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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?

I believe it is important to follow the recommendations of the Virginia Preschool Initiative and its guidelines published by the Virginia Department of Education which describes service coordination. It is imperative for local and state agencies and schools to make effective use of federal aid, Title I, Head Start, grants, and local funding.

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?

We can better support children who are returned to families by providing education services and funding the appropriate professional ratios necessary to assist these families in transition. Too often social workers are saddled with a caseload they cannot support.

Children are placed in foster care for many reasons including: inability to financially support themselves or their children; criminal issues where the parent is incarcerated; drug addiction; health issues of any family member, interpersonal or psychological dysfunction and other social issues. If we are to support these children, we must support programs that will assist parents with the above issues and make sure that they have the resources available to use these programs once they are returned home.

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?

Students become caught up in the in the “School to Prison Pipeline” due to the discipline policies within the schools especially at the middle and high school levels. Schools have adopted a zero-tolerance attitude toward misbehavior and conduct which often escalates to suspensions, expulsions, and arrests. Many schools in more urban areas have constructed alternative educational settings where these children can receive more individual attention and pursue less traditional goals. Continuing the education of these students should be the primary goal and will help to remove one of the links in the pipeline.

Schools can prevent some of the discipline problems by funding the resources in schools to provide more support to these students. Social workers, psychologist, nurses, and resource officers should be available in every school. Resource officers and other support personnel should promote positive interactions within the school environment including school safety and anti-violence programs. When the resource officers are engaged with a student in a major conduct issue, de-escalation techniques should be a priority.

I will support funding of these programs and personnel including the training that is needed to help support this population.

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 funding is cut, Virginia will need to expand the state programs. This is expensive and unfortunate, but if the federal government will not provide this care, we must. As a state delegate, I will work to introduce and support all legislation that guarantees the health needs of these children

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?

As a legislator, I will support policies that encourage treatment of the whole family. We must guarantee pregnancy care for addicted mothers seeking assistance and encourage family community care programs. Funding for opioid treatment is now recognized as a national emergency and more funding is becoming available. We must take advantage of all levels of federal and state grants to increase treatment programs and facilities. We must educate our communities by funding prevention programs so that we can reach this population. As an example, Chesterfield County recently began its Public Service Announcement efforts that will air thirty second ads on opioid addiction and prevention.

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?

Child development is complex. Helping children grow up to be healthy and productive citizens requires more than providing a public-school education. Governor McAuliffe recognized this when he established the Children's Cabinet in August 2014. The Children's Cabinet represents a commitment at the highest level of state government to the promotion of child welfare through collaboration/coordination with state and local agencies as well as community based organizations, that may touch a child's life. Since its inception, the Children's Cabinet has launched programs in support of its objectives, and has seen some impressive results. For example, the Challenged Schools initiative in the Petersburg schools has resulted in improved SOL test scores in four schools and a decrease in the rate of absenteeism overall. There are other school systems in Virginia that would benefit from these programs, and, therefore, they must be continued and expanded. However, a key component for success is continued funding. This could be, and should be, a combination of public and private funding. As a state Delegate, I will support the Children's Cabinet by supporting appropriations through the budget process that further the Children's Cabinet initiatives. Another key component for success is making sure that existing laws are consistent with the goals of the Children's Cabinet. For example, the Classrooms Not Courtrooms initiative may require changes to existing legislation. As a state Delegate, I will support proposed legislation that furthers this and other Children's Cabinet initiatives

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?

Early recognition and intervention is the largest barrier to mental health care in my opinion. I believe that ensuring all school have qualified professionals to recognize the symptoms of mental health disorders is critical. I also think that supporting the “whole health” philosophy in our community is important. There is a direct correlation between urbanization and depression in society. We must ensure that we allow for active, outdoor engagements for all youth, access to quality medical care, and education with a real application and connection to the greater world to help lessen the negative symptoms of mental health problems.

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 a state legislator, I believe the first step in addressing the achievement gap is to provide equitable funding to low-income area schools. Historically, schools in wealthy neighborhoods have more funding as well as newer, cleaner, and technologically enabled schools. Legislators need to make sure that school districts which encompass low-income neighborhoods have the funding needed. I will introduce legislation that will assist these districts to balance the level of services as well as the facilities and school environment. I believe programs such as the Children’s Cabinet are examples of successful initiatives that support this objective. Many school systems in Virginia would benefit from the continued expansion and funding of this project.

In addition, Pre-K education must be made affordable and accessible to lower-income families. To do this, we need to coordinate preschool services to make the most effective use of federal aid, Title I, Head Start, grants, and local funding. If these families can have access to quality Pre-K programs, they will be able to mitigate the disparities and disadvantages they have experienced.