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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?

We need a more unified approach to early childhood education. I would be interested in the creation of a framework for coordination between the Department of Education, the Department of Social Services, and other involved entities, to ensure better cooperation, efficiency, and high quality services.

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 support allocating additional resources for parents with children returning from foster care, specifically for home visits and family counseling opportunities. Additionally, I co-patroned HB1451 in the 2017 session, which directs the Department of Social Services to develop a survey to gather feedback from children aging out of foster care. I believe we cannot move forward in a holistic manner without considering the feedback these children can provide regarding their experiences at home, in the foster system, and the adjustments and challenges involved in returning to their 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?

I believe starting early is essential to preventing the school-to-prison pipeline. I believe legislation limiting suspension and expulsion measures is the first step. I also support steps to inform parents of troubling behavior and include them in addressing behavior issues. Additionally, we need to ensure the SOQ formula continues to include funding for essential support staff like school counselors and that education funding is provided to offer teachers relevant continuing education opportunities. I will continue to support legislation that keeps student discipline within the school system and makes involvement of the police or courts systems the last alternative.

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 funding for Medicaid and/or FAMIS in Virginia I would support increasing state funding to these programs to ensure all children in Virginia have access to quality, affordable health care. It is simply unacceptable to endanger the health of our most vulnerable population.

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?

I believe we must treat addiction as the health crisis it is rather than simply a criminal activity. I support insurance coverage for addiction treatment as well as coverage for mental health services for anyone effected by addiction. I agree that early intervention is key in mitigating the effects of in-utero drug exposure, which is why I voted in support of Senator Wexton's SB 1086, which requires a care plan with the Department of Social Services when a child has been exposed to substances in utero.

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 Children's Cabinet is vital to help ensure inter-agency cooperation and coordination. I support codifying the Cabinet through legislation to ensure continuity throughout each Governor's administration.

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?

I believe a lack of funding and lack of access are our major obstacles. Early recognition and intervention is the key to helping overcome many mental health issues. By increasing information for families and schools regarding early warning signs and the opportunities for identification of mental health issues we can better insure earlier and more appropriate intervention. Additionally, we must provide information regarding the services available in our community through the state, locality, or the private sector. In light of the threats to federal funding of important programs like Medicaid I also support the General Assembly taking a close look at current funding levels for health care programs to determine how we might bridge the gap should funding be slashed.

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 with many issues surrounding the health and well being of children, I strongly believe in early intervention as an important step in addressing the achievement gap. That requires recruiting, training, and retaining the qualified teachers and support staff needed to ensure proper screening for the unique needs of each student. Addressing a student's needs and skills early is not just an investment in a child, it is an investment in our communities and our economy.