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**Page 2: Contact Information**

Q1

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**Page 3: Question 1: Early Learning**

## Q2

**Virginia is known to have a 'non-system' of early learning where programs operate under different departments and sets of rules. What would you do to better link programs and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of Virginia's early learning programs?**

I will support legislation that offers more of a blanket of regulations for early learning in Virginia. Too often, when several agencies operate under different sets of rules, there is no standard and less accountability, and while one setting of early childhood education may offer an exemplary education, another within the same system may offer sub-par learning opportunities for its students. I will fight to include early childhood education as one of the standard steps in a child's journey through the school system. Every child and every parent has the right to pre-k and childcare that does not jeopardize a family's income due to the high costs of attendance. Only with support for a universalized pre-k can our children have the fighting chance they deserve, while allowing parents and guardians to seek the employment opportunities they desire, instead of settling because the high costs of childcare keep them home.

## Page 4: Question 2: Foster Care

## Q3

**Most children entering foster care are returned to their families. In most cases, these families do not receive additional support and services from the child welfare system, which can lead to poor health and education outcomes for children. How do you think the Commonwealth can better support children once they are returned to their families?**

The first line of defense for any happy and healthy child in any state is access to decent healthcare for both the child and the parent. The highest priority for the Commonwealth of Virginia must be passing legislation that allows this coverage, including the expansion for Medicaid through the ACA, while the opportunity exists. Parents struggling with health difficulties cannot have the full focus they need to give their children their fullest support. Too often, parents whose children are placed in foster care face a great stigma, and do not receive proper support. I will support legislation that offers more services for parents such as greater access to counseling services. In rural areas, far too often, the biggest hindrance for parents wishing to get out and better themselves for their children is a lack of transportation, either public or private. I will support programs for greater infrastructure and therefore greater access to the transportation needed to get to appointments and interviews as necessary.

## Page 5: Question 3: School to Prison Pipeline

## Q4

The US Department of Education data analyzed by the Center for Public Integrity shows that Virginia schools, in a single year, referred students to law enforcement agencies at three times the national rate. Numerous studies show that these school discipline policies increase the chances of these students becoming involved with the adult criminal justice system. If elected, how would you address these issues?

In effort to end any problem, the root cause must be addressed. The culture of an organization must be willing to get to that root cause instead of patching problems until they can no longer be mended or ignored. Therefore, I will support budget allowances and legislation ensuring that Virginia's youth have ample access to counseling services in schools without judgment or stigma attached. Every student should have access to these services and by addressing problems when they start and supporting students who may exhibit behavioral issues instead of punishing them immediately and every time issues arise, all students will have the opportunity to flourish instead of flounder. Children are still at a critical stage in life in which their brains are constantly changing and the most plastic they will ever be. By treating any child with judgement and stigma because they might act out or break rules instead of addressing why that behavior is being presented, that child is doomed with a reputation and the internalized notion that they are "bad", that there is something wrong with them, and therefore continuing the cycle into adolescence and adulthood. It is necessary to make sure that every student feels supported in their educational environment and knows that they have the same potential for growth as any of their peers.

## Page 6: Question 4: Health Insurance

## Q5

Virginia's Children's Health Insurance Program (known as FAMIS in Virginia) and Medicaid provide low-income children with health insurance that their families would otherwise be unable to afford. If the federal government cuts payments to the states for Medicaid and/or FAMIS, how would you support the health needs of low-income children?

If Medicaid is cut on the federal level, I will pursue bills that introduce progressive tax reform in the State of Virginia. In raising the state income tax on those citizens making \$150,000 or more a year a mere 1-2%, there will be funds more readily available to support those in the lowest economic brackets in the state. An increase in the taxes of the wealthiest of Virginia's citizens will not only support these services, but it will also keep the fallout of tax reform from falling on those who may be harmed the most by an increase to their taxes. I will also fight for budget allowances to make sure that increased funding goes to programs like WIC so that preventative health can be stressed before problems arise through proper diet and nutrition.

## Q6

**Substance abuse by parents affects both the parents 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. Substance abuse can significantly impact those early bonds between parents and children. If elected, what policy solutions would you promote to address the needs of the whole family?**

The first step in treating any kind of crisis is admitting there is one. I will be a loud and outspoken advocate first and foremost for better treatment programs in Virginia, and I will support legislation for those programs. Addiction cannot be treated by covering it up and pretending it does not exist. It also will not be treated by treating those who fall victim to the throes of addiction as if they were lesser human beings. Addiction is an illness and it must be treated as such. Illnesses cannot be treated effectively in jail, where a patient goes in only to be punished instead of rehabilitated. I support rehabilitation for those suffering from addiction, instead of locking them away where they will not be with their families for any number of years. Greater access to mental health care clinics and substance abuse recovery programs is the first step to solving the substance abuse problem in Virginia. Prevention is also a key step in fighting this crisis. By advocating for greater access to mental healthcare in a judgement free atmosphere, and by placing the same emphasis on mental health as physical health, addiction risks and behaviors that lead to addictive lifestyles can be identified early on and those who are at risk can have the support they need to either start their road to recovery sooner, or stop an addiction before it starts.

Q7

**A child can interact with many systems (schools, health and mental health, courts, etc.) as they grow up. A Virginia Children's Cabinet has been established to facilitate cross-agency collaborations at the highest levels of state government. If elected, how would you facilitate this type of cross-agency collaboration for children?**

By expanding the membership of the cabinet, there would be more voices of different experiences and backgrounds to generate solutions for the problems facing Virginia's Children. I would aim to expand the Cabinet to include at least two representatives of the Legislature, one from each party to keep the views balanced and bipartisan. There might also have cause for the inclusion of a member of the Judiciary and a member of an outside advocacy group for children. This mix would bring views from all sides to the discussion and those who are writing the legislation, as well as those who are enforcing it, would be able to have a more direct conversation about how these issues affect our children and find the most practical solutions together.

Page 9: Question 7: Mental Health

Q8

**In 2016, Virginia ranked 49th 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?**

As a rural Virginian, the most crushing barrier to mental health care is lack of access. There are not nearly enough resources for those citizens of all ages suffering from mental health problems. The lack of access is, in my opinion, one of the direct causes of the stigma, so by increasing access, we may decrease the stigma attached. Mental health support needs to start in the school so that students can grow up with the idea that it is safe and healthy to seek mental health care. I will also fight tirelessly for the Medicaid expansion in Virginia as long as it is a viable option so that those without insurance may seek the services they need.

Page 10: Question 8: Education

Q9

**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. How would you address the achievement gap in Pre-K to 12 education?**

Implementing a progressive raise in the income tax on Virginia's citizens earning \$150,000 or more a year, I would support action that calls for more support systems in schools. Virginia has a definitive lack of qualified teachers, and I would work to make sure that teachers receive the training they need to provide adequate support for economically diverse classroom environments, and I would fight for higher teacher pay so that those who are interested in becoming teachers are more likely to enter the career, and those who are already teachers will not feel as pressured to leave to seek better wages. I will also push for a budget that includes more funding for aides in the classroom, so that each student receives individualized attention in each subject and has room to grow and flourish. Newer teacher and aide hires would also allow for smaller class sizes, which has been proven effective in allowing students to receive the one-on-one time in their education that they need.