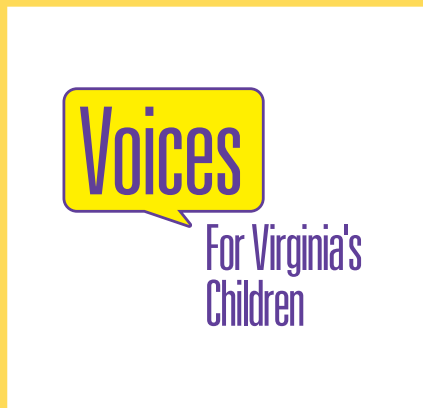




2022 IMPACT REPORT

# Voices for Virginia's Future



# OUR MISSION

Voices for Virginia's Children champions public policies and legislation that achieve positive and equitable outcomes for young people.

We believe every child should have equitable access to the resources, services, and opportunities needed to thrive. For us, that means advocating for sound policies, educating the public, mobilizing communities, utilizing data to determine unmet needs, and leading with compassion.

We envision a Virginia in which our systems center young people, ensuring their ability to realize their brightest potential is no longer predictable by race, socioeconomic status, or geography.



GET INVOLVED AT **[vakids.org](https://vakids.org)**







## A NOTE FROM OUR LEADERS

### DEAR FRIEND,

What an incredible year it has been! In 2022, Voices' board and staff joined hands to craft a new mission, vision, and theory of change for the organization. This new guiding framework pushes our organization beyond advocacy for children and youth to advocacy with children and youth, bringing the voices of young people into the halls of power. With this renewed energy and a refreshed sense of purpose, Voices has begun to turn many years of dreaming into reality.

Last fall, we launched our inaugural cohort of young changemakers, Virginia's Youth in Action (VAYA). This leadership development program builds young people's skills and understanding in advocacy, storytelling, community engagement, and Virginia's legislative process. The members of this first cohort of VAYA represent a variety of geographies, experiences, and backgrounds; their powerful stories have elevated the voices of all young people in our Commonwealth.

We continued to lift up the needs of children and families through policy advocacy. We achieved legislative victories for family economic security, affordable early care and education, language access for health care coverage, and more stability for children in foster care. We also responded to the growing youth mental health crisis by championing investments that better meet mental health needs within our schools.

As we reflect on the last year, we are filled with gratitude for the support we received from champions in every corner of Virginia. We are also grateful to former CEO, Amy Strite, who left Voices to pursue new leadership opportunities, and to Juan Pablo Berrizbeitia, who capably stepped in to guide Voices as Interim CEO. Most importantly, we appreciate you for investing in a better future for Virginia's young people through your support of Voices.

When we place children and youth at the center of our policy discussions, we create the conditions for all communities to thrive.



**Rachael Deane, Esq.**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Cyrillene Clark, Ph.D.**  
Chair, Board of Directors



# 2

## POLICY UPDATES



# 2022 General Assembly Highlights



Voices' 2022 policy wins were powered by champions driven to improve the lives of young people, including child-serving professionals from social services agencies, early childhood educators, and mental health providers. As we built on our engagement with young people who want to have their voices heard in the policy arena, we were able to work together to develop policy solutions that meet their needs.

The policy wins Voices achieved in 2022 were part of groundwork laid to expand support for caretakers for years to come. This is especially needed as we continue to adjust to a new way of living in response to the ongoing pandemic. Specifically, the victories from the 2022 General Assembly session were evident for families navigating changes to health insurance coverage, reaching the end of enhanced SNAP benefits, and filing their tax returns.

## Our Impact and Involvement

### FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY

After a 10-year effort, the 2022 General Assembly approved a state-level refundable Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) that enabled more than 600,000 families to keep their state tax dollars.

- **OUR IMPACT:** Voices elevated the stories of parents who would benefit from the new state EITC and hosted press conferences in collaboration with The Commonwealth Institute, Families Forward and Virginia Organizing.

### EARLY CHILDHOOD

To maximize additional federal funding for early childhood education, Virginia became one of three states to begin reimbursing child care programs, accepting subsidy by true costs.

- **OUR IMPACT:** Voices worked with Congresswoman Jennifer McClellan, in her former role as State Senator, to craft legislation that prompted the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) to create a new payment methodology.

*Policy analyst Emily Moore attended the Virginia Neonatal Perinatal Collaborative Summit focused on reducing bias and addressing racial disparities in maternal and infant health.*

# Policy Updates

## MENTAL HEALTH

In response to increasing student mental health needs, the General Assembly approved the first school-based mental health pilot programs, resulting in funding for six school divisions. In December, Governor Youngkin proposed increased funding of \$15 million to reach 30 school divisions.

- **OUR IMPACT:** Voices sought legislative patrons to introduce the pilot programs and advocated for their inclusion in the adopted budget.

## CHILD WELFARE

Legislation sponsored by Delegate Wampler passed, establishing collaborative regional placement options for children in foster care beyond county lines. This will increase kinship placements and the number of locally approved foster homes.

- **OUR IMPACT:** Voices was selected to participate in Governor Youngkin's Safe & Sound Task Force to develop immediate solutions for "hard to place" foster children.

## HEALTH CARE ACCESS

The General Assembly passed legislation to remove the language barriers to obtaining health care coverage by requiring that all

medical assistance program information be made accessible to individuals with disabilities and limited English proficiency through interpretation, translation, and auxiliary aids.

- **OUR IMPACT:** Voices participated in a language access working group with Delegate Tran, Senator Hashmi, and partners from Hamkae Center, Virginia Poverty Law Center, and The Commonwealth Institute to elevate the voices of community members impacted by the disparities in language access at state agencies.

## FOOD ACCESS AND NUTRITION SECURITY

Funding was included in the state budget for Virginia Fresh Match, which ensures access to healthy and nutritious foods by boosting the buying power of SNAP benefits for fruits and vegetables at farmers markets and food retailers.

- **OUR IMPACT:** Voices co-led the Virginia Food Access Coalition with the American Heart Association-Virginia and convened public and private organizations advocating for improved access to nutritious, local food for all Virginians.



*Advocacy and Engagement Manager Kristin Lennox testified to the Board of Education opposing changes to model policies for the treatment of transgender students.*





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## ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT

## Working with Young Advocates

Many of the world's most successful movements for justice and human equality have been led by young people. Voices believes in the limitless potential of young people and trusts them as experts in what they need to thrive. In June 2022, Voices brought many years of dreaming to life by working side-by-side with young people for positive policy change.

Last January, [we hosted our first virtual Youth Advocacy Day](#) with 15 young people ages 14 – 25. This group met with 15 policymakers and presented on key issues impacting their well-being and their communities, such as youth mental health, improvements for the foster care system, support and protections for LGBTQ+ youth, and equitable access to health coverage.

Inspired by this day of advocacy, the [incredible Elijah Lee](#), a youth leader, activist, and minister (age 14 at the time) began connecting with Voices staff to plan and

implement his own series of advocacy efforts. Elijah and Kristin Lennox, our Advocacy and Engagement Manager, embarked on a full day of legislative advocacy that ended with Elijah's own introduction and recognition on the House floor by Delegate Dawn Adams. Elijah left a big impression on the Virginia state legislature, which led to a summer of legislative meetings, drafting policy, and pursuing his own bills that address climate justice, trauma-informed care in schools, and youth civic engagement.

### VIRGINIA'S YOUTH IN ACTION

After the great success of our first Youth Advocacy Day and engagement with young advocates across Virginia, new funding from the Richmond Memorial Health Foundation gave us the opportunity to dramatically expand our youth engagement work. We dreamed of a program that would include youth voice in policy change conversations, empowering youth to influence the systems that impact their lives. We accomplished this



*Aaliyana Carr (16 at the time) said, "As young people, we have the responsibility of pursuing and advocating for change so future generations won't have to experience the same struggles."*



dream in June 2022 through the creation of Virginia's Youth in Action, a nine-month leadership cohort that enhances young people's ability to advance their communities through advocacy, storytelling, and community engagement.

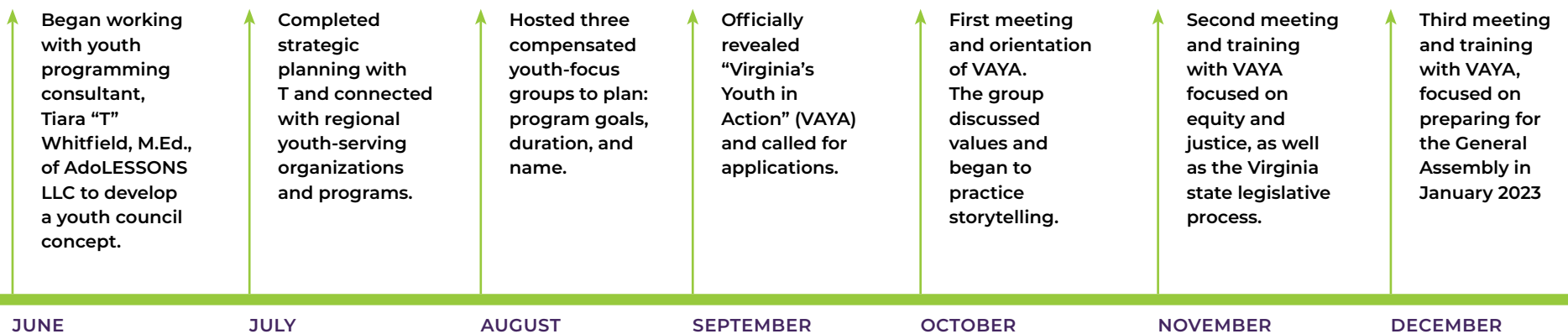
In September 2022, our application went live and Voices received over 60 applications for the inaugural cohort. After spending a tremendous amount of time narrowing down the group based on lived and living expertise, Voices selected 12 individuals representing different regions across the Commonwealth as well as a wide spectrum of intersectional identities.

From October to December 2022, youth received training to understand the legislative process and procedures in Virginia and developed skills in leadership, storytelling, advocacy and activism to effectively inform and engage policymakers on relevant legislation. To achieve these goals, Voices shifted our advocacy and engagement programming to a **Healing-Centered Engagement** (HCE) framework. Pioneered by Dr. Shawn Ginwright, HCE offers a holistic approach to trauma that shifts our focus from pathology (trauma) to possibility (well-being). HCE is a strengths-based approach that celebrates culture and identity as part of the collective healing and well-being of young people and the adults in their lives.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In addition to our growing youth advocacy work, Voices strengthened relationships with regional partners, including **Triumph Over Trauma** (Northern Shenandoah Trauma-Informed Community Network) and the **You GLOW Girl Network** (Petersburg and Southside). Kristin Lennox provided regular workshops and speaking engagements focused on storytelling and legislative advocacy at the state-level. Community members and advocates shared how Voices' advocacy workshops made the concept and process of state-level advocacy seem more accessible, possible, and effective.

## 2022 VAYA Timeline



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## DATA & RESEARCH





# Impact of the Pandemic on Child Well-Being: The Story in Data

*Voices and advocates from the Virginia Promise Partnership met with Senator Tim Kaine to discuss making child care more affordable.*



Voices uses our data expertise to amplify the data that is most compelling to lawmakers and spotlights areas of need, especially on topics related to children that may go overlooked. We provide a deeper layer of analysis when data does not include race or geography which can mask outcomes for children living in more disadvantaged and under resourced communities.

It takes both personal stories and data to make a compelling case for policy change. Data that became available in 2022 provided a better understanding of the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on children in Virginia. This data helped to shape two narratives relevant to our policy priorities:

- 1) **Families were facing daily hardships and economic security and stability was out of reach, and**
- 2) **Youth mental health concerns continued to climb, outpacing available help.**

## FAMILY ECONOMIC SECURITY ON SHAKY GROUND/ FAMILIES FACE DAILY ECONOMIC HARDSHIPS

The Census Pulse Survey provided insights into the impact of the pandemic on the lives of Virginia's families on a semi-regular basis. This survey samples households in Virginia to take the pulse of how they are faring in terms of their economic security and child well-being. The KIDS COUNT Data Center hosts over 100 indicators on child well-being, including these regular Census Pulse surveys. **A key pulse point** we tracked is if families with children in the home found it "somewhat difficult" or "very difficult" to pay for usual household expenses. Despite additional COVID relief efforts, the rate of families experiencing economic hardship has increased over the last three years, demonstrating that inflation and unpredictable economic conditions are creating stress in parents' day-to-day lives.

In particular, Black and Brown parents are more likely to be employed in lower wage fields and are more likely to experience a strain on their household budgets impacted by increasing housing and food costs.

### Families with Children Experiencing Economic Hardship

Average of 2022 Census Pulse Survey

Asian



Black or African American



Hispanic or Latino



Non-Hispanic White



Two or more races/Other race



TOTAL SURVEYED



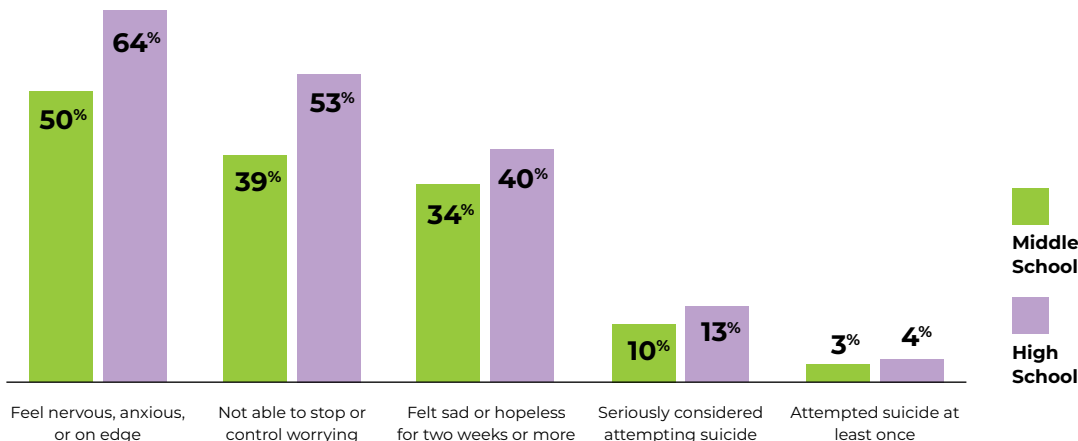
### CHILDREN AND YOUTH EXPRESS INCREASING MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

In November, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) released a report on the impact of the pandemic on K-12 students needs. While the report covered multiple issues of academic support and student need, the factors that stood out the most to our team were the impact on student mental health. Lawmakers on the commission were presented with data

crystalizing the scope and severity of mental health needs. Forty percent of high school students indicated they felt sad or hopeless for two weeks or more, and more than ten percent of middle and high school students seriously contemplated suicide.

This data put a spotlight on the need to address children's mental health issues and the severity of the problem that translated into several recommendations promoted by JLARC and adopted by the General Assembly.

### Middle and High School Students Reporting Mental Health Issues



SOURCE: JLARC analysis of Virginia Department of Education's 2021 and 2022 Virginia Survey of Climate and Working Conditions.  
NOTE: Surveys were conducted in January through March both years. The 2021 survey was for middle school students statewide. The 2022 survey was for high school students.





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## RACIAL TRUTH & RECONCILIATION

# Racial Truth & Reconciliation Week: Spotlighting Good Troublemakers

As we continue to navigate divisive political landscapes and strive to promote trauma-informed healing, compassion, and justice, RTRW 2022 highlighted the themes of **“Good Troublemaking: Necessary Trouble to Enact Change,” “Voices of Virginia’s Future: Highlighting Young Advocates,”**

**“Our kids were born for this time.”**

– ANN ZWECKBRONNER,  
*from Parenting an Activist panel discussion*

and **“Activists and Organizational Change: Reckoning and Reconciling Our Truth.”**

These themes centered the voices and stories of youth and community members as the experts on their lived experiences in these topics.

Over the course of the week, we hosted 19 workshops, 31 presenters, and 586 registrants from 29 states and Canada! Through our global reach, we welcomed state agencies, non-profit and community-based organizations, students, young people, parents, caregivers, and more. 95% of those polled were satisfied with the programs and 98% thought the content was relevant to their work. We celebrated the community that RTRW created by continuing to engage with repeat attendees over the years.

The workshops highlighted the importance of community partnership and collective liberation of the communities we uplift through advocacy. We engaged in conversation about diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice (DEIJ) within organizations and communities, the importance of understanding intersectionality, how to support and encourage social justice advocacy within youth and cause “good trouble” within



*Voices and local Richmond partners hosted a well-attended free community screening of “Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools.”*



## Racial Truth & Reconciliation Week:




our social system to bring about radical change. There was collective storytelling, intentional self-reflection, engagement with new lenses of focus, and a buzz of energy from attendees and organizers to take this work back to their own spaces. In one week, we got to see the power of community engagement in mobilization for radical change.

As a final event for RTRW, Voices joined with **Brown Ballerinas for Change**, **Pretty Purposed**, **YWCA of Richmond**, **Greater Richmond SCAN**, and **ChildSavers** to host a free community screening and conversation for **Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools** at the Robinson Theater in Richmond's historic Church Hill neighborhood. Attendees watched the powerful documentary and engaged in thoughtful dialogues on how to better support and champion Black girls and femmes in school environments, as parents, teachers, and advocates.

*Kennedy George and Ava Holloway, two of the co-founders of Brown Ballerinas for Change participate in an activity at the screening of "Pushout."*

## SATISFACTION OF PARTICIPANTS

 **95%** of those polled were satisfied with the programs

 **98%** of those polled thought the content was relevant to their work



# 6

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## In Memoriam Virginia “Jinks” Holton 1925-2022

We joyfully remember Virginia “Jinks” Holton, a lifelong child advocate and former First Lady of Virginia, who died in December at the age of 97. Along with Jeannie Baliles, another former First Lady, Mrs. Holton helped to found Voices for Virginia’s Children in the early 1990s with the belief that children’s needs should transcend partisan politics. Mrs. Holton later served as a Voices board member and loyal supporter.

Mrs. Holton dedicated herself to public service with a focus on children’s issues, including child nutrition, public education, and the juvenile court system. She was a champion for racial justice and civil rights, devoting herself and her family to desegregating Virginia’s public schools during her time as First Lady in the early 1970s. Voices continues to work on these issues and is committed to living out Mrs. Holton’s legacy and dedication to children and youth.







# 7

## DONOR LISTING

We are grateful to all the foundations, businesses, organizations, and individuals who have generously contributed to creating a brighter future for Virginia's young people. Thank you for investing in our mission of championing public policies and legislation that achieve positive and equitable outcomes for young people.

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Partnership for America's Children  
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### In Memory of Shannon Flynn

Nancy Ault

### In Memory of John Fletcher Lowe, Jr.

Mrs. Mary Fran Lowe

Mr. Roy Matthews

### In Memory of Virginia "Jinks" Rogers Holton

Ms. Anne Rogers

This listing reflects cumulative gifts received between 1/1/2022 and 12/31/2022. To make a correction, please contact our Development Manager, Zoe Thomas, at [zoe@vakids.org](mailto:zoe@vakids.org).

\* deceased  
 + sustaining monthly donor