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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?

Early childhood education is one of the most important factors for a child's future academic success. There should be more cooperation and information sharing among these various programs in Virginia that provide early learning. I would support legislation that encourages information sharing as well as funding for the expansion of programs that are based on successful models in Virginia. We should be utilizing our successful models as a blueprint for the expansion of programs and services. A comprehensive review or study of early learning programs in Virginia is also a worthwhile idea. I have been a long-time advocate in the community for early childhood education, and in addition, I have introduced amendments to the state budget to support expanding 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?

•I would support expanding the check-in and follow-up practices of the Department of Social Services to include more child based psychological needs. This would be the most comprehensive way to ensure that the child is doing well upon their return to their family that utilizes the most up to date information and models of psychology.

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?

•School discipline is a major issue that is facing our Commonwealth and particularly this region. We need to ensure that teachers and principals have the necessary tools to deal with student behavioral concerns. Out of school suspensions are used significantly too often. Putting children out on the street removes them from any educational opportunity and is a recipe for trouble as they wander the streets aimlessly. At the same time, disruptors should not be allowed to hamper the learning of the other children in the classroom and should be removed to a different space where they can be helped and have opportunities to learn. Additionally, it is important that violent and threatening behavior at various levels be referred to the proper authorities. We also need to ensure that our law enforcement system has options and alternatives so young offenders get the help they need. It is important to consider alternatives to school suspension and also alternatives to how we currently react to student discipline concerns.

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?

The federal payments to Medicaid and FAMIS are critical to Virginia. Given Virginia's already heavy reliance on federal spending, we need to ensure that our state budget adequately reflects the needed Medicaid and FAMIS payments. Many of our Commonwealth's children and elderly rely on these important programs. I would support budget priorities that reflect the importance of these programs.

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?

In the past I have sponsored and passed legislation to protect family members and friends from criminal prosecution, when they are simply trying to get help for their loved one who is battling an opioid induced overdose. It is important that family members be able to access help for their loved ones. However, more needs to be done to support the children who are being affected by this epidemic. I would be supportive of legislation that works to help affected children and ensure that their education, brain development, and quality of life does not suffer at the hands of an addiction in their family. It is critical that we address the trauma needs of our children in many categories, and certainly substance abuse is one.

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?

I would be supportive of the Virginia Children's Cabinet's recommendations on fostering an improved relationship between state agencies in terms of child interactions. Additionally, I would welcome the input of any interested stakeholder or stakeholder group on legislation that would streamline or improve a child's interaction with our state systems. It is important that these interactions be positive in nature but also achieve desired outcomes, as for some children the interactions may be foundational. Additionally, I have supported groups doing excellent work in the Richmond area, such as the Greater Richmond Trauma-Informed Community Network which focuses on advocating for children and families in our community.

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?

The most significant barrier to mental health care is lack of availability. Virginia should greatly increase its spending and support of mental health care for children and adolescents. Additional services and programs are needed throughout the Commonwealth to address significant needs. I support the expansion of services for children and am also supportive of public awareness campaigns that aim to de-stigmatize the process of receiving mental health services. We also need to ensure that families are aware of mental healthcare options and how to access them. We need to educate our communities on the importance of this mental health care and ensure that it is not viewed with a negative lens. Elimination of mental health care stigma, in addition to more resources for services, are greatly needed in Virginia.

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 ensure that all teachers and administrators have access to the same level of resources with which to teach and advise students. It is important that school divisions not only work to attract and retain qualified teachers, but support staff as well. Classroom paraprofessionals, lunch and recess staff, and clerical workers, just to name a few, all play an important role in the success of a child. Our curriculum should include items that provide data driven metrics of performance that allow the teacher to develop each individual student, without constant testing. It is also important that parents and community members be engaged in the schools. Schools should reach out to parents often and provide information that ensures they feel welcome and a part of their child's success. Above all, we should be spending more time listening to the feedback from our teachers and implementing their ideas to address the challenges they face. The achievement gap among students cannot be solved from the top down. We need to ensure that all Virginia children have access to academic resources. Children throughout the Commonwealth, no matter the family income level or the color of their skin, should have the opportunity, resources and technology for a 21st century education that will allow them to go to college or have the training for a well-paying job. Investing in our children's education is an investment in the future of our Commonwealth, our communities and our society.