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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?

Early learning is the key to transforming Virginia's education system and preparing our children for future careers. Current fragmented systems of early childhood education are inadequately preparing children for school. We must remove the notion of a K-12 education and instead make sure that Virginia invests in early learning from the time a child is born. As a Delegate, I would fight for more consistent funding streams for existing state and federal programs. I also think Virginia needs to "go big" on early learning and create a system of universal pre-K, using a combination of new and existing infrastructure to provide every child in the Commonwealth the beginnings of a comprehensive public education.

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?

While the number of children in our foster care system has declined over the past decade, my district in Southwest Virginia continues to see one of the highest rates of children under 17 in foster care. As a former journalist, I contributed to an Edward R. Murrow award-winning documentary that looked at increased risk factors for child abuse and neglect in Southwest Virginia. Part of reducing the rates of abuse and neglect and improving outcomes for children returned to their families is to provide more support and wrap-around services. Virginia's DSS must coordinate better care for children and increase the attention each case receives. The General Assembly must do its part to ensure this happens by providing resources to improve case management.

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?

Virginia must systematically address our school-to-prison pipeline. As Delegate, I would fight for an inclusion model state-wide for special education, so that students with intellectual or developmental disabilities are given the same public education as any other child. I would advocate for more accountability in discipline policies and a move away from segregation, isolation and using physical restraint. While I support and believe in a school safety model that includes school resource officers, we must make sure that calls for service are appropriate. As students get older, schools must be able to provide mental health and substance use disorder services. As Delegate, I would advocate to adopt the recommendations from the Board of Education for more support staff per pupil in our schools.

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 federal cuts to FAMIS and Medicaid occur, the General Assembly must pick up the slack. The unfortunate and short-sighted decisions made in Congress must not adversely affect Virginia's most vulnerable children. As Delegate, I will be a voice for those children and make sure no ground is lost and protections to support these essential programs are created.

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?

As a journalist, I reported on the increased number of children being born dependent on opioids to mothers facing addiction. This babies scream as they enter immediate withdrawal and must be treated in NICU units. This robs the mother and child of precious bonding time early in the child's life. As Delegate, I would support hospital providers and family planning organizations that seek to treat pregnant women for opioid addiction before the child is born. I would also want to be a close and open collaborator with hospital systems that are facing challenges in providing necessary staff and bed space to accommodate the increasing number of children who are born dependent to opioids.

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?

As Delegate, I would support Virginia's Children's Cabinet and its initiatives aimed and ensuring success for all children. This includes the Classrooms not Courtrooms and Challenged Schools programs. I would want to increase the data available to inform decision making and help facilitate better inter-agency communication. It's time to take what has been learned from some select communities and expand best practices state-wide.

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?

When I was evening anchor at WDBJ, I produced and hosted a documentary on our public mental health system titled "Stop the Stigma." I believe that stigma of mental illness continues to be the biggest barrier to effective treatment and recovery. As Delegate, I would support any effort to increase public awareness for mental illnesses, particularly for our youth. Most major mood disorders have their first onset of symptoms during the high school and college years. I believe we must increase access to services for children with possible mental illnesses by incentivizing mental health professionals to practice in underserved areas like Southwest Virginia. We must continue to expand access to telemedicine to help children in rural areas and expand access of our FAMIS and Medicaid systems to cover more children.

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?

Virginia continues to proceed on two divergent education tracks: one for children in affluent areas and one for children in communities that are struggling. To change this, I would fight for changes to our school funding formulas so rural schools and children living in low-income areas are not disproportionately and negatively affected with what the General Assembly provides in direct support. I would take a hard look at ways of combating what is essentially the re-segregation of schools in Virginia, including options for parents in urban communities to have children attend schools in other divisions.