

**COMPLETE**

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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?

It is likely that each early childhood education program has some merits as well as deficits. Creating a work group of key leaders from each of the programs would be a practical and effective step to developing an integrated, consistent system of early childhood education. This mission of this group would need to be narrow. The mission would be to review the standards, program components, and regulations of each program and then work together to develop a set of uniform regulations that reflect best practices in the field of early childhood education. Transitioning the work group into an on-going committee to evaluate the progress on implementing uniform standards and problem solving challenges along the way would add further support to this initiative. This committee could also work to ensure that the system does not gravitate back to a fractured system and allow established standards to change in a thoughtful, planned way to ensure that practices are keeping pace with community needs and evidence based changes in the field of 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?**

Research shows that when children are returned to live with their families, these families need continued financial assistance and case management support. These children also need continued educational and community resource support.

What resources does the child welfare system currently provide to children returned from foster care to their families? What tracking system is currently used? This seems to be an issue where additional data, proper evaluation of data and evaluation of the existing systems could provide better outcomes. Using available, and possibly additional, data and progress tracking would be a better view of needs.

I have no idea of the cost or potential impact, but it occurs to me that this might be a good opportunity to take advantage of the widespread use of mobile phones. Part of the conditions of return of the children is "checking in" done by the parents via a easily used mobile app or via an automated telephone system. It tracks specific data points related to health and education - i.e. school attendance, grades, doctor visits, especially well child visits and ER visits, extra curricular activities, time in daycare, etc.. The data can be evaluated to alert authorities of things like failure to check in on schedule, poor results (or excessively good results that could indicate untruthfulness).

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 would suggest that the state department of education review the disciplinary guidelines at all school divisions in Virginia. What evaluation has been done to the types of infractions referred to law enforcement and are there early intervention opportunities? Are the discipline policies being enforced consistently and evenly across all school divisions? A review of the discipline policies to evaluate what is considered infractions and the reasons behind these particular policies would be helpful. Are there additional disciplinary steps that can reasonably be included in the process prior to referral to law enforcement? What other diversion and intervention programs can be added to the process?

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?**

If the federal government cuts payment to Medicaid or FAMIS, the number of uninsured kids would go up. With any rollback in federal aid, Virginia would have to cover any cost differences to maintain current programs. In Virginia, according to the state constitution, the state must balance its budget. Any cuts on Medicaid funding, to balance the budget, would leave children without access to care.

As a state legislator, I would look into possibly imposing a tax on hospital revenue. States that have imposed a tax on hospital revenue have been able to fill state budget holes, and I think we could learn from that. Another option that I would also look into is raising the tax on tobacco products. Revenue raised by a tax on tobacco products could fund foster care initiatives, early childhood education, child health, and mental health care, and so on. It would also be helpful to see where efficiency could be improved, possibly in duplication of efforts or excess administrative costs, to help reduce the amount of funding necessary while not sacrificing the services and quality of care available to low income families.

## 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?**

There is not an easy answer to this question. Addressing the opioid epidemic requires more than just jailing people for drug use. The root causes of the addiction need to be addressed. Treatment also has to include not only the addict, but the whole family and a support system to ensure the addict has a successful sobriety journey. There also needs to be some type of program that supports the non-addict parent to create the bonding opportunities necessary. These parents end up taking on roles as parent to both the children and the addict, in addition to providing for and caring for the home. Providing them with a support system that allows them time and energy to parent would be crucial in maintaining a less chaotic household and the bonding opportunities needed by the children. If there is not already a program for the children that helps them, in an age-appropriate way, to understand what is going on and that their parent's addiction is not a result of them or their actions, this is crucial to helping break the cycle and provide the growth and learning environment critical to these children who are at high-risk.

## 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?

By creating cross agency collaborations, there is an opportunity for gathering resources that can benefit all partners. Partnerships can both expand resources and play a critical role in helping to build a more coordinated system of community support. Opening the lines of communication, promoting information exchange, and having the knowledge at multiple levels is the best facilitator. By knowing who we're serving - children and parents - we can better cater towards their needs. Having the available resources and the need for agencies to be coordinated will certainly help Virginia Children's Cabinet in implementing its priorities and policy agenda.

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?

There is a grave shortage of child psychiatrists, and this hits the community mental health sector particularly hard due to the compensation packages that the community services boards (CSB's) can offer. This results in CSB's having great difficulty in hiring child psychiatrists, which then limits access to this vital mental health resource. One potential solution to this problem would be to work with medical schools in Virginia to incentivize child psychiatry training programs and residencies. An additional problem is that Medicaid reimbursement rates are not sufficient to attract enough private providers. Therefore, those with limited resources run the risk of going unserved when the community mental health system is overwhelmed and the private sector is unable to supplement these services. The state may need to consider ways of augmenting the CSB's budget to enable localities to offer competitive packages to child psychiatrists.

Transportation for rural populations is another barrier to accessing mental health treatment. Public transportation is not available in most rural areas, and Medicaid taxi service is cumbersome and unreliable. To assist in resolving this issue, the state may want to consider funding transportation services through the CSB's who know their client populations well and could tailor a cost-effective service based upon the specific needs of their area.

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?

The achievement gap between white and black students has barely narrowed over the last 50 years. One policy that is aimed at preventing the achievement gap at its earliest stages is investing in early childhood education. Research has shown that high quality early education programs show progress in reducing the achievement gap. As your legislator, I would look into pre-school curriculum in Virginia. I would make sure that the programs that are being provided are consistent across the state. In addition to this, I would ensure that funding is there for teacher salary, training and development, increase classroom size, and less waiting period to enroll kids.