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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?

Pre-K education is essential to children's early brain development and socialization skills. Pre-K education is especially important to poverty-stricken students and students from disadvantaged backgrounds because it helps to close the achievement gap. Ideally, Virginia will move towards universal Pre-K for all Virginians. Until that happens, I support budget appropriations and legislation that will ensure that Virginia's disadvantaged youth are able to enroll into Pre-K and that there is a streamlined set of rules for eligibility and Pre-K education curriculum.

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?

As a foster parent for eight years, I know intimately the challenges of supporting foster children and ensuring positive health and education outcomes for all kids. Because foster families often lack access to necessary resources such as tutoring and mentoring programs, I founded the Foundation for Foster and Orphan Children. The Commonwealth should promote and financially support high-impact nonprofits that provide tutoring and support services to foster children after they have been returned to their families. Nonprofits are great resources to provide services for reunited families.

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?

To end the school to prison pipeline, two main issues must be addressed. First, resource officers must be trained to understand that their job in a school is to redirect a child's behavior and use his or her skill set to de-escalate classroom disruptions. Some officers detain and arrest students as a default, but that is not the main function of a resource officer. Referring students to law enforcement agencies at such a young age will only expose them to the criminal justice system and begin a perpetual cycle. Resource officers must appreciate the fact that they are dealing with children whose brains and impulse control are still developing. School resources officers should utilize school resources such as school counselors and/or teacher and parent conferences rather than an arrest. Next, I would also advocate for schools to utilize fewer out of school suspensions. Statistics show that the more days a child misses from school the less likely he or she will successfully graduate from high school. Instead of setting children up for failure using out of school suspension, there are other alternatives such as in-school suspension (ISS) classrooms where children receive instruction in a smaller classroom setting and all of the child's classwork and homework is provided by the child's teachers and completed by the student in ISS. ISS is an effective diversion tool that has the least impact on the student's ability to continue to progress alongside his or her peers.

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?

As a legislator, I would support increasing the state funding for Medicaid and/or FAMIS. It is our responsibility to ensure that all Virginians have access to affordable health care. We must appropriate the budget in ways that protect the Commonwealth's most vulnerable populations, children, and the poor.

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?

Substance abuse is usually treated by addiction awareness and prevention courses. However, a more holistic approach is more effective when addressing the issues that arise from substance abuse. Parents suffering from addiction usually also need help with housing, connecting with services, and parenting courses. The children of adults suffering from substance abuse are oftentimes ignored. Counseling and therapeutic services should also be offered to the children who have usually been exposed to drug abuse and distribution.

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 establishment of the Virginia Children's Cabinet is a great way to ensure community groups, community networks and social service agencies all work collaboratively to ensure the health, welfare and safety of Virginia's children. As a Delegate, I would support the Executive Order for the Virginia Children's Cabinet to be extended after January 8, 2018 to January 7, 2022. I would also create more measurable and time specific goals for the Children's Cabinet to ensure that each agency is held accountable for results. The cross-agency collaboration made possible by the Virginia Children's Cabinet is essential to meeting these benchmarks.

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?

We need to work to provide access to affordable healthcare for all Virginians and particularly for children. Mental health should be covered as part of comprehensive, affordable healthcare. Meanwhile in Congress, Republicans have proposed a healthcare bill would cut essential health benefits and coverage, including mental healthcare, for Virginians. It is vital that we expand Medicaid and FAMIS to ensure mental health treatment and other essential services are covered for children and all Virginians. I would also support programs targeted at improving access and decreasing stigma around mental healthcare.

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?

As I mentioned above, the achievement gap begins early. I believe Virginia should move towards providing universal Pre-K for all Virginians. Narrowing the achievement gap also starts with investing in teachers and in our communities. Students of color struggle to succeed when we lose the best teachers to districts that pay their teachers more. Teachers in Prince William County earn \$7,000 less on average than teachers in Fairfax and Arlington. As a result, many of the best teachers leave our county. Simply put, we need to increase teacher pay to a fair rate that retains our talented teachers and provides for students across Prince William and Stafford Counties. We should also consider changing the way that we allocate funding. It does not make sense that some schools are so overcrowded that students are learning in trailers. Students of color are largely concentrated in schools without adequate funding. In Richmond, I would fight for a fair system of funding that will ensure all Virginian students receive a quality education. As our district's population continues to grow and attract people from all over the world, many students are entering our school district with varying English language abilities. It is vital that we invest in English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) instruction to ensure that all students receive the instruction they need to excel.