

**VOICES GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE FORUM OVERVIEW**  
**Sept. 8, 2017 4:30- 6:30 PM at Reynolds Community College, Parham Rd.**

**YOUTH MODERATOR PANEL QUESTIONS TO CANDIDATES**

[SOPHIA] #1: I am a senior at Virginia Commonwealth University and will graduate this year with a degree in social work. I have been fortunate to have the support of great mentors and teachers to reach this point. And I've worked really hard to get here! However, 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. If elected, how would you address the achievement gap in Pre-K to 12 education?

[MORGAN] #2: When I get sick, I know that I can go to the doctor and most of my bills will be covered by insurance. However, for some low-income children, or children with disabilities, that may not always be the case. In Virginia, FAMIS and Medicaid provide health insurance for children in low-income families, and children with disabilities. Outreach and enrollment efforts have been so successful that 95% of children in Virginia have health insurance today. However, Congress has considered cuts to Medicaid and is deciding whether to continue funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (what we call FAMIS in Virginia). If the federal government cuts payments to the state for these programs, how would you address the health needs of low-income children? *(Note: this question could be tweaked slightly in the unlikely possibility that Congressional action takes place prior to 9/8.)*

[STEVEN] #3: In my studies of biology and bioethics, and in my volunteer work with NAMI, I have learned about the impact of substance use disorders on an individual's physical and mental health. When parents have substance use disorders it affects them 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. Yet over the past five years, the number of children entering foster care due to parental substance use has increased. It now accounts for over a quarter of all children entering foster care. If elected, what policy solutions would you promote to address the needs of the whole family when treating substance use disorders?

[MAKAYLA] #4: I became interested in participating in the Youth for RISE Advocacy Network after my own experiences with school suspensions and wanted to move in a positive direction. In the most recent school year over 73,000 Virginia students were suspended. Students of color, and students with disabilities, were more likely to be suspended. Research shows that students who are suspended are more likely to experience academic failure, have substance use issues and mental health needs, and are more prone to contact with law enforcement and courts. What will you do to ensure that schools, and students, are accountable for behavior, and ensure that students stay on the path towards graduation?

[SOPHIA] # 5: *(Crowdsourced Question Contest Winner)* I was involved in the Virginia foster care system for many years. I'm so happy to say that both my twin sister and I

were eventually adopted before aging out of foster care. However, many of the children and youth I work with at UMFS Project Life were not as lucky and do not have the backup and support of family. The Commonwealth of Virginia has the highest percentage of youth aging out of the foster care system without permanent family connections in the country. If elected, how will you support youth aging out of foster care?

[MORGAN] #6: I am from Southside Virginia where 1 in every 4 children is living in poverty. Brain research demonstrates that growing up in poverty can create toxic stress that impacts physical and mental health. However, those experiences can be buffered by positive relationships with parents and caregivers, especially in the early years. What initiatives would you champion to reduce the impact of toxic stress, or childhood trauma, on young children?

[STEVEN] #7: I try to be a positive support for my friends and peers living with depression and have learned a lot in my volunteer experience with NAMI and On Our Own. Yet, my peer support is sometimes not enough. In 2016, Virginia ranked 49<sup>th</sup> 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?

[SOPHIA] #8: This evening we raised questions about how state policy decisions can impact children in a variety of ways, from schools, to health care and foster care, and to mental health treatment. Children often interact with many systems, and require a network of support as they grow up, in order to become successful, productive members of the workforce. A Virginia Children's Cabinet has been established to facilitate collaborations across agencies, and at the highest levels of state government. If elected, how would you ensure that state agencies work together to improve outcomes for children?

## **Youth Moderator Panel Bios**

### **Sophia Booker, Richmond**

Sophia is senior at Virginia Commonwealth University. Sophia will graduate with a degree in social work with a minor in psychology. As an alumna of the foster care system in Virginia, Sophia gives back to the foster care community in many ways. This includes her employment at Project LIFE, a program of United Methodist Family Services focused on successful transition to adulthood and permanent connections for older youth in foster care. She was recently appointed to serve on the State Executive Council for Children Services.

### **Makayla Jackson, Henrico**

Makayla just began her freshman year in high school. She has been accepted into the Advanced Career Education Center at Hermitage High School and plans to participate in

the nursing program. She is a member of the Youth for RISE Advocacy Network, working to improve the juvenile justice system and dismantle the school to prison pipeline.

### **Steven Scherping, Charlottesville**

Steven is a fourth year at the University of Virginia. He grew up in Great Falls. Steven is studying biology and bioethics and is currently interviewing for medical school. Steven is the UVA chapter president of NAMI, the National Alliance on Mental Illness, and has been involved in the organization since 2015. While serving as president, Steven has had the opportunity to cultivate a relationship with On Our Own, a Charlottesville mental health advocacy and peer support organization.

### **Morgan Stanley, South Hill**

Morgan is a junior attending Kenston Forest School in Blackstone. She stays busy participating in cheer leading, Tri-Hi-Y club, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and works as a restaurant hostess after school. Her interest in policy stems from her experience participating in the Virginia YMCA's Model General Assembly program where she worked through the legislative process. This year she plans to run for Lt. Governor of the Model General Assembly.