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Collector: Web Link 1 (Web Link)
Started: Friday, July 14, 2017 4:04:35 PM
Last Modified: Friday, July 14, 2017 7:16:53 PM
Time Spent: 03:12:18
IP Address: 104.192.128.137

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?

Early learning is essential to the well-being and future success of all children. Virginia should have the best possible policy and programs to assure access to high quality early learning opportunities for all our children. Lack of a systemic approach precludes assuring such access and the best results.

I do not know enough to know what specific reforms are needed in this case, but I do know how to reform systems to improve service delivery and maximize positive outcomes.

If elected, I look forward to working with Voices for Virginia's Children and other early learning experts to develop evidence-based reforms for consideration by the House of Delegates. I pledge to work hard to pass system reform legislation.

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?

Reunification of families is the optimal outcome of any foster care intervention. However, successful reunification requires surrounding the family with necessary services to address whatever stressors led to the child(ren) being placed in foster care in the first place. This is common sense.

One of the most important supports families need is affordable housing. Too many children end up in foster care because their parents lack the resources to create safe and decent homes for their kids. The HUD Family Reunification Program (FUP) was established precisely for this reason. It needs to be expanded.

The Commonwealth is obligated to provide whatever services a professional assessment determines are needed to help the family succeed. This could be concrete services like food, housing, child care, and transportation or counseling, mental health care, special education and other support services. Not only is this best practice, but it is more cost effective than having to intervene again in another crisis.

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?

It is very sad that our schools have become police states. I understand the need for public safety and we should do everything we can to keep guns out of schools.

But we rely too much on law enforcement and not enough on creating cultures of caring to solve discipline problems in schools. If we ask law enforcement to create/assure order in schools, we are defining school behavior problems as criminal behavior and labeling kids who are acting out as criminals. Teachers, principals, guidance counselors, social workers, bus monitors, even cafeteria and custodial staff, should be empowered and trained to intervene with evidence-based, non-violent strategies. Calling in the police or other armed security should be reserved as a last resort.

Given that children of color and children who are disabled are over represented among the children who are referred to law enforcement, this is civil rights problem.

If elected, I pledge to work with Voices for Virginia's Children and other advocates to craft necessary legislative solutions.

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?

It seems that Congressional Republican leadership is even more determined to eviscerate Medicaid than they are to repeal the ACA. The proposed block granting of Medicaid plus cutting funding would devastate low income families. If Congress does manage to block grant Medicaid, it will be essential that more Medicaid protectors, like me, are elected to the VA House of Delegates.

If the ACA and Medicaid survive, Virginia must adopt Medicaid expansion.

I will fight every day to protect and expand health care for all Virginians, but especially the lowest income children and people with disabilities.

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?

Failure to intervene when there is evidence of substance abuse by parents is not only wrong, it is foolhardy. Access to evidence-based treatment is essential. Unfortunately, treatment opportunities are limited and will become more so if the ACA is repealed and Medicaid is cut back. If the ACA and Medicaid survive, Virginia must adopt Medicaid expansion.

In the absence of treatment for parents, we have a responsibility to protect kids and should take whatever actions are needed.

On the opioid epidemic specifically, I am very interested in these lawsuits against pharmaceutical companies that have been filed by Attorneys General in several other states. The end goal is settlements that will bring resources for treatment for people with addictions and care for children whose parents can no longer care for them.

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?

When I was a social work graduate student in the 1970s, I did a field placement at the Virginia Commission for Children and Youth. I fully support and would heartily encourage cross-agency collaborations. This kind of collaboration is what leads to the systems change identified in the question on early learning.

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?

In the absence of data to tell me which of the barriers you cite is most significant, I do not have an informed view about ranking of significance. However, given Virginia's dismal rating at 49th, it would seem to that all of the barriers matter and must be addressed.

Type of insurance: if the ACA is repealed, we will lose the requirement that all essential benefits, including mental health care, are covered. State legislators and advocates will have to work to assure continued coverage.

Place of residence: mental health care through the private sector is dependent on availability of providers who are more likely to be found in population centers. For many Virginians, especially in rural areas, the Community Service Boards are the primary mental health care providers. CSBs are subject to the vicissitudes of annual appropriations at the state level. They should be fully funded. CSBs will suffer under Medicaid cuts as well. If the ACA and Medicaid survive, Virginia must adopt Medicaid expansion.

Lack of access: see the two answers above.

Stigma. While the stigma against seeking treatment for major depression and other serious mental illnesses is far less than it was even 20 years ago, stigma still can prevent youth and their parents from even identifying symptoms of mental illness, in order to know to seek treatment. This is especially true for young men and members of racial minorities. Public education campaigns can help. But primary care providers and other helping adults must be trained to look for and name symptoms to help young people understand what is happening to them.

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?

First, we must restore and expand the state funding for public schools that was reduced in 2009. Second, we must resist all efforts to divert state funding for public schools to vouchers, "virtual" schools, and all other efforts to delegitimize public education. Third, it is unacceptable that children in rich jurisdictions have better school facilities, better technology, and better compensated teachers than children in poor jurisdictions. The state must assure equity across jurisdictions. Every school child in Virginia deserves the highest quality education possible, regardless of where he or she lives. Fourth, we must fully fund Pre-K programs across the state.

These measures would level the playing field. But more is needed to make up for past discrimination. Programs to bring kids to grade level are essential. Also essential are school nutrition and school counseling programs.

Beyond what schools can do, we have to address the larger issues that impede school achievement. For example, there is ample evidence that lack of decent, affordable housing is a serious impediment to educational achievement of not only children who move frequently due to eviction, doubling up, or homelessness, but also to their classmates. Children churning through classrooms at different points in the school year prevent smooth completion of lesson plans and require extra attention from teaching staff.