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Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)
Started: Friday, July 14, 2017 7:06:56 PM
Last Modified: Friday, July 14, 2017 11:58:44 PM
Time Spent: 04:51:48
IP Address: 174.53.74.130

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?

Every child in Virginia should have access to high quality early childhood education. Statewide standards and oversight should be in place to ensure programs provide these vital services well. While local control should be given tremendous weight, no child should be let down by receiving sub-standard early childhood education, which can be a serious hindrance for the remainder of their educational career.

To improve these programs, we should encourage collaboration and best practice sharing with educators across the commonwealth, and we should fully fund programs that meet the needs children and families, no matter the zip code.

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 am strongly in favor of Kinship Guardianship Assistance Programs. Families with children returning from foster care should receive the same type of support as foster families for a period upon the return of the child. These structured programs can not only improve the quality of life for the child and family, but can ensure a standard of care and conditions for the child that make a return to the foster care system less likely. We must do more to empower families to stay together, and to recover from the often traumatic and life altering events that lead to the removal of a child. By doing so, we can make strides to improve the lives of families across the commonwealth.

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 is a very real problem in communities across Virginia, and we should do all we can to bring it to an end. Putting students in contact with law enforcement leads to negative outcomes and should be reserved for the most heinous violations. We should focus on getting students to study the justice system in class, not as participants.

I support the legislation advocated by VA Kids to redefine and reduce long term suspensions and to lower the impact of involuntary contact with law enforcement, and I would work with leaders in the House of Delegates who have introduced legislation to reduce the number of student referrals to law enforcement.

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?

First, I would do all that I could to protect Medicaid in Virginia, and to make it available to the 400,000 Virginians who were left out in the cold when the legislature voted against expanding access.

If Medicaid or FAMIS were cut under some version of the national legislation being discussed in Washington, DC, I would do everything within my power to protect the 95% of children who currently have healthcare in Virginia, and I would continue pushing to cover the remaining 5%. There should be no higher priority for Virginia's legislature than ensuring that our children are protected and able to access necessary healthcare.

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?

To start, we need to treat substance abuse as a public health crisis instead of a criminal one. While those who supply and profit from dangerous narcotics should be prosecuted fully, the devastation and cost associated with imprisoning those in the grips of addiction is very high, both for families and for Virginia, and the results are very poor.

Instead, it is imperative that we increase access to treatment and promote programming that takes a family centered approach to recovery. I see the efficacy of such programs in my own community, where the McShin Foundation's efforts to include families in recovery lead to better outcomes for patients and their loved ones. Such programs give patients and those in their support systems tools to aid in their long term sobriety, and work to educate the community about these issues to reduce the stigma associated with them. I would strongly advocate for the McShin Foundation and programs like it to be made available to all in Virginia who need them.

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?

The Virginia Children's Cabinet has great priorities and I support their leadership in optimizing the cross-agency collaborations and public-private partnerships that are focused on improving the lives of children across the commonwealth.

As a Delegate, I would serve an important role in personally cutting through some of the gridlock and red tape that often slows down collaboration on behalf of children. It would be incumbent upon me to use my relationships in the community and in the House of Delegates to ensure that issues facing children were given the attention and resources they needed to find a positive outcome. As a longtime advocate for families and children fleeing violence and persecution, I know that it some issues don't have easy fixes and take significant time and energy to see to a solution. It would be an honor to do that work for children and families in my 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?

It is appalling that Virginia has done so poorly in addressing the mental health issues of our young people.

All of the above reasons are significant barriers to accessing mental health treatment and they are interrelated. Lack of access can be caused by place of residence, inadequate insurance, or stigma around seeking care. We need a multi-faceted approach to address access to these services.

I will advocate for measures that increase access to same day care and tele-mental health services, ensuring that a wide array of patients receive care quickly. These services can also reduce the stigma sometimes associated with going through the mental health system because they allow direct access to care.

Funding these services is vital to the well-being of young people around Virginia and will be a priority in any budget that I work on.

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?

First and foremost, we must do all that we can to ensure that Pre-K is well implemented and fully funded in every community. When children fall behind in elementary school, it can be extremely difficult for them to catch up as they advance through middle and high school. I would advocate for the inclusion of STEM and Arts programming in preschool, which has been shown here in Virginia to put children ahead as they enter elementary school.

It is also extremely important that we develop school leadership that reflects the community. We need to do more to recruit, develop and retain teachers and administrators of color, and to aid in the professional development of all teachers and administrators in low-performing schools. The challenges teachers and administrators face in these districts are often unique and we need to support them with training and resources that match these challenges.