

## IMPROVING FOSTER CARE IN VIRGINIA

### STUDY PLAN

#### Study Mandate

- During the 2020 Virginia General Assembly Session, the Commission on Youth introduced legislation and budget amendments and made recommendations on how to improve Virginia's foster care system.
- These recommendations for improving Virginia's foster care system focused on the areas of workforce recruitment and retention, kinship care, foster family recruitment and retention, and programs to support youth as they transition from foster care to adulthood.
- Since 2020, Virginia has implemented bipartisan improvements to the foster care system. Additionally, Governor Youngkin created the Safe and Sound Task force to bring together state and local government agencies, elected officials, the faith community, and community partners to create safe and appropriate housing placements for children in foster care.
- In order to continue engaging in efforts to improve Virginia's foster care system the Commission on Youth will work with agencies and stakeholders as follows:
  - Organize different topic area work groups to discuss and develop recommendations on workforce retention, liability insurance for foster care agencies, and foster care family recruitment and retention.
  - Support and participate in the Virginia Department of Social Services' working group to implement a statewide driver's licensing program.
  - Support and participate in the Office on Children's Ombudsman study of legal representation in child dependency cases.
  - Analyze and review on-going agency efforts and recent recommendations on the following: having a foster care point of contact at institutions of higher education, housing for aging out foster care youth, iFoster implementation, and workforce programs for foster care and special education foster care youth.

#### Identified Issues

- During the 2020 Virginia General Assembly Session, the Virginia Commission on Youth introduced legislation and budget amendments and made recommendations, totaling 19 recommendations, on ways to improve Virginia's foster care system. A number of these recommendations have been implemented, but there are still areas for improvement that need to be addressed.
- Workforce recruitment and retention continues to be impacted by high turnover of 20-30%. The entry level child welfare family services specialist salary remains as low as \$36,000 in some areas of the state. Stipend program slots are not made available for many potential child welfare workers due to funding. Training and development for local department of social services employees remains an outstanding issue that needs to be addressed.
- Liability insurance for foster care private providers has seen a steep increase over the past few years. Reasons for this increase include a limited pool of insurance providers, high risk assessments that are driven by safety concerns, large dollar figure court awards or payouts,

and concerns over the adequacy of training for foster care parents. Increased premiums may result in an impact on agencies opening or continuing their services.

- Foster care family recruitment and retention is most impacted by maintenance payments as well as the training and resources available to parents, such as support groups and community based services. The Department of Social Services is currently working on making improvements to the Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT). The resources and a plan to address the other elements of family recruitment and retention still need to be identified.
- While Virginia has made improvements in supporting kinship families, more needs to be done to increase the number of foster care kinship families.

### **Study Activities**

- Review organization resources.
  - Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development
  - National Welfare Institute
  - Casey Family Programs
  - Butler Report
- Review and analyze foster care trends in other states.
- Compare Virginia child welfare workforce salaries to other states.
- Interview identified stakeholders.
- Convene work groups on the following topics:
  - Workforce retention
  - Liability insurance for foster care agencies
  - Foster care family recruitment and retention
- Support and participate in:
  - Virginia Department of Social Services' working group to implement a statewide driver's licensing program
  - Office on Children's Ombudsman study of legal representation in child dependency cases
- Organize, review, and follow-up on recommendations on:
  - Foster care point of contact at Virginia's public institutions of higher education
  - Affordable housing for youth aging out of foster care
  - Workforce programs and training for foster care youth and special education foster care youth, including iFoster
- Collaborate with the Safe and Sound Task Force.
- Develop recommendations based on interviews and workgroups.
- Present findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth.
- Receive public comment.
- Prepare final report.