



Virginia Commission on Youth 2016 Legislative Studies and Initiatives

THE USE OF SEGREGATION IN VIRGINIA’S JUVENILE DETENTION HOMES AND CORRECTIONAL CENTERS PUBLIC COMMENTS IN RED

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>Study Mandate During the 2016 General Assembly Session, Senator Favola introduced Senate Bill 215. The substitute version of SB 215 requires the Board of Juvenile Justice to promulgate regulations on the use of room segregation in juvenile detention homes and juvenile correctional facilities that (i) include relevant definitions, criteria for use of room segregation, frequency of required room checks, training requirements for staff, and follow-up requirements after using room segregation; (ii) allow the use of room segregation only when other less restrictive options have been exhausted and for certain purposes; (iii) allow the use of room segregation only for the minimum amount of time required to address the resident's behavior; (iv) provide to the resident a means of communication with staff during room segregation; (v) specify that if a resident in room segregation exhibits self-injurious behavior, when and under what conditions staff shall consult with a mental health professional; and (vi) detail the circumstances under which the director of the juvenile detention home or juvenile correctional facility shall develop a plan for improved behavioral outcomes for the resident.</p> <p>The House Courts of Justice Committee reviewed this legislation and it was laid on the table. The Commission on Youth received a letter</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Request the Board of Juvenile Justice, in consultation with experts in the fields of mental health and juvenile justice and child-rights advocates, to promulgate regulations on the use of room segregation in juvenile correctional facilities and detention homes. 2. Introduce a §1 bill to direct the Board of Juvenile Justice, in consultation with experts in the fields of mental health and juvenile justice and child-rights advocates, to promulgate regulations on the use of room segregation in juvenile correctional facilities and detention homes. 3. Continue to monitor the Department of Juvenile Justice’s comprehensive review of the residential requirements for juvenile correctional centers and secure juvenile detention centers which began in the summer of 2016, and request presentation updates from the department as needed. <p><u>PUBLIC COMMENTS</u> BJ Brown commented that “The mere fact that each locality makes up their own rules is a red flag for problems.” “It seems difficult to believe that there are no guidelines based on age, length of time for each incident or what constitutes the offense for isolation. Isolation can cause an</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>from the Chair of the House Courts of Justice Committee requesting a review of the bill and the concept it addresses and to make recommendations prior to the 2017 General Assembly Session.</p> <p>Study Finding Segregation in Virginia’s juvenile detention centers and correctional centers is used to address resident and staff safety, facility security, resident discipline, and acute mental health issues of certain residents. Virginia’s current regulations on room confinement, isolation and administrative segregation/confinement provide the rules for the use of segregation.</p>	<p>individual to become a ticking time bomb. It can also cause psychosis, suicide, depression, trauma and violence directed at multiple victims or groups. There is no doubt, isolation is an effective way to cause a lasting memory. However, the actual possibility of a positive result is not usual what occurs. Certainly safety for staff, other children and the child in question is necessary. The outcome of this form of punishment can be devastating.”</p>

**REVIEW OF VIRGINIA’S TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR
NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF) PROGRAM**
PUBLIC COMMENTS IN RED

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>Finding 1 – TANF recipients are not automatically guaranteed housing assistance. Housing affordability can be problematic for families receiving TANF benefits who are attempting to transition from welfare to work. Housing assistance enhances the effects of welfare reform strategies by promoting employment and increasing earnings. While some local public housing programs provide priority housing to certain individuals, e.g., domestic violence survivors who need to relocate due to abuse, TANF recipients are not prioritized for housing services. Moreover, income limits for these programs vary among localities so a TANF recipient may be eligible at a Housing Authority located in one locality but not another.</p> <p>The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) sets income eligibility criteria for housing services based on the median income for each county or metropolitan area. Local Housing Authorities use income limits developed by HUD. There are two types of housing assistance, public housing and Section 8 (Housing Choice Voucher).</p> <p>Public housing comes in all sizes and types, from scattered single-family houses to high-rise apartments for elderly families. HUD sets the lower income limits for public housing at 80% and very low income limits at 50% of the median income for the county or metropolitan area in which the recipient resides. The Virginia Section 8 (Housing Choice Voucher) Program allows very low-income families to choose and lease or purchase safe, decent, and affordable privately owned rental housing. Participants may select a housing unit of their choice, provided these housing units meet the minimum program health and safety requirements. In order to qualify for the Virginia Housing Choice Voucher program, applicants must fulfil certain residency and income requirements. The Virginia Housing</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Request the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA), with input from local housing authorities; evaluate the feasibility of prioritizing housing services for Virginia’s TANF recipients. Such an evaluation will assess the barriers to providing housing assistance to TANF recipients including the time limitations of TANF and any other housing assistance program participation requirements. Request VHDA report findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2018 General Assembly Session. Take no action. <p><u>PUBLIC COMMENTS</u></p> <p>IN SUPPORT</p> <p><u>Option 1</u> The Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) supports Option 1 to have VHDA evaluate the availability of housing assistance for TANF families. Given the inadequacy of TANF cash assistance (benefits fall below 25% of the poverty line everywhere in the state); families receiving TANF clearly cannot afford private housing costs. Safe and affordable (subsidized) housing is a long-term need of people living in deep poverty. A thorough evaluation of currently available housing assistance will inform the Commission’s future actions in this area.</p> <p>The VPLC offers another recommendation that the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) establish a TANF-funded emergency program in 2017 to assist TANF families (and families that received TANF support in the previous 12 months) who need help paying for security deposits, utility deposits, and/or overdue rent to secure/retain affordable housing. VDSS can develop criteria to ensure that such emergency assistance will lead to longer term housing stability.</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>Choice Voucher program gives special eligibility consideration to the elderly, disabled and to families with children. The income eligibility threshold for the housing voucher program is 50% of the median income for the county or metropolitan area in which the family resides. By law, a public housing authority must provide 75% of its vouchers to applicants whose incomes do not exceed 30% of the area median income.</p> <p>As of 2014, the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) listed 9,807 families on local housing agency waiting lists.¹ Of those responding, 682 households indicated they are handicapped or disabled. Over 98% of the total households on the local housing agency waiting lists reported to be extremely low to very low-income.</p>	<p>An employment services worker with a local department of social services (LDSS) expressed support for Option 1 and stated that TANF recipients should be automatically guaranteed housing assistance due to their required participation in the VIEW program. Many TANF recipients are mandated to participate in the VIEW program. Once enrolled in VIEW, TANF recipients are required to begin seeking employment right away up to 35 hours per week, if not already working. Addressing basic housing concerns can possibly alleviate delayed participation in the VIEW program. VHDA may want to consider partnering with agencies such as Habitat for Humanity, encouraging Home Ownership Programs to TANF recipients.</p> <p>ADDITIONAL COMMENTS</p> <p><u>Option 1</u> The Social Action Linking Together (SALT) network commented that most local governments in Northern Virginia have priority populations in their housing plans - formerly homeless or at risk of homelessness, households with persons having special needs, victims of domestic abuse, etc. SALT questioned whether TANF recipients are already included within some of these categories? These priorities are usually established at the local level within an adopted housing plan, and they are based on needs identified within the community. Time limitations are a critical problem with many federal programs, which is why case management and supportive services are needed for assisting these households with employment skills so they can afford housing. The other option is to secure a housing choice voucher to supplement rent. Some local governments are even creating their own local rental supplement programs - Arlington and to a limited extent Fairfax Co and the City of Alexandria.</p> <p>IN OPPOSITION</p> <p><u>Option 1</u> The TANF/Employment Services Program Committee for the Virginia League of Social Services issued comment stating that localities already have the ability to do this through establishing preferences in their local</p>

¹ Virginia Housing Development Authority. (2014). Public Housing Authority (PHA) 5 Year Plan for Fiscal Years 2015 - 2019.

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 1 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>housing plans and through the allocation of funding received by their homelessness continuum of care agencies. Each local public housing authority has the opportunity in their annual plan to establish preferences for access. For example, Charlottesville has a homeless preference. Harrisonburg/Rockingham has preferences for homeless, disabilities, female single head of households and several others. Moving TANF families to the head of the list over the homeless population may cause some issues with localities. If this recommendation is going to proceed, this commenter suggested that representatives from VHDA, HUD and local continuum of care agencies become involved in the discussion.</p>
<p>Finding 2 – Access to child care is essential for TANF families and those transitioning from TANF to the workforce. After housing costs, child care costs can challenge the continued employment and self-sufficiency of low-income parents. Many families pay 30% or more of their income for child care. In FY 2014, the annual cost of child care in Virginia was \$10,458 for an infant, \$7,957 for a four-year old, and \$3,339 for a school-aged child. Child care is a significant component in helping TANF families become self-sufficient and in enabling the working poor to break the cycle of poverty.</p> <p>Virginia’s Child Care Subsidy Program, which is administered by the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) and 120 local departments of social services (LDSS), provides low-income families with financial assistance for child care. The Subsidy is broken down into mandated services and non-mandated services.</p> <p>The following families are prioritized (mandated) for child care services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare (VIEW) & TANF working recipients; • TANF education and training recipients; • Transitional services for TANF/VIEW recipients; and • SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) employment and training recipients. <p>In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, 17,361 were served.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the Virginia Department of Social Services’ (VDSS) efforts to include a component within the Virginia Case Management System (VaCMS) that allows the seamless transition of the TANF child care subsidy from one LDSS to another LDSS. 2. Introduce a budget amendment to increase funds for child care subsidies to the working poor. 3. Support continued efforts to provide market-based subsidies to make quality child care a reality for vulnerable families. 4. Provide resources to assist families in identifying and accessing child care to meet their needs such as non-traditional hours of care, children’s special needs or other considerations. 5. Take no action. <p><u>PUBLIC COMMENTS</u></p> <p><u>IN SUPPORT</u></p> <p><u>Option 1</u> The TANF/Employment Services Program Committee for the Virginia League of Social Services issued comment stating Option 1 is needed; however, this effort is still in the early planning stages.</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>Certain low-income families may also be eligible (non-mandated) for the Child Care Subsidy based on the extent funding is available and if the families meet certain eligibility and non-financial requirements. The following categories that are eligible for child care subsidy services dependent upon the locality’s funding allocation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee Child Care – qualifying families who are not participating in VIEW/TANF working programs or not receiving TANF/VIEW transitional services; and • Head Start Wrap-Around Child Care – families are eligible for the subsidy due to their child’s participation in Head Start. <p>In FY 2016, 21,394 children received child care services under this non-mandated category.</p> <p>The Advisory Group learned that there are waiting lists in many localities for Child Care Subsidy under the non-mandated category. As of August 2016, there were 11,877 families and 19,055 children on the statewide waiting list (TANF working families and VIEW participants are mandated and not put on waiting lists for the Child Care Subsidy).</p> <p>Families who are receiving the Child Care Subsidy and are not considered mandated may lose access to this benefit should they move from one locality to another. When Child Care Subsidy recipients move, they notify the new locality of their need for child care services. Child care services in the original locality cease and the family reapplies in the new locality. These families are then placed on a locality’s waiting list, even if they were receiving the child care subsidy in the locality where they previously resided.</p> <p>The updated regulations for the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), the federal regulation that governs Virginia’s Child Care Subsidy Program, calls for states to maintain a family’s authorization for services should they move within the state. A workgroup convened by the Virginia Department of Social Services is currently working on this transfer process. TANF will migrate into the Virginia Case Management System (VaCMS) this fall. Both programs will be in the same case management system for the first time. This effort will allow cases to be transferred so that families will not need to re-</p>	<p><u>Option 2</u> The TANF/Employment Services Program Committee for the Virginia League of Social Services issued comment stating that this was one of the most important recommendations to target the “working poor” in the Commonwealth. Part of the problem facing TANF families and child care could also be addressed by Finding 3, Option 1.a. by extending the time period families can receive transitional services. Families who are leaving VIEW and transitional programs go to the bottom of the Fee Child Care waiting list and may result in the loss of work and possible return to TANF, if the VIEW clock allows. Otherwise, the client will be without a job or cash assistance. That alone, however will not address those families who are already working and not eligible for TANF. An increase in the funds for Fee Child Care families would address this need to a certain extent. That may require the use of General Funds.</p> <p><u>Options 2 & 4</u> An employment services worker with a local department of social services (LDSS) expressed support for Options 2 & 4. TANF Families are often required to participate in the VIEW program, unless medically exempted from the VIEW program. The VIEW program currently mandates customers to participate 35 hours per week in a component to promote job readiness and employment.</p> <p>A barrier to families in obtaining and maintaining employment is child care assistance. TANF recipients frequently work in minimum wage jobs, often making these families underemployed and unable to pay for child care expenses. Introducing a budget amendment to increase funds for care subsidies to the working families receiving TANF and transitioning to the workforce may help families maintain their current employment. Option 4 should be a requirement of all agencies to provide TANF recipients with additional information regarding accessing child care to meet their needs such as non-traditional hours of care, children’s special needs or other considerations.</p> <p><u>Options 1 through 4</u> The Virginia Association of Local Human Services Officials (VALHSO) has identified those recommendations related to supporting non-TANF child care subsidies as high priority. Funding for child care has</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>apply for the subsidy.</p>	<p>consistently proven to provide stability needed for low income working families. A central component of welfare reform was that the law allows states to transfer some of their TANF block grant dollars to the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) up to a cap (30%). In addition, under TANF, states can spend TANF or state Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds directly on child care without having to transfer the funds to CCDBG and without any cap or limit. In 2014, Virginia spent approximately 20% of federal and state TANF funds on child care. The current appropriation for FY 2017 is \$46,196,188, or approximately 29.2% and VDSS has plans to extend this to the maximum allowable.</p> <p>As of October 2, 2016, the number of families on the statewide wait list is about equal to the number of families currently served and is double the number of families that currently receive fee child care.</p> <p>Given that the need for child care for low income families is significantly greater than the funding available, VALHSO supports continued efforts to increase available funding for child care subsidies to the working poor.</p> <p>VALHSO also supports Option 1 for the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to include a component in the Virginia Case Management System (VaCMS) to allow for the seamless transition of TANF child care subsidy from one local department of social services to another. VDSS already has a work group in place that is planning to implement this change. A review of cases for the past fiscal year indicates that the number of TANF cases transferred in during the year is approximately equal to the number of cases transferred out. The VaCMS system currently allows for the system to over-encumber, thereby allowing localities to add TANF recipients and to manage the expenditures by attrition.</p> <p>The Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) commented that the Commission’s study confirms the importance of affordable child care services for TANF families and those transitioning from TANF to the workforce. The VPLC supports all four recommendations to improve Virginia’s subsidized child care system. Option 2 – to increase funding for child care subsidies – must be a top priority.</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 2 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>The Social Action Linking Together (SALT) network commented that some of the barriers related to work readiness are poor mental and physical health, education less than high school, no recent work experience and lack of English-language proficiency. Two other impediments are having a child less than one year of age and having a handicapped child. Additional barriers of concern for SALT include the absence of child-care for pre-school children and those whose parents work at night, lack of before- and-after-school care, paucity of employment opportunities in the community, mental and physical abuse, substance abuse, and caregiving responsibilities for aged and handicapped parents or relatives. Providing substantially increased funding for child care is critical. The absence of child care is a primary reason why mothers either cannot go to work or have to leave work. There are waiting lists of eligible low-income working families who do not have child care subsidies. Limiting subsidies to only the poorest families, so that those who get jobs with decent salaries lose eligibility for child care subsidies, is not the answer. Increased co-payments for child care charged to the recipients, making the cost unmanageable or reducing the rates paid to caregivers, which forces them out of business, is not the answer. Adequate funding plus extending child care for two years after exiting the program is a prerequisite for successfully transitioning to self-sufficiency.</p> <p>An individual commenter expressed support for any action that would increase access to child care for TANF recipients. The cost of child care is equitable to college tuition yet many families leave TANF earning far below living wages.</p> <p>IN OPPOSITION No comments were received in opposition to the proposed options.</p>
<p>Finding 3 – Virginia’s VIEW recipients receive a comprehensive array of supportive and transitional services that help them to maintain employment and achieve self-sufficiency. Virginia’s TANF program is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. States receive grants to design and operate programs that accomplish one of the purposes of the TANF program: 1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children can be cared</p>	<p>1. a. Introduce legislation/budget amendment to extend transitional services available to Virginia’s VIEW recipients from 12 months to 18 months. Virginia’s TANF funds appropriated for expanded/discretionary services may be utilized to fund this expansion.</p> <p>- or-</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>for in their own homes;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Reduce the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage; 3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and 4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. <p>The Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare Program (VIEW) is the work-related portion of Virginia’s TANF program which requires participants to be employed or engaged in a work activity. There is a 60-month federal lifetime limit on receipt of TANF cash assistance. TANF recipients who are in VIEW receive 24-months of cash benefits, plus one year of transitional benefits. After this time period, they must wait two years before they can again qualify for TANF. VIEW recipients will be discontinued from the program if their incomes increase above the 100% federal poverty level (FPL).</p> <p>With a few exceptions, TANF recipients must participate in work activities. Upon entry into VIEW, the participant signs an Agreement of Personal Responsibility outlining the responsibilities of the client and agency. An employability assessment is then conducted which evaluates work history, education history, job skills, functional literacy level, and job readiness skills. An Activity and Service Plan is also developed, which indicates the activities the participant will engage in to obtain employment. Work activities include job search, job readiness, unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, community work experience, public service, on-the-job training, vocational education, job skills training, English as a Second Language (ESL), Adult Basic Education (ABE) and the General Equivalence Diploma (GED). Core job activities include unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, Community Work Experience Program (CWEP), on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance, public service, vocational education and training.</p> <p>Funding for Virginia’s TANF program is dependent on the Commonwealth meeting a 50% work participation rate (WPR). Failure to meet the WPR results in a five percent reduction in the TANF block grant, which is \$7.9 million. In federal FY 2014, the</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. b. Request VDSS to assess the feasibility and fiscal impact of extending transitional services available to Virginia’s VIEW recipients from 12 months to 18 months. Request that VDSS report findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2018 General Assembly Session. 2. Request VDSS to assess the feasibility and fiscal impact of increasing Virginia’s TANF income eligibility threshold for VIEW participants. Request that VDSS report findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2018 General Assembly Session. 3. Introduce legislation/budgetary language for VDSS develop policies for an improved temporary medical condition exemption determination process and the transition of TANF cases which are exempt due to a temporary medical condition. Such policies shall have the goal of expeditiously transitioning TANF’s medically exempt cases to VIEW or facilitate their application to appropriate disability benefits and similar to the Veterans’ Administrations’ Stabilization Compensation Grant. 4. Introduce legislation/budgetary language to fund designated staff to work with the TANF population that are exempt from VIEW due to a temporary medical condition to either transition them to VIEW, facilitate approval of disability benefits, or otherwise resolve medical issues. <p><i><u>Potential revision to Options 3 and 4 based on public comment:</u></i> <i>Request the Virginia League of Social Services’ (VLSEE) TANF/Employment Services Committee, in conjunction with VDSS; review Virginia’s temporary medical exemption condition policies for VIEW cases. This review will include recommendations for improving Virginia’s existing temporary medical condition exemption determination and re-evaluation policies with focus on the goal of expeditiously transitioning TANF’s medically exempt cases to VIEW or facilitating their application to appropriate disability benefits programs. VDSS and the VLSEE’s TANF/Employment Service Committee will report findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth prior to the 2018 General Assembly Session.</i></p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>Commonwealth’s WPR was 43.9%. Virginia’s actual target was 32.3% because of Virginia’s caseload reduction credit – a percent reduction in the required WPR for each percentage reduction in the TANF caseload since 2005. The Advisory Group learned that Virginia does extremely well with workforce participation and usually ranks in the top ten states to achieve employment for TANF recipients. According to VDSS, since 1995 there have been 251,499 TANF participants. Of this number, 240,356 participated in a work activity and 169,366 entered employment. For FY 2016, there were 21,041 TANF participants with 19,084 participating in a work activity. The number of TANF recipients who entered employment was 12,939. Their average monthly earnings were \$1,192.</p> <p><u>TANF Supportive and Transitional Services</u> In addition to cash assistance, TANF recipients are eligible for a wide range of benefits and services addressing conditions and causes of economic and social disadvantage of children and families. The intent of providing these supportive services is to remove barriers to the individual’s work participation and to stabilize employment. As noted previously, this includes child care if such assistance enables the individual to work. Other supportive services include medical assistance, transportation and/or work related expenses, and emergency intervention. According to VDSS, as of September 2016, 71.26% TANF recipients received Medicaid and SNAP benefits. Other services available to TANF recipients include energy assistance, housing assistance, Women’s Infants and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch/Breakfast Program.</p> <p>In addition, transitional services are available for up to one year after TANF assistance ends. Transitional services that may be available when a participant’s TANF assistance ceases are transportation assistance, child care assistance, employment, and training services. Medical assistance, including transitional medical assistance for families with a working parent who becomes ineligible for TANF financial assistance because of increased earnings, is also available. Financial assistance of \$50 per month, if the participant is employed and is working at least 30 hours per week or more at the time of TANF closure.</p>	<p>5. Provide funding for training for LDSS workers who work with TANF recipients to fulfill the goals of self-sufficiency.</p> <p><i>Potential revision to Option 5 based on public comment: Introduce legislation which mandates training for LDSS workers and emphasizes best practices in working with TANF recipients and helping them achieve self-sufficiency.</i></p> <p>6. Request a presentation from the Secretary of Technology and Finance and the Commonwealth’s Chief Information Officer on Executive Directive 7 on increasing the use of shared data and analytics among Virginia agencies with focus on enhancing government transparency, increasing operational efficiency and effectiveness, and minimizing duplication with particular emphasis on addressing Virginia’s welfare and health and human services’ programs for children and families.</p> <p>7. Take no action.</p> <p><u>PUBLIC COMMENTS</u></p> <p>IN SUPPORT</p> <p><u>Option 1.a.</u> The Virginia Benefit Programs Organization (BPRO) TANF/VIEW Committee expressed support for expanding transitional supportive services to 18 or 24 months and suggested a step-down approach to help clients work toward self-sufficiency as they transition off social services assistance. Clients who are receiving transitional services are able to continue to receive case management along with some of the following transitional services based on the local agencies’ supportive service guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transitional Child Care with copay (this may also include ongoing over the market rates a client may already be paying) • Transitional Medical, Dental, and Vision Support • Transitional Work Related Expenses • Transitional Emergency Intervention • Transitional Transportation

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><u>Temporary Medical Condition Exemption to VIEW participation</u> All individuals must participate in VIEW unless otherwise exempt. There are eight exemptions to this work requirement. The exemptions include caregiving for minor children, enrollment in school or vocational training, a temporary medical condition that prevent entry into at least 20 hours per week of employment/training, an individual who is incapacitated, as determined by receipt of Social Security Disability benefits or Supplemental Security Income, an individual 60 years or older, an individual who is the sole caregiver of another member of the household who is incapacitated whose presence is essential for the care of the family member, and a six week exemption to a parent who has given birth to a child.</p> <p>If the individual is unable to participate in VIEW for at least 20 hours per week because of a temporary medical condition substantiated by a medical statement, the eligibility worker must obtain a new medical and re-evaluate the exempt individual's incapacity immediately following the anticipated end of the incapacity originally noted on the medical statement. If the duration indicated on the medical statement is for longer than 12 months, or is identified as permanent, a new form must be obtained every 12 months.</p> <p>As of April 2016, there were a total of 1,727 cases that were exempt from VIEW. Of this number, 1,433 were exempt from VIEW due the temporary medical exemption that prevents entry into at least 20 hours per week of employment/training (83% of exempt VIEW cases). Because the medical exemption requirement does not require work activity, many of these TANF recipients' barriers to self-sufficiency continue to mount. Recipients with severe medical exemptions may actually be eligible for Social Security disability benefits in lieu of TANF.</p> <p><u>Use of Data</u> Human service programs may place focus on the administration of individual programs rather than the outcomes that those programs and services are intended to produce. Families are enrolled in the programs for which they are eligible and they receive a particular set of services. The services families receive may not be integrated with</p>	<p>The BPRO TANF/VIEW Committee proposes a step down approach during the transitional period from months 13 to 18 or 24 as the client shifts from social services support to self-sufficiency. During these additional months, the Committee proposes limiting the supportive services that are offered and continue the case management to help the client make the transition. This step-down approach will help clients work on becoming more self-sufficient after beginning a job so their chances of success are greater. They will have to learn to take on more responsibilities during the transitional period, but still have the support of the agency. Milestone meetings should take place with the VIEW worker at 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, and 24 months, during which time the clients and workers will explore budgeting, money management, financial planning, etc. to help prepare the clients for being completely off of VIEW Transitional Supportive Services.</p> <p>The Virginia Association of Local Human Services Officials (VALHSO) has identified those recommendations related to expanding transitional services as being the most important. VALHSO supports introducing legislation to extend all transitional services available to Virginia's VIEW recipients. VALHSO recommends extending transitional child care and VIEW transitional supportive services for up to two years. Virginia's TANF funds appropriated for expanded/discretionary services may be utilized to fund this expansion without an additional budget amendment. The current projected surplus is expected to exceed the amounts estimated in the Commission's study. However, if the TANF-Unemployed Parent (TANF-UP) program is included, a budget amendment of approximately \$344,530 would be required as these TANF cases are funded with state General Funds (TANF-UP provides assistance to families with two able-bodied parents). Currently, VIEW clients are eligible for transitional supportive services including emergency intervention services, transportation, work-related expenses, and medical and dental services once the TANF case closes. Extending these services and transitional child care to two years for all TANF recipients would give the clients additional time to establish themselves in the workforce and have a much greater chance of sustaining self-sufficiency. Per VDSS, the total estimated cost to expand the transitional services as outlined above is approximately \$574,218 per month. Total estimated annual cost is estimated to be approximately \$7 million.</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>other programs nor utilize data to maximize results. Increased data sharing and analysis can allow for the identification of best practices in the administration of state programs and services, allow programs to be more efficiently and effectively administered, and be accomplished in such a way that assures the protection of individuals' privacy.</p> <p>In May of 2016, Governor Terry McAuliffe signed Executive Directive 7 to leverage the use of shared data and data analytics among state agencies to improve services and outcomes, maximize the use of resources, and increase the return on investment of citizens' tax dollars. The directive requires a review of all Commonwealth systems, practices, processes, policies, applicable laws, and regulations governing the sharing of data across agencies. The Executive Directive also calls for the creation of an inventory of state agencies' data analytics assets, capabilities, best practices and data-sharing activities. The Secretaries of Technology and Finance and Chief Information Officer are to report their findings from this effort no later than October 15, 2016.</p>	<p>VALHSO also commented that extending the transitional child care for an additional year (two years total) would also increase the probability of ongoing self-sufficiency. Most TANF clients enter the workforce in entry level, low-paying positions. Local social services agencies have waiting lists for Fee Child Care and these clients cannot afford to pay the entire cost of child care until funds become available for them. The availability of child care services for two years gives them the opportunity to work their way into higher paying positions that would better support the high cost of child care.</p> <p>VALHSO then commented that extending the transitional payment for an additional year (for a total of two years) would have a positive impact on the work participation rate. An increase in the work participation rate has a potential to generate additional federal funding for the TANF block grant.</p> <p>The Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) stated that Virginia must invest more in its VIEW program. VIEW is the only vehicle in the state that is specifically intended to transition TANF families to self-sufficiency through work. When VIEW fails to deliver that result, families are at risk of falling into even deeper poverty due to TANF time-limits. The VPLC strongly supports Option 1.a. which would extend transitional services for VIEW participants to 18 months. TANF families must overcome many challenges to truly become self-sufficient. An additional 6 months of transitional services could very well lead to more success. In addition, – beyond those 18 months – many families will continue to need support. That is why the Commission's recommendations regarding child care and our recommendation regarding housing are so important for not just TANF recipients, but also for former-TANF recipients and other very low income families.</p> <p>The VPLC stated that the Commission should also endorse another recommendation – to ensure that parents who are former-TANF and former-VIEW recipients have access to medical assistance on an ongoing basis. Medicaid terminates when parents leave TANF and VIEW and their family income is higher than 30-50% FPL (depending on where they live). The children keep Medicaid or FAMIS (up to 205% FPL), but their</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 3 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>parents often become uninsured, just when they are trying to make it on their own. Virginia needs to close its Medicaid coverage gap to assist parents who have income up to 138% FPL. Without ongoing medical assistance, other efforts to promote/ensure self-sufficiency are incomplete.</p> <p>An individual commenter expressed support for any action that would increase access to child care. TANF is a program designed to assist families with minor children achieve self-sufficiency. Employment is the key to self-sufficiency and child care is a vital need for parents to maintain employment. The cost of child care is equitable to college tuition yet many families leave TANF earning far below living wages. Families who lose child care at the conclusion of the TANF transitional period find themselves at the bottom of the fee waiting list: currently 12,000 families strong. This individual noted support for extending transitional services to 24 months from the current 12 months. Transitional services are only available to working families, ensuring that necessary child care continues while families maintain employment. In any economy, people who do gain a foothold into the labor market will not see any significant increase to base pay via pay raises from employers in the short term (12 months) to sustainable “living” wages. Providing an extra year will allow children to mature and become more self-reliant themselves such that the cost of care will diminish (perhaps to before/after school, or less expensive care than the cost of infant care.)</p> <p><u>Option 1.b.</u> The TANF/Employment Services Program Committee for the Virginia League of Social Services recommended proceeding with this approach. It is important to know the fiscal impact of extending these services. In light of the TANF surplus shrinking, it is only a matter of a few years until other programs using TANF funding would be affected by this Option. It is important to have TANF funding used for TANF programs. In addition, we recommend a study to possibly expand the definition of diversionary assistance – front end employment supports for working poor who need temporary supportive services to maintain employment.</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 3 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>Option 2 The TANF/Employment Services Program Committee for the Virginia League of Social Services recommended proceeding with this approach as well. Raising the income eligibility limit would allow more of the “working poor” to access funding and supportive services.</p> <p>An individual commenter stated the Commonwealth should create a diversionary program focused on front-end employment supports for working poor who need temporary supportive services to maintain employment. This would increase support for working families while preventing job loss in order to qualify for TANF cash assistance. The current screening limit is 185% of the TANF eligibility limit. The current diversionary program screens at 185% of need, and the family must have lost income, had reduced income, or the delay in the start of income. This diversionary program grants 4 months of TANF in one lump sum to take care of one-time expenses, such as a car repair. This diversionary program would only assist someone who is not currently working, or is working less than 20 hours per week at minimum wage.</p> <p>Gross income is compared to 185% before allowing any earned income or standard deductions that mirror net take home. The 185% screening limit for a family of three averages \$649.00 (across 3 locality groupings). That is the equivalent of 21 hours per week at minimum wage, at which a family of 3 earns too much to qualify for TANF. Establish a higher screening limit in order for working families to access diversionary funds to handle short term needs in order to maintain employment, such as a car repair, unexpected medical or dental bill, utility or housing emergency.</p> <p>Options 1.a., 1.b., & 2 The Social Action Linking Together (SALT) network supports Option 1.-a-b; & 2--SALT supports policies allowing TANF participants to pursue postsecondary education and extending the time TANF participants can count college or vocational training toward work requirements for receiving benefits up to 2 years. Virginia should broaden the activities counting toward the work participation rate and create programs that support alternative pathways to work for families needing more than limited job search assistance. These families have the most to gain from receiving assistance, but, under the current program structure, incentives</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 3 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>and new strategies are necessary for improving employment prospects of TANF participants. Virginia should expand types of activities that can be utilized and count toward their work requirements in order to serve more families with significant barriers to employment. The current TANF program allows too few participants to count time spent in vocational education and training as complying with the work requirement for too limited of a time period. Many vocational educational programs, including associate degrees, require 24 months for completion.</p> <p><u>Option 5</u> The Virginia Benefit Programs Organization (BPRO) TANF/VIEW Committee support additional training in order to keep up with today’s trends and programs as the Committee looks at leading the TANF recipient to self-sufficiency. The VIEW worker currently provides case management to those assigned to TANF/VIEW. The Committee believes that annual professional development should be mandatory for TANF/VIEW workers. Trainings or workshops should include some of the following: money management, budgeting, financial planning, resume and cover letter writing, interviewing skills, mentoring skills, job development etc. Should VIEW be asked to work with the medically exempt population who are currently receiving TANF, additional training would also be needed by staff to help this population be able to take the next step for themselves whether that is applying for Social Security or assistance with getting them the proper supports so that they are able to return to work. As TANF and VIEW workers, the Committee members encounter hard to serve populations and it their job to help these clients reach goals of self-sufficiency and self-reliance. It is imperative that TANF/VIEW workers continue to stay up to date with the proper training in order to best serve the client.</p> <p><u>Option for the Commission’s Consideration</u> An employment services worker with a local department of social services (LDSS) commented that VIEW is 20 years old and new legislation to reform the program needs to be introduced. The goal of this program is to promote self-sufficiency for the “working poor;” however, there are many ways in which this program is failing to do so. This commenter stated there are several different ways in which the VIEW program can maximize local partnership and provide VIEW customer’s</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 3 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>with tools to achieve economic independence.</p> <p>1. Customer's entering the VIEW program should be mandated to take a month long financial component. In this initial component (VIEW Financial Management Component), VIEW customers would about budgeting, saving, investments, credit, receive assistance with credit repair, and opening a savings/checking account etc. Local VIEW programs would partner with local banks to assist customers in opening up savings/checking accounts if they choose.</p> <p>Additionally, representatives of the Virginia Individual Development Accounts (VIDA) can provide customers with information regarding the VIDA program and establish accounts if they desire.</p> <p>A guest speaker from HUD or the local Redevelopment and Housing, or Habitat for Humanity come can provide information to customer's regarding purchasing a home.</p> <p>In the VIEW Financial Management Component, each customer will be provided with a financial advisor from a local bank or community program (i.e. Virginia Corporative Extension) to provide continual assistance to customers throughout their participation in the VIEW program.</p> <p>Additionally, exploring new legislation mandating VIEW customer's save a portion of their TANF check (5%) in a VIEW Certificate of Deposit (CD) disbursed to customers once their 24 months of participation has ended? Encouraging customers to save a portion of their TANF benefits reinforces the themes of Financial Management, Self- Sufficiency, Self- Responsibility and Time-limited Governmental Assistance.</p> <p>VIEW programs may see a decrease in customers needing transitional supportive services because, they have been given tools to help them manage their finances and additional they have saved or have been made to save money that they are use the month after their 24 month clock has expired.</p> <p>2. The GED Component should be considered a core activity in the VIEW program and mandated for customers who do not have their GED/High</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 3 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>school diploma. Society has changed greatly since 20 years ago when the VIEW program was first introduced in the State of Virginia. Research has shown that education is a factor in whether or not a person will be successful in life.</p> <p>In most jobs, a college level education is a prerequisite for most job listings and without it. Plenty of college graduates are unemployed or underemployed. If recent college graduates are struggling to find adequate employment; how much more will VIEW participants struggle to find employment who do not have at least a GED? On average 4 out of every 10 VIEW participants do not have a GED.</p> <p>America is insisting on higher levels of education, technological knowledge and innovation. VIEW participants need to keep abreast of the changes in order to compete in society and with the world. Self-sufficiency starts with a basic fundamental education. By not addressing the underemployment of VIEW participants, governmental programs will continue to have to provide an increase in supportive/transitional services to fill in that gap for VIEW participants.</p> <p>Each VIEW participant entering the VIEW program should at least have his or her GED by the time their first 24-month clock expires. Now, customers wishing to continue with a vocational trade or post-secondary education can do so at their leisure with the assistance of the VIEW program; however, it will not be required.</p> <p>IN OPPOSITION No comments were received in opposition to the proposed options.</p>
<p>Finding 4 – Virginia’s locality groupings need to be re-assessed to ensure they are keeping up with current costs of living. Eligibility for TANF is dependent upon a variety of factors including the families’ income and the total number of dependents in the household. In addition, Virginia has a three-tiered locality grouping structure to establish payment amounts for the TANF program. Virginia’s locality grouping structure was established in 1974 and is based on the shelter costs in localities. Each locality is placed in a locality grouping which determines payment levels for recipients of</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Request the Virginia Board of Social Services to review the statewide locality groupings utilized by LDSS determining TANF payment amounts and assess the feasibility and fiscal impact of combining Locality Groupings I and II for the purposes of TANF cash benefits and using the Group II rates for the new group. 2. Take no action.

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>TANF in that locality. Therefore, monthly TANF assistance payments are based on the number of eligible persons in the assistance unit and the locality grouping in which the family resides. A family of three in a locality designated Group I receives a standard of assistance in the amount of \$307. A family of three in a locality designated Group II receives \$336. A family of three in a locality designated Group III receives \$409.</p> <p>The Advisory Group learned that the current system might not reflect the current cost- of-living in some of Virginia’s localities. However, modifications made to Virginia’s locality groupings would increase the amount of public assistance a substantial number of TANF recipients would receive. This would have a fiscal impact. Additionally, the General Assembly appropriates TANF funds instead of General Funds for other eligible programs. The TANF appropriations to these expanded programs will likely have to be reduced if modifications to the current locality grouping structure are made.</p> <p>Pursuant to 22VAC40-293-20, a locality may individually approach the Virginia Board of Social Services and petition for a change of the standard of assistance locality groupings by approval of the state board. The local board of social services shall request the change in writing to the State Board of Social Services and provide information on fair market rent data along with a comparison of shelter costs in the petitioning locality and adjacent localities.</p>	<p><u>PUBLIC COMMENTS</u></p> <p>IN SUPPORT</p> <p><u>Option 1</u> The TANF/Employment Services Program Committee for the Virginia League of Social Services expressed support for this option but noted that it was the Committee’s belief that this was not a priority at this time. There is currently a mechanism which would allow localities to petition for re-assignment.</p> <p>The Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) commented that the current locality groupings which determine the level of TANF cash assistance represent an antiquated approach to public assistance which needs to be completely phased out. It should be replaced with a single benefit level statewide and coupled with a housing cost supplement to assist those TANF families who have higher, actual housing expenses. Therefore, the VPLC supports Option 1 (moving all Group I localities to Group II) as an interim step – but it should be implemented in 2017, without delay. As a second step, the VPLC recommend that a single statewide benefit level be established and coupled with a housing supplement. VDSS established the groupings decades ago and has failed to initiate necessary reviews or adjustments. As a result, the TANF locality groupings are now completely out-of-date, arbitrary, and inequitable. Nearly all other public benefit programs in Virginia use financial eligibility rules and benefit levels that are uniform statewide (e.g. SNAP, FAMIS, and ongoing Medicaid for children, pregnant women, elderly, disabled, Plan First, and Breast Cancer treatment.) [Note: Medicaid for parents and the Medicaid “spenddown” program for individuals with higher income were designed to follow the TANF locality groupings, but Medicaid locality groupings are no longer exactly the same. Medicaid also has some adjustments to provider payments in northern Virginia.] Because TANF benefits have not kept up with inflation and are woefully inadequate throughout the Commonwealth, a comparison of rental costs in different localities no longer has any meaning. The maximum TANF benefit for a family of 3 in Northern Virginia is only \$389/month – not enough to pay for housing, utilities, and other basic necessities anywhere in Virginia. The locality system for cash assistance no longer makes sense. It should be</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 4 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>phased out as quickly as possible.</p> <p>The Social Action Linking Together (SALT) network commented that the cost of proving lodging in a homeless shelter is more than four times greater than the TANF benefits for a family of four. In addition to the high price tag on shelter care for the homeless is the damaging emotional cost to children forced to live in shelters. One five year old of a TANF family expressed the fear and lack of security homelessness creates by telling his counselor, “Everything is gone, maybe my mother will leave too.” For other children, there is the humiliation of going to school on a bus used for transporting the homeless and the loss of childhood joy. Locally agencies, the churches, and civic groups are expending funds to prevent evictions, but the difference between TANF public assistance income and housing costs is so great that the needs are not and cannot be met. Other benefits received by TANF families do not offset the insufficiency of the TANF grants. For example, the TANF grants in every locality are less than one-fifth of the official poverty level. The locality groupings proposal is only a small step in beginning to address the inadequate TANF benefits. This step is however, one SALT urges the Commission to take. The highest priority, when considering welfare reform in Virginia, needs to be adequate TANF benefits. SALT urges the Commission to begin the process of raising TANF benefit levels.</p> <p>An employment services worker with a local department of social services (LDSS) expressed support for Option 1.</p> <p>IN OPPOSITION No comments were received in opposition to the proposed options.</p>
<p>Finding 5 – There is a structural imbalance in TANF funding. In Virginia, TANF is funded through an annual \$158.2 million federal block grant. The Commonwealth has flexibility to design/fund programs that address the needs of Virginia’s low-income families. Virginia is required to spend \$128 million annually in General Funds known as Maintenance of Effort (MOE.) This represents 75% of the amount the state spent on welfare spending in 1994. A significant portion of TANF funds (\$74.9 million) goes to direct services to families under purposes 1 and 2. State and local state operations are</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Support the General Assembly’s efforts that ensure that Virginia’s TANF program is adequately funded and ensure that the primary purposes of TANF are maintained. 2. Take no action.

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>\$53.6 million and \$2 million is reserved for a new eligibility system. States may also transfer up to 30% of the block grant for programs under the Child Care and Development Block Grant, also called the Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) and Social Services Block Grant (SSBG). Virginia has transferred \$15.6 million to the CCDF for At-Risk Child Care and \$2.5 million for Head Start. Virginia has also transferred \$6.4 million to the SSBG for local start support and \$9.4 million for services under Virginia’s Children’s Services Act (CSA). This totals \$33.9 million of TANF funds transferred to both of these federal grants.</p> <p>According to the Administration for Children and Families, in FY 2015, Virginia spent approximately 60% of TANF and state MOE on the combination of basic assistance which includes work, education, and training activities as well as child care. The remaining funds were for program management, transfers to the SSBG, other activities, and non-recurrent short-term benefits. Twenty-five states spent less than half of their TANF and MOE funds combined on these activities.</p> <p>In addition to the TANF cash assistance program administered by LDSS, TANF can be used to fund a variety of programs and services known as “expanded funding.” These programs must meet at least one of the four purposes of the TANF program and provide services to both families receiving TANF and to other low-income families who have transitioned off the TANF cash assistance program, or are at risk of becoming TANF recipients. Expanded funding is allocated from the TANF block grant and was over \$21 million in both FY 2017 and FY 2018. Expanded funding is currently appropriated for the following programs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Healthy Families (\$9.0 million) – Domestic Violence Grants (\$3.3 million) – Community Action Agencies (\$4.25 million) – Comprehensive Health Investment Project (\$2.4 million) – Boys and Girls Clubs (\$1 million) – Resource Mothers (\$1 million) – Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Grants (\$185,725) <p>FY 2016 closed with a TANF surplus/savings of \$70.5 million.</p>	<p>PUBLIC COMMENTS</p> <p>IN SUPPORT</p> <p><u>Option 1</u> The TANF/Employment Services Program Committee for the Virginia League of Social Services supports this option, as the TANF/VIEW population should have priority for the use of these funds. Current research shows that states are not fully funding their work programs which may lead to lower outcomes.</p> <p>The Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) has noted that there is a need to realign TANF spending to ensure that the primary purposes of the program are being met. The VPLC supports Option 1, but would amend it to require that at least 75% of TANF spending is for actual cash assistance and direct, supportive services for Virginia’s poorest children and their families. Other recommendations noted herein would be funded through this proposed reallocation.</p> <p>An employment services worker with a local department of social services (LDSS) expressed support for Options 1 & 3. Option 1, to support the General Assembly’s efforts which ensure that Virginia’s TANF program is adequately funded and ensure that the primary purposes of TANF are maintained.</p> <p>The TANF program is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. States receive block grants to design and operate programs that accomplish one of the purposes of the TANF program. States can use federal TANF and state MOE dollars to meet any of the four goals set out in the 1996 law:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives 2. End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage 3. Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies 4. Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p>However, there remains a structural imbalance in TANF funding and the challenge with the TANF surplus is making sure that long-term commitments are sustainable. Projected surpluses/savings for FY 2017 were \$48.1 million and in FY 2018 were \$20.7 million. Virginia is overspending \$20 million over the federal TANF appropriation each year. In FY 2019, Virginia may have a deficit if TANF funding remains at current levels and if caseloads start to increase. It is critical to remember that the Commonwealth must ensure there is sufficient funding to meet the primary purpose of TANF, financial assistance and supportive services to needy eligible families and children. If there is a recession, funds appropriated to programs pursuant to these purposes could lose funding to fulfill the primary purposes of TANF.</p>	<p>The General Assembly should also pursue efforts to work with eligibility workers and view employment services workers across the state to draft necessary reforms to the TANF/VIEW program in order to achieve goals 2 & 3. Serious reform needs to change this program that is 20 years old and failing to provide families with adequate assistance in order promote self-sufficiency through job preparation and work and develop new methods for considering promoting marriage in the 21st century.</p> <p>The Social Action Linking Together (SALT) network commented that using TANF money exclusively for TANF purposes is the best way to help families that strive to make the transition from welfare dependency to economic self-sufficiency. Making welfare reform work in Virginia should be the highest priority. Since the commencement of welfare reform under the Clinton administration, SALT advocates have been urging state legislators to do a number of things required for making welfare reform work. A major first step forward would be refraining from “supplantation,” a gimmick used by state legislators that results in the reduction of TANF funding, funding clearly intended to be used for direct assistance to families. Next, invest in education and job training programs; then increase the cash benefits for families in order to keep up with inflation (since TANF was created, there have been only two increases in the benefit); finally, provide an increase for subsistence—making sure that families have a roof over their heads, food for the table, and clothing. These are all steps that can be taken to protect and advance the human dignity of our most vulnerable citizens.</p> <p>During the past several years, the federal TANF Block Grant was used as an informal “rainy day fund,” a financial source for supporting programs that had previously been funded with state General Funds. It’s time that state revenue be dedicated to restoring the General Funds support for all traditional state funded programs, so that federal funds can be used for their intended purpose—namely, to provide adequate safety net subsistence services and job training to move families from welfare to economic self-sufficiency.</p> <p>Spending on cash assistance is insufficient. Per the federal block grant structure, the amount of TANF received by Virginia is fixed, not decreasing even during an economic downturn. Virginia’s TANF Block</p>

Findings/Conclusions	Recommendations and Public Comments
<p><i>Finding 5 (cont.)</i></p>	<p>Grant annual funding from the federal government is \$158 million, never changing based on caseload increases or decreases—it remains constant. The steep caseload decline from 70,797 families in June 1995 to 22,298 in June 2016, a decrease of 69%, leaves Virginia with a TANF program carry-forward savings of \$62,761,966 for FY 2017; and \$42,834,410 for FY 2018, which by federal law is required be used for TANF core family assistance purposes only. According to the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP), TANF recipients are provided very modest cash assistance of \$428 per month in the median states. Virginia recipients receive \$269 per month—Virginia, the 7th richest state, is 42nd in TANF benefit payments. The average total benefits have declined because there have been no inflation adjustments.</p> <p>Conclusion— Poverty reduction should be the goal of welfare reform, not caseload reduction. Welfare reform should be attentive to lifting people up, moving them toward authentic independence and flourishing in society, not simply pushing them off the rolls. This will require support for workers as they seek self-sufficiency in addition to ensuring adequate benefits for those who need a safety net to feed, clothe and house their families. Welfare is a difficult issue, but not an impossible issue to address intelligently and humanely. If we want to effectively work on behalf of poor children and poor families, we must compassionately accompany them in their journey to self-sufficiency. This requires acknowledging that low wage jobs do not pay a living wage, a wage adequate for meeting a family’s basic needs, and that Virginia’s decisions about TANF will affect immeasurably the lives of Virginia’s low income families. We urge Virginia to strengthen TANF families in ways that can lift up poor people and enable them to flourish in the various communities of our Commonwealth.</p> <p>IN OPPOSITION No comments were received in opposition to the proposed options.</p>