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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?

Although we already know that early learning programs are a proven investment with an exponential return, Virginia continues to fall behind other states in providing our constituents access to quality programs. This is in large part due to our 'non-system' of early learning. In our current system, no one department or agency oversees and regulates all our early learning programs. The Commonwealth currently provides very limited resources for early learning programs. We need to develop policies that help maximize these resources and promote collaboration between departments. Ideally, a long-term goal should be to include pre-K as a part of our K-12 education system. This would make it easier to secure funding for this critical program and to maintain quality control. In the short-term, we need to improve and expand the Virginia Preschool Initiative. We to encourage further private sector buy-in and investment into early learning programs. We also need to follow Alexandria City's example and promote public partnerships with nonprofit and private sector early learning programs.

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 needs to help provide institutional support for these families to make sure these at-risk children do not return to the foster care system. We need to expand the Child Care Subsidy Program, which provides critical financial support to assist families with the increasingly burdensome cost of quality child care. We also need to leverage existing resources and programs to support these families, such as TANF and SNAP benefits. Virginia has an asset limit for SNAP even though the benefits are paid by the federal government. As a member of the Appropriations Committee, my budget amendment increased the TANF benefit for multiple child families. Another amendment marginally increased the monthly benefit. These two things will hopefully make a difference in very poor families.

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?

First, I am sympathetic to the direction Delegate Bell and Senator Lucas were heading last year on expulsion policy. As I listened to the debate, I decided how I would vote, but the version I thought was coming to the House floor did not arrive.

We must give our teachers more tools so that early intervention might help reduce formal law enforcement. Due to budgetary constraints, our schools now face a deficit of almost 15,000 staff members and teachers. Unfortunately, teachers are tasked with covering the slack, serving as social workers, guidance counselors, and a myriad of other roles beyond their job description. With increasing class sizes and lack of quality support staff, it is often easier to rely on these types of disciplinary policies.

In order to address this, we need to develop a plan to fully fund the Standards of Quality Recommendations. I will reintroduce my budget amendment from last session to do so. We need to make sure these support positions are fully included when the State re-benchmarks every two years. We need to change the education funding formula to recognize the number of Title 1 students that a school district educates, by definition these students require more individual attention. With this additional support, hopefully, schools can reduce the reliance on law enforcement agencies.

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 were to significantly slash Medicaid and/or FAMIS, it would instigate a soul-searching challenge to our current fiscal policies. The Commonwealth would need to step up with a combination of drastic budget cuts and/or greatly increase state revenues to cover healthcare costs for some of the most vulnerable Virginians. I would be willing to raise revenue to cover this vulnerable population.

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?

We need to fully fund and then expand the Healthy Families program. We need mentorship programs for young mothers and fathers who were not prepared for parenthood. We need to fund substance abuse programs through the CSBs.

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?

We probably need to provide financial incentives to cooperate. We are now requiring our research universities to work together to receive funding.

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?

One of the most significant barriers to mental health treatment is the lack of accessibility. In response to Senator Creigh Deeds' personal tragedy, the General Assembly has taken steps to significantly expand the Commonwealth's investment in mental health care and to ensure access. Although we have been able to make some progress, the General Assembly must remain vigilant so that nobody falls through the cracks. Funding mental health must remain our commitment through downturns in the economy and thus our revenue stream. As a member of both the Health, Welfare, and Institutions Committee and the Health and Human Resources Appropriations Subcommittee, I will do my best to prioritize mental health when there is another downturn in our economy. Community resources work to prevent tragedy and even higher cost institutional responses. Obviously, this is an area where there is strong citizen support for more resources. Almost every day, in some corner of America, a preventable tragedy occurs because a person has not been able to avail themselves of professional help.

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?

Currently the Commonwealth distributes K-12 funding through a formula called the Local Composite Index (LCI). Unfortunately, this metric does not reflect the composition of the student body. Localities with a large population of students eligible for free or reduced price lunch often come to school not as well prepared as many of their neighbors. Until we solve this problem, added resources and services are needed to close the achievement gap. In recent years, I have worked on securing funds outside of the LCI to better reflect the needs of each school district. If more education funding was allocated based in part on the composition of the student body, and not simply the total land value and population income, we would be better equipped to address a multitude of issues. The Commonwealth also needs to increase its investment in the Virginia Preschool Initiative. Research has show that the first five years of a child's life is critical to their development. We need to ensure that at-risk children are prepared for formal schooling. Pre-school is not an entitlement for a child, but an essential investment in our future as a Commonwealth.