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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?

In order to be free, we need equal access to the tools necessary to succeed. Tools such as education. Early learning is absolutely critical to ensure a student's success. Inefficiencies within the early education system is wasteful and a poor use of taxpayer money, and more importantly, it hurts children at the most important time in their academic and social development.

Due to the fractured nature of our Commonwealth, each county operates differently and interprets legislation differently. One example of how this lack of a cohesive operating system can lead to ineffectiveness involves the Child Services Act. The act provides each county with a budget for mental health services for kids. But since judges are inconsistent, parents will sometimes move between counties in order to change judges. We need to ensure that these types of "non-systems" are not affecting early childhood education, starting by improving communication across programs.

Above all, it is important for us to trust our teachers and caretakers. I have many educators in my family -- my granddad was a high school principal, my Nana taught second grade, and my mom is a public university English professor. I recognize that the people working with students are the ones who best understand their needs. While it is critical to ensure that all early learning programs are focused on the same important goals, in any policy I develop I will ultimately consult and trust those who work with students every day: our teachers and childcare experts.

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?

In 2014, 2,923 children in Virginia who had been returned to their families after spending time in foster care re-entered the foster care system. We need a system where both children and their parents have the help they need. I believe in universal health care for all Virginians, including mental health care and addiction treatment. These health care services are critical to preventing factors that contribute to turbulent home lives, such as substance abuse, and to ensuring the stability of the family and better health for children when children are returned to their families from foster care.

Yet, while children receive therapy when they are placed into the foster care system, their parents are not provided with psychiatric services and often do not have the health insurance to seek these services on their own. Parents have an even more difficult time receiving treatment in rural districts where treatment centers are farther away, especially if they are also dealing with driving charges or vehicle impoundment. Similarly, when it is determined that children are no longer able to stay at their home, they are often moved to live with their grandparents, who typically use medicare instead of medicaid. In our district, there are no mental health care providers that accept medicare. We need to ensure that families in these situations still have access to healthcare.

Finally, we can need to increase the number of counselors in schools.

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?

As of this year, over 60 percent of American children have been exposed to a traumatic event within the past year, and 20 percent of those reported experiencing three or more events. When students live turbulent lives outside of school, they are more likely to act out in school. They can also become re-traumatized through punishment, causing a vicious cycle that only worsens the problem.

When education systems understand how trauma and chronic stress impacts kids and families, they can respond in a way that builds resilience. Schools need to be a place in which students feel safe and find compassion, but are still held accountable. When these environments exist, and are the primary focus, academic achievement and better behavioral outcomes develop organically, and children perform better.

We also need to provide more vocational training and community centers, and we need to help students in particular who are risk of entering the school to prison pipeline early on, starting with increasing the number of school psychologists.

Finally, we need genuine criminal justice reform as a whole. When our children are funneled into the prison system, they are taught to be criminals. Virginia spends over a billion dollars a year on state prisons in the Department of Correction. We need to raise the state felony larceny limit to \$600, institute more pre-trial release programs, legalize marijuana, end license suspension for all non-driving offenses, and raise the cap on court-appointed attorneys.

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?

I believe that affordable health care is a fundamental freedom, and families and children aren't free to live their lives if they aren't free from sickness. I am fully in favor of Medicaid expansion, which would secure the right to affordable care for more than 400,000 Virginians.

We also need to make healthcare more affordable overall. We need to reform the system so that regulators are unable to collude with the health insurance industry, in order to ensure that doctors aren't forced into charging more than what healthcare should cost. In addition, we should support our system of free clinics so they are able to hire more clinicians of all types and provide whole-person health resources to those with low or no income or health insurance.

We can also alleviate the need for serious health care by focusing on prevention. A major factor of chronic adult onset health issues that warrant medical interventions, such as heart disease, cholesterol issues, and substance abuse, is chronic stress as a child. Living with chronic stress can lead to poor coping skills, such as alcohol and substance use, poor eating habits, smoking, and other further contributors to health issues. Creating resilient communities to mitigate chronic stress will reduce our healthcare costs overall.

Page 7: Question 5: Opioid Epidemic

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?

Freedom means the capacity to take care of ourselves, and we can't do that when we're crippled with addiction. The opioid epidemic is the top public health crisis in my district. We must address opioid abuse head on, such as by curbing the out-of-control crony capitalism of the pharmaceutical industry, educating each other on drug safety, and ending the stigma against mental health care. Legalizing safe alternative coping mechanisms such as marijuana. Guarantee accessible addiction treatment to anyone who needs it. Send our children to vocational schools or community colleges and universities instead of to prison. Ensure equal access to the tools we need to succeed and thrive.

Page 8: Question 6: Cross-Systems

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?

While there are groups with several different missions related to improving people's lives, we all share the common goal of bettering our community. The best way to facilitate cross-agency collaboration is to strengthen partnerships among these groups within all of the different systems through open communication, whether they are from the government, private, or nonprofit sector. This will allow different agencies to better work together to identify and understand common needs within the community and to share best practices.

Lack of cross-agency collaboration can be a barrier to improving child health care. For example, if a court orders a patient to receive a psychiatric evaluation, the court psychologist often ignores that patient's previous medical history. Patients lie all the time, and an evaluation which ignores previous medical history or doesn't communicate with the patient's long-term provider is a waste of taxpayer money. We should encourage court orders regarding psychiatric evaluations to include any existing healthcare provider in the loop.

It is important that we bring different groups together to consider our common goals for improving the lives of children, so that different groups with different areas of expertise are able to come together and work effectively as a single enterprise dedicated to making a difference for our kids. Some of this work is currently occurring through the Culpeper Best Practices meetings held by Judge Somerville, where people from various disciplines meet to identify community needs and brainstorm possible solutions. We need to increase these types of meetings and encourage the attendance of elected officials so that they can become more aware of best practices and community needs.

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?

Health care is a human right, regardless of where you live or how much money you make. Lack of access is still the most significant barrier to effective healthcare. Our ultimate goal is to guarantee universal healthcare for everyone.

Other than access, stigma is the most critical barrier to receiving mental health treatment. Parents are not always comfortable sending their children to receive psychiatric services, or they assume they are simply going through a phase. Often, when children present with behavioral issues, they are misdiagnosed as defiant or as having attention deficits. When the community is more educated on the impact of trauma and how the brain functions under chronically stressful situations, these behaviors could be more accurately diagnosed as symptoms of anxiety that are more effectively treated through compassion and resilience-building interventions.

In addition, it is crucial that we increase the number of schools counselors and psychologists.

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?

In order to address the achievement gap, we need to rethink our approach to discipline in schools. A May 2016 report found that Culpeper County was "in the top quartile of divisions with the highest percentages of African American students suspended." Between 2014 and 2015, 12.97 percent of African-American students were short-term suspended at least once compared to 5.21 percent of white students, and 16.6 percent of students with disabilities compared to 5.7 percent of those without.

An affordable education is a fundamental freedom that needs to be defended. Unfortunately, unequal access to quality education is a significant barrier for many students, especially students of color and in rural areas.

To improve outcomes for kids we must also support their parents. When parents are employed and feeling competent, they are better taking care of themselves, and have more patience to respond to their children in a way that builds healthy human beings. When parents are functioning in survival mode every day, they are less likely to be able to support the healthy emotional and academic development of their kids. Freedom means a good job and a healthy, happy living environment.