

Voices for Virginia's Children Statement on Governor Northam's 2020-2022 Budget Amendments

RICHMOND, Va. - Today, Governor Northam proposed amendments to the 2020-2022 biennial budget. The proposed budget focuses on funding for Virginia's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, paths for economic recovery and steps to advance a progressive agenda.

Specifically, Northam's recommendations include \$16 million for early childhood education, \$14 million in state and federal resources to implement the 2018 Family First Prevention Services Act and \$27 million for school counselors. However, Northam's budget amendments fall short when it comes to overall child well-being in Virginia.

Voices for Virginia's Children issued the following statement in response to Governor Northam's proposed budget amendments:

"Policymakers are facing tough decisions about how to help children and families recover from the pandemic. We know that the economic and emotional toll on families will impact children for many years to come. Governor Northam's budget today takes important steps to stabilize education funding, support teachers and school counselors and expand access to preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds. However, it misses significant opportunities to expand our mental health supports for children and families and provide greater economic stability.

"Right now, 13% of Virginia's families are facing food insecurity, and for Black families that number is nearly twice that percentage at 25%. When it comes to keeping a roof over your head, 16% of families are facing housing instability. That rate is 36% for Black families. Existing racial and ethnic disparities in this country due to systemic racism are growing because of the pandemic. It's become increasingly clear that more and more families need support to stay above water.

"A disruptive event for children and families requires a radical response, and the pandemic has made it abundantly clear our current collection of safety net programs is not enough to protect families. Policy efforts to change the path forward for Virginia's families will require significant investments to prevent children from entering foster care, provide social-emotional support and screenings for all children. We are asking state leaders to provide the necessary leadership and intentional focus this requires by making the Children's Cabinet permanent with an advisor.

"We look forward to working with the governor and state legislators during the upcoming 2021 General Assembly Session to prioritize the physical and mental needs of children, and do so in a way that puts racial and ethnic equity first in policymaking."

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About Voices for Virginia's Children

Founded in 1994, Voices for Virginia's Children is the Commonwealth's only independent, multi-issue child policy and advocacy organization. We are home to the KIDS COUNT data center for Virginia, which includes more than 200 state- and locality-level indicators on child well-being over time. Using data and independent policy research, we advocate for sound policy solutions and mobilize support to meet the needs of Virginia's children. Learn more at vakids.org.