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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?

There is good research demonstrating that students see the most significant academic outcomes and predictors for future success in school when they have attended early childhood education programs and public Pre-K initiatives. It is important that Virginia closes the education gap in early childhood education initiatives for low-income families. As Delegate, I will join the work to re-organize the operational structure of early childhood education programs in the state to foster a more consistent, student-centric framework that encompasses all relevant policy areas and initiatives including the Virginia Preschool Initiative and strengthen safe child-care regulations.

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 Commonwealth of Virginia needs to do a better job of maintaining accurate records of children entering and exiting the child welfare system in order to ensure that every family that accesses the system continues to have support. In instances where a child who has entered the foster care system is returned to his/her family, we need to ensure that the Department of Social Services has the resources to maintain regular contact with the family to ensure they are aware of available benefits and any requirements necessary on their end to receive those benefits. We need to ensure that we are affording Virginia's children with best possible outcomes, ensuring that their living situation is stable, and reducing foster care re-entry. Stable housing and family life provide better mental health, physical health, and education outcomes; the more effective the state can be about actively reaching out to families, the better off our children will be.

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?

I fully support recent legislative efforts proposed in the General Assembly (and advocated for by VOICES) to reform school discipline. Furthermore, I am also troubled by statistics from the same CPI report that state children of color and children with disabilities are reported to law enforcement at disproportionate rates as compared to white, non-disabled students. It should be rare that students in Grades K-5 serve out of school suspensions. I believe it is important that the Commonwealth provides regular professional development opportunities to our teachers and school resource officers to increase their access to tools aimed at defusing difficult situations that may arise in the classroom. Such opportunities might include mental health first aid training and crisis de-escalation seminars and/or alternative programs such as in-school meditation programs.

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 the federal government moves forward with the Senate's version of the American Health Care Act, Virginia will see an approximate \$1.4 billion cut to Medicaid services that provide essential health care benefits to children, seniors, and low-income individuals and families. Under the per-capita cap system, Virginia will be forced to divert general fund dollars from other programs or generate new forms of revenue to backfill dollars necessary to maintain current Medicaid services and coverage levels. I believe Medicaid services are not only essential to maintain at current levels but also expand to include Virginians at income levels above the current maximum for eligibility. This will mean raising new revenue or achieving savings elsewhere; I believe there are creative alternatives to be considered that do not include raising taxes.

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?

Substance abuse is a complicated multi-dimensional issue. Virginia has made some gains in funding more substance abuse treatment and education programs, but given the scope of the opioid addiction crisis in Virginia, it is important that we keep that progress moving forward by continued funding for first responder education and training for opioid reversal, regular education and training for responsible prescribing, long-term residential treatment for those addicted to opioids, more in-depth study, and reversal of the precursors to addiction (i.e., lack of employment options, depression, etc.).

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?

I am a big proponent of collaboration between agencies and branches of government to provide the most comprehensive, person-centric system to facilitate citizens' ease of navigation between different departments and services. I would like to see more collaboration like that demonstrated by the Virginia Children's Cabinet permeate state government in the Commonwealth and, as Delegate, I would seek to initiate more interdepartmental collaboration.

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?

I think the most significant barrier to mental health for children in Virginia is access to a number of core, comprehensive care services throughout the entire geography of the Commonwealth of Virginia. As Delegate, I will seek to ensure that the General Assembly continues its commitment to comprehensive healthcare for children and that we create policy that supports standardized baseline services across the Commonwealth.

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?

The achievement gap between lower income students and their higher income peers is perpetuated by a number of flaws in our system of public education, beginning with the lack of adequate funding that has yet to return to pre-recession levels. Localities have stepped up in many cases to fill the void; however, as studies from the Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Policy indicate, failure to reinvest in public schools most hurts schools located in areas with high concentrations of poverty. It is critical that we expand our Pre-K programs for the poor and reform school discipline; we can build a consistent foundation and set a precedent for keeping students of all socioeconomic backgrounds in the classroom.