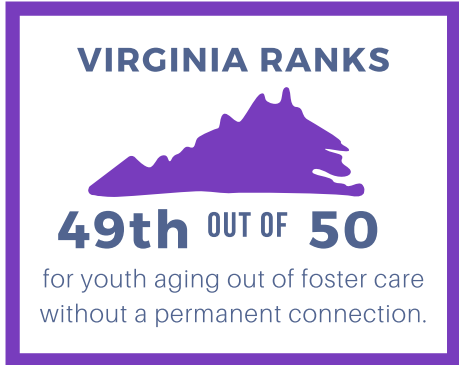


# FOSTER CARE IS NOT THE SOLUTION - FAMILIES ARE.

## EVERY CHILD DESERVES A SAFE, LOVING, AND PERMANENT FAMILY.

- Each year about 500 youth in foster care will turn 18 and age out without being reunited with family or adopted.
- Codifying Fostering Futures will ensure stability for older youth who may age out.
- Codify Family Partnership Meetings (FPMs) to increase parental and youth involvement in case planning.
- Support proposed budget that includes evidence-based services for families at risk of entering foster care.



## PROVIDE RELATIVES THE SAME SUPPORTS AS NON-RELATIVE FOSTER PARENTS

**Research has shown that kinship arrangements reduce the impact of trauma and are more likely to support a permanent home.**

- Support \$16M in the Governor's budget to create a financial assistance program for children being raised by relatives outside of the child welfare system.
- Expand the definition of kin to include cousins, church members and those with whom a child has a close relationship.



Percent of children placed with relatives or kin



**Research has shown that kinship arrangements reduce the impact of trauma and are more likely to support a permanent home.**

- Nearly one-third of all entry-level family services specialists quit within their first year.
- Support the increase in child welfare workers' base salary in the Governor's budget.

# \$30,828

**STARTING BASE SALARY FOR ENTRY-LEVEL CASE WORKER**



Many child welfare workers in Virginia have caseloads that exceed the recommended 15 children per worker

## SCALE-UP EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES TO ACHIEVE BETTER OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**Enable providers to implement more trauma-informed and evidence-based practices by funding efforts to train providers in new models.** To support implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act we must continue to invest in the infrastructure to scale up evidence-based services.

- REQUEST: \$33M over 2 years in Governor's budget to provide evidence based and trauma-informed mental health, substance use disorder, and in-home parent skill based training to children at imminent risk of entering foster care.

## CREATE STRUCTURE FOR VIRGINIA'S KINSHIP CARE SYSTEM

**Virginia must create a financial assistance program for kinship caregivers. Additional financial assistance can incentivize relatives and kin to take children in and avoid foster care placements.** Research shows that children placed with relatives or kin are more likely to achieve permanency than children in non-relative placements. Half of children of color who are discharged from foster care go to live with relatives.

- REQUEST: \$16M over two years in Governor's budget to provide support payments for relatives caring for children outside of foster care.

## STABILIZE THE FOSTER CARE WORKFORCE

**Increase the minimum salary for local DSS Family Services Series positions and provide a salary adjustment for current Family Services employees.** The 2018 JLARC report highlighted that stability of the foster care workforce is one of the primary challenges. Turnover rates for an entry-level Family Services Worker Specialist is 42%, with retention efforts being an even greater issue in small, rural agencies. The minimum starting salary for an entry level position is \$30,828, which is only slightly above the 2019 Federal Poverty Level for a family of four. The impact of the high-turnover of caseworkers on children is found in our low rate of permanency of children and the number of placements children experience.

- REQUEST: \$18 Million over two years in Governor's budget to increase family service specialists position salaries by 20%.

## HELP FOSTER CARE YOUTH HAVE NORMAL ADOLESCENT EXPERIENCES

**Codify Family Partnership Meetings (FPMs) to increase parental and youth involvement in case planning. Virginia has a low rate of parental and youth involvement in case planning.** While many local departments hold regular FPMs at critical case decision points to ensure input in the development and compliance with case plans, many other local departments do not, or do not include important elements of FPMs.

- REQUEST: Support legislation to codify Family Partnership meetings.

**Help foster youth obtain drivers licenses and transportation to attend school and to find employment.** Support foster youth to obtain a driver's license by providing reimbursements for foster parents, kinship caregivers, and youth in Fostering Futures for their car insurance premiums.

- REQUEST: Support \$250,000 budget amendment to create a program for youth in foster care to pay for car insurance premiums.

**Codify Fostering Futures.** In 2016, Virginia was able to extend foster care services for older youth in foster care by obtaining additional funds in the budget. Now we must pass a law to put the program in code to ensure it is always available for young people. Virginia has one of the highest utilization rates of extended foster care in the country.

- REQUEST: Support HB400 & SB156 to codify Fostering Futures

**Create a Children's Ombudsman Office as an independent investigative office.** Establish an independent and autonomous agency that handles and investigates complaints from citizens and families related to child welfare services that protect the interests and rights of children and families.

- REQUEST: Support HB1301 that establishes a Children's Ombudsman Office

**Increase compensation for Guardians Ad Litem.** Many young people who have experienced foster care say they never met their Guardian Ad Litem. One of the reasons for this is the two-level compensation for GALs, who are paid \$75 per hour for in-court work, and \$55 per hour for out-of-court work. But their work outside the courtroom, ascertaining what a child's best interests may be, is their most important duty. GAL compensation should reflect what we value most: a child's best interests, not speaking to a judge.

**Replace the Virginia Department of Social Services data tracking system known as OASIS.** Updated technology, along with updated training and child welfare courses, will allow social services to serve children and families more efficiently. This can reduce the length of time between a child entering foster care and finding permanency through reunification, kinship care, or adoption.

- REQUEST: Support \$4 million included in Governors proposed budget to replace VDSS data tracking system.