

Voices for Virginia's Children 2017 Candidate Survey

Contact Information Bill Bunch

276-971-0964

P.O.Box 12 Tazewell Va 24651 3-HD bilbunch@gmail.com

Name: Phone Number: Address: District: City/Town: Email Address:

Question 1: Early Learning; 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?

I would seek the advice of experts in the field. I would put the children ahead of "turf" battles.

Question 2: Foster Care: 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?

Post-reunification services are vital to maintaining the progress families make towards reunification. This can mean someone periodically goes into the home to help with parenting. It could be that community-based services work better, such as childcare services or therapy/counseling.

Question 3: School to Prison Pipeline: 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 Children's Cabinet in Virginia has already done some great work on this issue

with its Classrooms not Courtrooms initiative. As delegate I will listen to and support any of their recommendations.

Question 4: Health Insurance: 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?

Expanding Medicaid is one of my core issues, and it was a disappointment to me that Virginia opted out of expanding Medicaid. I believe that everyone, particularly children, should have access to high quality, affordable healthcare, and as delegate I will fight as much as I can to make it happen. If the federal government chose to cut funds, I will seek out other ways to supplement the funding at the state and local levels.

Question 5: Opioid Epidemic: 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?

The opioid epidemic is one of the most critical public health crises facing Southwest Virginia, and it has negative effects on everyone in the community, including our children. The National Governors Association has released a road map as to what states can do to help fight the epidemic, and relying on recommendations such as theirs would be key.

I also believe that one thing we can do to make sure fewer children are separated from their parents is by facilitating fostering of the entire family. There was recently a report of a family struggling from opioid and heroin addiction who were not caring properly for their child. Instead of separating the family and sending the child into foster care, the entire family was fostered by a

woman. This ensured that the child was properly cared for, while at the same time allowing the parents to remain a constant in their life. I believe that creative solutions like this are crucial pieces to solving the opioid crisis.

Question 6: Cross-Systems Collaboration: 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?

The Children's Cabinet serves a vital function in shaping policy that is based in research and experience rather than politicians' interests and hunches. As delegate, I will ensure that such endeavors are properly funded and staffed.

Question 7: Mental Health: 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?

I believe that the stigma surrounding mental health, especially as it relates to children, is one of the largest factors preventing proper diagnosis and treatment. A proper diagnosis depends on the child's symptoms being taken seriously by the parent and by the doctor. I would propose developing better follow up when help is needed!

Question 8: Education: 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?

Ideally, I would go to the root and solve the underlying issues of inequality that lead to the achievement gap. Absent that, I believe that the best way to approach the solution is by listening to the people who actually interact with children daily: teachers. As delegate, I would promote the voices of teachers in any legislation that attempts to address this issue.

