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Page 2: Contact Information

Q1

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Page 3: Question 1: Early Learning

Q2

Virginia is known to have a 'non-system' of early learning where programs operate under different departments and sets of rules. What would you do to better link programs and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Virginia's early learning programs?

With 90% of brain development taking place before age 5, we must do more to expand access to early childhood education in the Commonwealth. While we have different programs to address early childhood education, including the Virginia Preschool Initiative, child care assistance, and Head Start, these programs are limited and fragmented at best. We need to invest in these programs to expand access to early learning, especially for at-risk children. We also need to increase coordination between public school divisions and private programs so that we can increase the quality of education being provided and expand access for low-income children. The special Joint Committee created in the budget this year to study this issue is an important first step in that process. I look forward to the results of their work and will lend my support to any efforts that increase support for early learning programs and expand access to early childhood education.

Page 4: Question 2: Foster Care

Q3

Most children entering foster care are returned to their families. In most cases, these families do not receive additional support and services from the child welfare system, which can lead to poor health and education outcomes for children. How do you think the Commonwealth can better support children once they are returned to their families?

Children who are in the foster care system are some of our most vulnerable Virginians. We need to be doing everything we can to support them and their families. Specifically, I've worked with Senator Favola in the past and will continue to support the creation of a Kinship Guardianship Assistance program in Virginia to help facilitate placements with relatives and create a more permanent and stable situation for children in need of a new home. Additionally, we need to expand services for foster children and their families to help them transition out of foster care. I'm proud to have worked with Voices for Virginia's Children and Senator Favola to advocate for the Fostering Futures Program, which was created in 2016. It will help foster children between the ages of 18 and 21 transition to a life beyond foster care. We also need to increase the maintenance payments that foster families receive to keep up with the high cost of living in Virginia. Foster families often go years without an increase in this payment. In 2014, I spoke out against budget amendments that decreased the payments that foster families would have received. We should never balance the budget on the backs of abused and neglected children.

Page 5: Question 3: School to Prison Pipeline

Q4

The US Department of Education data analyzed by the Center for Public Integrity shows that Virginia schools, in a single year, referred students to law enforcement agencies at three times the national rate. Numerous studies show that these school discipline policies increase the chances of these students becoming involved with the adult criminal justice system. If elected, how would you address these issues?

The school to prison pipeline in Virginia is a major problem that needs to be addressed. Virginia is the worst in the nation for referring students to law enforcement. We need to reduce the use of suspension and expulsion as a tool for discipline as well as decrease the time frame that students are allowed to be suspended and expelled. Often discipline issues stem from problems with access to stable housing, health care, or a permanent family support system. Instead of removing students from a classroom or positive school environment, we need to expand access and funding for in-school and community based services that can help troubled students.

Page 6: Question 4: Health Insurance

Q5

Virginia's Children's Health Insurance Program (known as FAMIS in Virginia) and Medicaid provide low-income children with health insurance that their families would otherwise be unable to afford. If the federal government cuts payments to the states for Medicaid and/or FAMIS, how would you support the health needs of low-income children?

Republicans in Washington, D.C. are pushing cuts to Medicaid coverage under the guise of repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act. If they are successful, it will have a tremendous impact on the Commonwealth because we have such lean Medicaid coverage. Put simply, there is nowhere else to cut. We must do everything we can to keep our current level of Medicaid coverage and services, which means raising additional revenue to fund this top priority. We have a moral obligation to Virginia's most vulnerable citizens to make sure that they receive the care that they need.

Page 7: Question 5: Opioid Epidemic

Q6

Substance abuse by parents affects both the parents and their children. Brain research shows that positive attachment between a parent and child in the first few years of life is critical to the child's healthy brain development. Substance abuse can significantly impact those early bonds between parents and children. If elected, what policy solutions would you promote to address the needs of the whole family?

With over 1,300 newborns in Virginia being referred to Child Protective Services as substance exposed in 2016, we face a tremendous crisis in the Commonwealth. We need to strengthen our system of care for pregnant mothers and parents so that they can get the treatment they need in the setting they need while maintaining the important bond between mother and child. I'm proud to have supported Senator Wexton's legislation this past session to increase reporting requirements at the local Department of Social Services and require the local department in conjunction with Child Protective Services to develop a "plan of safe care" for the mother and child.

Page 8: Question 6: Cross-Systems

Q7

A child can interact with many systems (schools, health and mental health, courts, etc.) as they grow up. A Virginia Children's Cabinet has been established to facilitate cross-agency collaborations at the highest levels of state government. If elected, how would you facilitate this type of cross-agency collaboration for children?

It is extremely important that we reshape the way that Virginia works to meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma. We can do this in Virginia by adopting a "trauma-informed" model that builds off of the success of local and regional Trauma Informed Community Networks to work across agencies using a shared framework and coordinating resources to help children and families. The Governor's Children's Cabinet is an important first step to implementing this type of model in Virginia, but we need to do more to develop a unified framework for state agencies and coordinate state-level efforts. We also need to assess how we can better coordinate and partner with the private sector to meet the needs of children who have experienced trauma. I will continue working with Voices for Virginia's Children to make the necessary policy changes in state agencies to implement a trauma informed model of care in Virginia.

Page 9: Question 7: Mental Health

Q8

In 2016, Virginia ranked 49th in the nation for the rate of youth with major depression who did not receive any mental health treatment. There are many barriers to quality mental health treatment for children, including: type of insurance, place of residence, lack of access and stigma. What do you view as the most significant barrier to effective mental health care for children and adolescents in Virginia, and how would you propose addressing this barrier?

In Virginia, 130,000 children and adolescents live with mental illness. However, we continue to kick the can down the road when it comes to seriously funding mental health services for children. We need to expand access to services so that children can receive the care they need in all parts of the Commonwealth. We should also increase coordination between public and private mental health services so that no children fall between the gaps in our system and ensure that children are being treated in the least restrictive setting possible. In addition, Virginia should reevaluate its funding formula to establish minimum staffing levels for essential support personnel such as social workers, counselors, psychologists, and nurses so that more children with mental health needs are being identified and treated.

Page 10: Question 8: Education

Q9

The achievement gap between lower income students and their higher income peers and between white students and students of color has been a persistent problem in Virginia that has recently worsened. How would you address the achievement gap in Pre-K to 12 education?

We need to recognize that education is about more than just the time that children spend in their classrooms with teachers. Virginia needs to support programs that help meet the health, housing, food, and other needs that lower income students face on a daily basis. Additionally, schools that serve these students need to adopt a more holistic community based approach. Carlin Springs Elementary in Arlington is a great example. The school's population is 88% English language learners, 87% economically disadvantaged students, and 94% students of color. Despite these challenges, students at Carlin Springs are far exceeding their accreditation requirements for student achievement. They are able to achieve these results because the school takes a community based approach that not only meets the academic needs of the students, but also their social, emotional, and health needs through collaboration with community partners. Carlin Springs Elementary is a testament to the power of Community Schools and what we can achieve if we take a more holistic approach in meeting the needs of the next generation of Virginians.