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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?

This has been an issue that I have been actively working on for years and am pleased that I have had the opportunity to collaborate with Voices for Virginia's Children and many other related stakeholders in the name of making children safer. Expanding background checks, particularly to include fingerprint background checks, closing the exemption loopholes and increasing penalties for those unlicensed or license-exempt providers whose neglect causes the death or serious injury of a child, are key to fixing Virginia's system of child care. Furthermore, if we cannot close these loopholes, or in the interim, we must insist upon higher minimum safety standards. I have both sponsored (2014-HB 552, 2015-HB 1552, HB 2046, 2016-HB 474, HB 500, 2017-HB 2259) and served as both co-patron (2016-HB 1189, SJ 63, 2017-HB 1568, SB 897, SB 1239) and chief co-patron (2014-HB 412, 2015-HB 1570) of legislation to this effect over the past four legislative sessions. I will continue to fight for these issues, as long as I have the privilege to serve in office.

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 believe that our Commonwealth needs to build a stronger safety net in general. Additionally, we need to ensure the full implementation of the federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008. This federal law allows our Commonwealth a plethora of opportunities to promote good outcomes and most importantly, permanency for 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?

I supported legislation (HB 1536) this past year that would have prohibited students in preschool through grade three from being suspended for more than five school days or expelled except for drug offenses, firearm offenses, or certain criminal acts. I believe this is common sense. Suspension policies need to be reviewed and applied less often than they currently are in Virginia today, especially for young students. Furthermore, I introduced legislation that would have taught children at a young age about boundaries (HB 2406). This legislation was an attempt to prevent both bullying as well as improper behavior in general from students in the future. Unfortunately, this bill did not make it out of conference committee.

Additionally, I believe we must invest in early education, especially pre-K programs so that fewer juveniles find themselves in a place where they are more likely to commit crimes.

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 and foremost, I have supported the expansion of Medicaid coverage to those living in the health care "coverage gap" since day one. I have spoken on the floor of the House of Delegates several times in this regard, urging my colleagues to see both the human and economic reasons behind expanding coverage to individuals desperately in need of health care services. This need is clear as the annual Remote Area Medical clinic prepares to set up free medical services for the many residents of Southwest Virginia in need of medical care. This clinic sees thousands of people every year (including children) lined up for care they cannot receive regularly because they do not have health care and cannot get Medicaid coverage. We must expand coverage in Virginia.

Having a healthy start to life is key and essential especially for children. Expanding Medicaid helps accomplish so many of the goals that have been outlined in this questionnaire. Working families, children and individuals will all benefit, creating a healthier Virginia.

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?

This is an issue that knows no boundaries: neither race, nor gender, nor class. I was pleased to support and in some cases co-patron legislation that increased access to naloxone and requires the Department of Social Services to collect information on substance exposed infants. In the future, I think we need to focus on promoting legislation that focuses on treating addiction as a disease.

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?

If re-elected, I hope to continue to support ideas such as the Children's Cabinet as any intragovernmental councils and commissions that focus on the wellbeing of children. Just this past year, I introduced and passed legislation (HB 2404) creating a new advisory council on Pediatric Autoimmune Neuropsychiatric Disorders Associated with Streptococcal Infections (PANDAS) and Pediatric Acute-onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS). Both diseases are rare but on the rise and significantly affect children who are diagnosed with them.

Additionally, I have championed legislation that helps children return to school after illness or injury. I introduced and passed legislation creating "return to learn" protocols for student athletes who have suffered concussions (2014-HB 1096) as well as students who have been treated for pediatric cancer (2016-HB 475). I am the mother of two children. I ran for office so that they and the rest of Virginia's children can have the best future possible.

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?

Under Senator Creigh Deeds' leadership, we have already made significant improvements in bed registry, administrative and technical corrections and community-based care. There is still more that can be done and will continue to be examined by Senator Deeds' special subcommittee looking at mental health services across the Commonwealth. I believe the state must play a pivotal role in increasing access to treatment for youth and providing consistent treatment and services regardless of locality.

I believe that one of the biggest issues in combatting mental health problems is the need to end the stigma surrounding them. The solution will be more than a legislative fix; it is also a culture change. I believe that legislation that treats mental health problems the same way we treat heart disease or cancer can be part of the impetus for this culture change. Two big issues that I see among children is the increased problems of bullying and harassment in schools as well as an increase in suicide.

This year I passed two pieces of legislation related to this topic. HB 1709 requires the policies and procedures prohibiting bullying that are contained in each school board's code of student conduct to direct the principal to notify the parent of any student involved in an alleged incident of bullying of the status of any investigation within five school days of the allegation of bullying. HB 2258 directs the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to report to the Governor and the General Assembly on its activities related to suicide prevention across the lifespan by December 1, 2017. I am looking forward to the results of this report, hearing about what DBHDS is doing related to suicide prevention and hope to potentially find opportunities to improve how we deliver mental health in the Commonwealth.

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?

This is an issue very near and dear to me. Outside of the General Assembly, I serve as the Chair of Jobs for Virginia Graduates, an organization that helps high-risk high school students graduate and find jobs. Since 1998, JVG has helped thousands of Virginia students graduate and find employment and has been recognized as the Commonwealth's top anti-dropout program.

This past year in the General Assembly, I also introduced legislation that would study workforce development and career technical education in high schools, as well as have the Board of Education consider including credentials earned through career technical education as a part of accreditation standards. These bills (HB 1708, HJ 679) had the support of not only teachers but also major (including the statewide) Chambers of Commerce. While neither are laws today, the Board of Education is actually in the process of seeing how these credentials fit as a part of accreditation standards in Virginia. This is crucially important. We need to take a more holistic look at education—college is not the path for everyone. We need to encourage career technical training too.