



**Delegate Dickie Bell, former first lady and Voices board member Anne Holton, and Voices policy director Margaret Nimmo Crowe at Children's Mental Health Advocacy Day.**

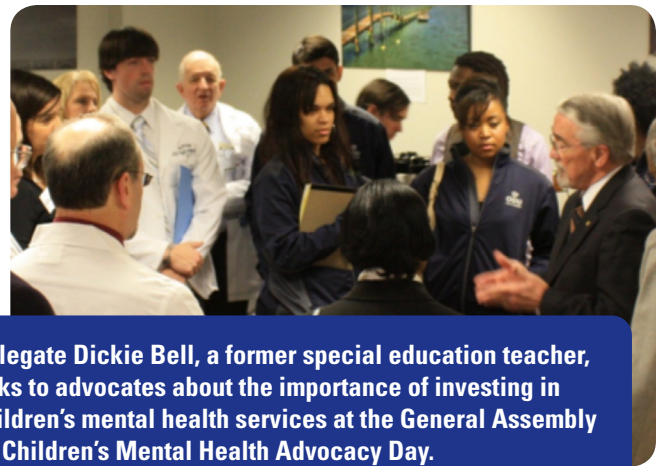
## Campaign builds broad support for kids' mental health funding

The last few months have been busy ones for the Campaign for Children's Mental Health. Voices, along with steering committee partners National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Virginia and the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards, have advocated strongly for investments in child psychiatry and community-based crisis response services. Here are some of the highlights of our effort:

- The Campaign recruited and prepared parents and professionals testifying about the need for increased investments in children's mental health services at four regional budget hearings in January: Richmond, Lexington, Newport News and Fairfax.
- A bipartisan group of legislators agreed to patron our budget amendments: Senators Emmett Hanger (R) and Janet Howell (D), and Delegates John O'Bannon (R), Riley Ingram (R), Steve Landes (R), Dickie Bell (R), Bob Brink (D), Patrick Hope (D), David Englin(D) and Charniele Herring (D).
- We hosted our first ever Children's Mental Health Advocacy Day on January 26 at the General Assembly, with a breakfast for legislators in the morning. We packed the 7th floor west conference room of the General Assembly Building with advocates (including a large delegation for the Virginia Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics), who then walked the halls making visits to their legislators encouraging them to support children's mental health funding.
- Children's mental health issues received an unprecedented amount of media coverage, including editorials in support of funding crisis response services by both *The Washington Post* and the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.
- Thousands of Virginians took action on behalf of our children with mental health needs. We submitted an online petition signed by more than 2,000 of you to key legislators, and more than 1,700 emails were sent to legislators about children's mental health funding during the 2012 session.

The budget passed by the General Assembly includes \$3.3 million in new funding for children's mental health services over the next two years. The funding is designated for child psychiatry and community-based crisis response services for children. As of this writing, we are awaiting the Governor's actions on the budget.

Special thanks to all the organizational partners of the Campaign for Children's Mental Health for their advocacy efforts during the session. Pulling together, we are making a difference for kids!



**Delegate Dickie Bell, a former special education teacher, talks to advocates about the importance of investing in children's mental health services at the General Assembly on Children's Mental Health Advocacy Day.**

# GREETINGS FROM VOICES' BOARD CHAIR

For members of the Voices for Virginia's Children Board of Directors, assisting with efforts to make the Commonwealth a safer, more supportive place for children to live and grow is an honor. The Annual Report is ample demonstration that these efforts, with your help, are producing positive results for Virginia children and families.

As the Voices staff supports legislation and policy decisions that can improve life for Virginia's children, the Board is strategically advancing initiatives to help more Virginia adults view themselves as youth champions. From fundraising to "friend raising," we invite you to join us in spreading the message that it takes just one gracious act to make a difference – calling or writing a legislator, subscribing to the Voices' newsletter to stay informed, sharing details about Voices' advocacy work with a friend or colleague, or making regular contributions that permit Voices to give hope to more children and their families.

On behalf of the quarter million Virginia children living in poverty, the thirteen percent of kindergartners destined to start school already behind, the foster care youth awaiting permanent homes, and the youths in dire need of mental health services, we salute you for your continued support. Your personal advocacy efforts are helping shape a better future for our state's youngest citizens, and as a result, for all of us.

**Stacy Hawkins Adams**  
*2012 Board Chair*



**Advocates Liz Clemmer, Alli Ventura, and Lyons Hardy show their support for children's mental health during the 2012 General Assembly session.**

# VOICES ADVOCATES SUCCESSFULLY FOR CHILDREN IN KINSHIP CARE

During the 2012 Virginia legislative session, a “long” or 60-day session, Voices focused on the core issues of a budget initiative related to the Campaign for Children’s Mental Health and strengthening our foster care and kinship care services in the Commonwealth. Voices also identified several bills filed by legislators that we felt would be harmful to Virginia’s children and families, and worked to defeat those measures.

The path to developing Virginia’s budget for the 2012-2014 biennium has been unusual this session, and the final budget just passed the House and Senate on April 17. It is now awaiting the approval of the Governor. You can read about the Campaign’s efforts to secure additional funding for mental health services for children on page 1. Voices also advocated with many partners to prevent significant cuts to valuable programs for children, including home visiting programs Healthy Families and CHIP of Virginia. A final analysis of the budget will be available on [www.vakids.org](http://www.vakids.org) and [www.1in5kids.org](http://www.1in5kids.org).

Most prominent on our legislative agenda was SB 217, sponsored by Senator George Barker. The bill promotes the educational stability of children living in informal kinship care arrangements (children living with relatives, but who are not in state custody), by allowing these children to be enrolled in the school divisions where the relative resides, without requiring a transfer of legal custody. As of the close of the legislative session, SB 217 successfully passed both the House and Senate, and awaits signature by Governor McDonnell.

The bill supports the many families in Virginia who are relying on close relatives to help pitch in and care for their children during serious hardships, such as health crises, foreclosure and unemployment. Local departments of social services are also increasingly using informal kinship care to prevent children from needing to come into state custody through the foster care system. Senator Barker’s bill helps to remove critical barriers to school enrollment for these children – a component that can often make or break a successful kinship placement.

We’re very proud of the effort put into passing the bill, and especially the coalition of partners we helped to build in support of SB 217. Many thanks go out to: the Virginia Poverty Law Center; FACES of Virginia Families; the JustChildren program of the Legal Aid Justice Center; the Virginia League of Social Services Executives; Virginia Organizing; AARP of Virginia; Prevent Child Abuse Virginia; the Family Foundation of Virginia; the Virginia Education Association; the Virginia Association of School Nurses; and the Virginia School Counselors Association.

Thanks to all of you who also stepped up and helped to support SB 217 with your emails, calls and visits to legislators. We could not do what we do without you!

We also worked on SB 156, sponsored by Senator Barbara Favola, designed to prime Virginia to take advantage of new federal funding through the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act by extending full foster care and adoption services to kids through age 21. (Currently, Virginia ends these services at age 18, for the most part.) As a result of Senator Favola’s bill, the Virginia Department of Social Services will be required to study the financial and practical implications of extending these services to kids through age 21, and produce that report by September 2012. We are hopeful that this report will provide us with valuable information as we further examine the possibility of enacting this portion of the Fostering Connections Act in the Commonwealth.

As always, Voices staff also worked to defeat legislation that would be harmful to Virginia’s children if successful. We met with legislators and testified against many of these bills, which were ultimately defeated, including:

- SB 24, which sought to enact unreasonably harsh penalties for what is termed “welfare fraud” – this charge could relate to something as simple as misreporting of even a small amount of income, for example: an extra day’s work picked up to help make ends meet. Voices opposes this type of fraud, but believes that such penalties are best left to judges to dole out, as they are in the best position to factor in the individual circumstances of a case.
- HB 463, which sought to transfer “legal” custody of children in foster care to the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) if they are committed by a judge. This transfer of legal custody could have eliminated a much-needed “check and balance” on DJJ by social services while these children are detained.

For information about additional bills we covered, please go to [www.vakids.org](http://www.vakids.org) and read the full General Assembly 2012 Summary.



## VOICES WELCOMES NEW BOARD AND STAFF

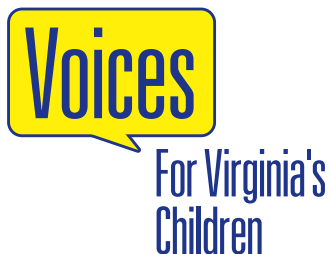
Voices has welcomed a number of new names and faces over the last few months. We have four new board members and four new staff members joining our ranks!

### Joining the Voices' Board of Directors:

- **Jim Beamer** - Managing Director of Legislative Outreach at Dominion Resources
- **Julie McClellan** - Senior Corporate Counsel at First American Real Estate Solutions
- **Charlotte McNulty** - former Executive Director of Virginia's Office for Comprehensive Services
- **James Wilson** - Senior Treasury Manager at Performance Food Group

### Joining Voices' staff:

- **Emily Griffey** - Senior Policy Analyst for early care and education; worked previously for Richmond City Department of Social Services and Richmond's Smart Beginning's Coalition
- **Ted Groves** - KIDS COUNT Data Center Director; lead IT and evaluation efforts for Chesterfield County's Department of Mental Health and Mental Rehabilitation Services
- **Cathy McCallister** - Administrative & Office Support Professional; previously taught elementary school in West Virginia
- **Amy Woolard** - Senior Policy Attorney for child welfare/ foster care; formerly an education attorney with Just Children, a program of the Legal Aid Justice Center



We champion public policies to improve the lives of Virginia's children.

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