matter today and in the future. School readiness for Northern Virginia begins with parents and ends with school success. All the links in the continuum matter for families every day in Fairfax, and the county budget must not be balanced by cuts the most vulnerable in our community.

We look forward to working with you during the budget process this spring. Thank you for your support for Fairfax County’s children and families.

Sincerely,

[your name]