



April 22, 2016

City Council
Alexandria City Hall
301 King Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314

Dear Members of City Council:

Voices for Virginia's Children and the undersigned organizations – program providers, advocates, and leaders in this community – urge you to make early care and education a priority in the Fiscal Year 2017 City Budget. Alexandria's model of early learning is gaining attention, not just for crucial prekindergarten opportunities for four-year-olds but also the important work for children birth to age five, in child care and school-based settings. Investments are needed to achieve access to affordable, high-quality early care and education in Alexandria.

As you consider the city's resources and how to invest to support families and the local economy, we urge you to prioritize:

- ✓ **opportunities for four year olds in the Virginia Preschool Initiative**
- ✓ **opportunities for working families and their young children through the subsidy assistance program**

Growing numbers of children live in poverty in the Commonwealth – and Alexandria is not immune to this or its devastating effects on young children. In 2014, 16% of children in Alexandria were living in poverty and 60% of Alexandria public school students received free and reduced lunch. Children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience toxic stress and trauma that has been linked to poorer academic and health outcomes than their more advantaged peers.

The state anticipates even more children will be in need of VPI in Alexandria in the year ahead and so the slot allocation is increasing. And, the General Assembly invested in a per-pupil increase as well as an opportunity of "mixed delivery pilots" which are a tremendous opportunity. These are not just slots and numbers, but children in families that live in this community, who would benefit from access to early learning but will not get to enroll unless thoughtful solutions are identified to invest in match dollars and space to operate programs.

We also ask for investment in the child care subsidy program to meet the needs of local families. Though the General Assembly took significant steps forward for early care and education in 2016, they did not invest in child care subsidy. We appreciate that in difficult times, the City supports local families through its own investment, and we appreciate the difference this makes for families. We urge you to consider the more than 200 families on the local waiting list and direct investments to child care services for their children. Working parents need reliable child care and this is crucial to Alexandria's economy and to the early learning opportunities of these children.

These children and families cannot wait. Thank you for your leadership. Please contact us if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Voices for Virginia's Children
ALIVE! Child Development Center
Campagna Center
Child and Family Network Centers
Creative Play School
Easter Seals Serving DC|MD|VA
Hopkins House

Infant/Toddler Family Day Care
Northern Virginia Association for the Education of
Young Children
Northern Virginia Family Service
SCAN of Northern Virginia
Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts