

Voices

For Virginia's Children

# 2021 FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

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Voices for Virginia's Children's Family Economic Security policy agenda is informed by the Virginia Food Access coalition, Virginia Paid Sick Days Coalition, and The Campaign for a Family Friendly Economy of Virginia. In addition, the Racial Truth & Reconciliation Virginia Coalition and Virginia's Trauma-Informed Community Networks have informed the outcome of this year's policy agenda.



RACIAL TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

**In 2019, over 250,000 children in Virginia — nearly 13% — lived in poverty.** Virginia's KIDS COUNT Data Center indicates poverty rates of 28% for Black children, 19.8% for Latinx children in comparison to 8.9% for white children. Children of color are already more likely to experience economic hardships, which contributes to economic trauma. Yet, when layered with environment trauma, such as inequitable access to healthy foods due to food deserts, a lack of financial opportunities, and poverty, it contributes to more adverse childhood experiences, which are connected to poor social, emotional, mental and health outcomes.

*Economic trauma refers to a sustained stressful impact or emotional pain of one's experience with lack of financial opportunities and poverty.*

## **COVID-19 WIDENS RACIAL AND ETHNIC DISPARITIES CREATING ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS**

During the 2020 legislative session and 2020 special session, Virginia made great strides in contributing to positive economic supports through its investments in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Virginia Food Access Investment Program. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened economic hardships due to unemployment rates, the closing of community-based centers that served impoverished communities, individuals having to resign from their jobs because of child care center closures, pre-existing health conditions that place individuals who would be on the frontline in the high-risk category, and more. We must ensure that everyone is able to make it through this pandemic, regardless of identity or geography, by fostering economic resilience and additional financial supports to build off of previous momentum.

## **INVEST IN PAID TIME OFF TO PROMOTE COMMUNITY WELL-BEING**

### **Expand paid leave options for parents to protect their families and communities.**

The pandemic has raised awareness of the importance of paid leave for families. Fifteen states have passed paid leave standards. Virginia can prioritize businesses, families, and the general public by adopting a phased-in approach for paid sick days and paid family leave.

## **FOSTER FINANCIAL SECURITY AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCE**

### **Strengthen safety net resources for families such as TANF cash assistance, child care subsidies and SNAP nutrition benefits.**

Whether a family lives in an urban, suburban, or rural setting, people collectively experience the impact that stems from the economic downturn: being laid off, the inability to find a job, difficulties supporting family, or seeing community or local organizations they depend on shut down. Despite a recent 15% increase, the monthly cash assistance provided by TANF has not kept up with the rate of inflation. Virginia can improve financial security by taking advantage of its surplus in TANF federal funding to increase TANF payment rates and eligibility levels. In addition, we can take steps to ensure nutrition resources such as Pandemic EBT and child care assistance can help meet families' needs.

## **INCREASE ACCESS TO FOOD SECURITY**

### **Increase access to affordable and healthy food options in underserved communities.**

Food insecurity is an issue that Virginia's inner cities, small towns and rural communities struggle to gain access to due to a lack of food enterprises, including grocery stores, food hubs, mobile markets, farmers markets and food cooperatives. While 1.25 million was invested in the VA Food Access Investment Program last year, community centers that impoverished communities rely on, such as churches and food pantries, have closed down because of the pandemic. Virginia can strengthen food security by supporting investments in the Virginia Food Access Investment to expand retailers in underserved communities and the Virginia Fruit and the Vegetable Produce RX Program to create a fund that serves Medicaid and CHIP recipients.