

# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

## Commission on Youth

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Senator Barbara A. Favola, *Vice Chair*

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### The Week of the Young Child™

**RICHMOND** – The Week of the Young Child™ is an annual celebration sponsored by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The purpose of this week is to focus attention on the needs of young children (birth through age eight) and their families and to recognize the early childhood programs and services that meet those needs.

Delegate Christopher K. Peace, Chairman of the Virginia Commission on Youth, is pleased to announce the recent accomplishments of the Commission that support the needs of young children and their families. Speaking about the Commission's work, Delegate Peace stated, "Over the past several years, the Commission has worked closely with the executive branch, local government officials, and other impacted stakeholders to identify best practices, engage families, and identify policies that yield the greatest returns. The Commission on Youth has worked hard to develop legislation and policies that best support the needs of young children."

#### Commission on Youth Highlights that Focus on Young Children:

##### Encouraging Least Restrictive Placements for Students with Disabilities (2015)

- In 2014 and 2015, the Commission on Youth conducted a study – *The Use of Federal, State, and Local Funds for Private Educational Placements of Students with Disabilities*. For students with significant disabilities, or those requiring specialized services and/or supports, private settings may be necessary to meet the individualized needs of the child. Private placements for students with disabilities are funded by Virginia's Children Services Act (CSA). While private schools are an appropriate option within the continuum of placement options, they usually are quite costly. While the number of special education students in the Commonwealth has declined slightly in recent years, data shows that net total expenditures for private day and residential placements funded by CSA have increased by 27% between Fiscal Years (FY) 2012 and 2015 and 12.4% between 2014 and 2015.

##### Language Authorizing a Pilot Program to Safely Reduce the Number of Children in Foster Care (2015)

- The 2016 General Assembly has included language in both the House and Senate Budgets for the Department of Social Services to establish a pilot program in Planning District 11 (Counties of Amherst, Appomattox, Bedford, Campbell Counties and the City of Lynchburg) for the temporary placements of children in families in crisis. This was a recommendation from a 2015 Commission on Youth Study – *Temporary Placements of Children*. The Commission's study evaluated a model employed by 27 other states to reduce the number of children placed in foster care. This model proactively addresses the needs of children and families before they reach a crisis point by providing parents with support and respite during difficult times and having children stay in a safe environment in their community with the ultimate goal of reunification. This approach enables prevention services to be provided to the family rather than waiting for future Child Protective Services' involvement. Parents in other states have utilized this program by voluntarily placing their children with screened and approved host families, for an average stay of six weeks (44 days), while other families help

support the biological/placing parents to help them get back on their feet. Comparatively, the most recent outcomes data in Virginia from October 2015 showed the average time in foster care to be over 20 months. The Commission will receive a follow up report on the progress of this pilot prior to the 2017 General Assembly Session.

#### **Early Childhood Education – Workgroup on Quality (2014)**

- On June 17, 2014, the Commission convened the Early Childhood Education – Workgroup on Quality. Over 15 legislators participated on the Workgroup and approximately 120 individuals from the executive/legislative branches and business community attended. Dominion was a key partner. The Commission adopted several meaningful recommendations that emerged from the Workgroup. The recommendations addressed high-quality early childhood education programming and improving access to Virginia’s Preschool Initiative. One adopted recommendation, which is ongoing, was to request the Commonwealth Council for Childhood Success to study licensing for Virginia’s child care system for all providers, including home-based providers.

#### **Unlawful Adoption of a Child (2014)**

- The Commission studied unlawful adoption of a child, also known as “re-homing.” Children who are “re-homed” are extremely vulnerable and are at great risk for human trafficking and abuse. A recommendation adopted by the Commission support efforts to provide services to adoptive parents who may be struggling to meet the needs of their child (HB 1821, Farrell and co-patroned by Delegate Peace; SB 834, Martin). This legislation was unanimously passed by both the House and Senate. Getting the right support in a time of need makes it more likely that these adoptive families will remain together, and succeed as families.

#### **Seclusion and Restraint in Schools (2014)**

- The Commission studied the use of seclusion and restraint in schools. The Commission adopted a recommendation requiring the Virginia Board of Education to promulgate regulations for the use of seclusion and restraint in public schools (HB 1443, Bell; SB 782, Favola). This legislation passed the House unanimously and passed the Senate by 37-1. The legislation addresses concerns raised by family members that schools’ reliance on guidelines allows for broad discretion for the use of seclusion and restraint.

#### **Three Branch Institute on Child Social and Emotional Well-Being for Foster Care Youth (2013 & 2014)**

- As one of seven states selected to participate in The Three-Branch Institute on Child Social and Emotional Well-Being of the National Governors Association, Virginia was able to improve the social and emotional well-being of children in foster care. Commission on Youth members participated in this initiative to represent the legislative branch. Key accomplishments include:
  - Enrolling over 80 percent of all children in foster care in managed care, which has improved access to health care providers, coordinated care and case management, targeted services for chronic conditions, and inclusion of a 24-hour nurse advice line;
  - Developing Medicaid prescription rate analysis; and
  - Shared data on foster children between the Department of Education and the Department of Social Services.

The Virginia Commission on Youth is a bipartisan, standing legislative commission of the General Assembly comprised of 12 members (six Delegates, three Senators, and three citizens) that provides a legislative forum addressing the needs of and services to the Commonwealth's youth and their families. The Commission contributes to the General Assembly’s ability to make sound policy decisions based on well-studied and reasoned recommendations. Additional information about the Commission on Youth and the Commission’s initiatives can be obtained on the Commission’s website at <http://vcoy.virginia.gov>.

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