



**FINAL REPORT OF THE  
VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH**

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**

# **Improving Virginia's Foster Care System**

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND  
2023**



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## MEMBERS OF THE VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

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David “Dave” W. Marsden  
David R. Suetterlein

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Jessica Hones-Healey  
The Honorable Christian Rehak

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**Appendix A: Improving Foster Care in Virginia – Presentation**

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## **I. Authority for Study**

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Section 30-174 of the *Code of Virginia* establishes the Commission on Youth and directs it to “study and provide recommendations addressing the needs of and services to the Commonwealth’s youth and their families.” This section also directs the Commission to “encourage the development of uniform policies and services to youth across the Commonwealth and provide a forum for continuing review and study of such services.” Section 30-175 of the *Code of Virginia* outlines the powers and duties of the Commission on Youth and directs it to “undertake studies and to gather information and data ... and to formulate and report its recommendations to the General Assembly and the Governor.”

At its May 15, 2023 meeting, the Commission on Youth adopted a study plan directing staff to work with agencies and stakeholders on the topics of workforce recruitment and retention, foster and kinship care family recruitment and retention, and liability insurance for foster care agencies. The Commission on Youth also directed staff to analyze and review ongoing agency efforts and recent recommendations on having a foster care point of contact at institutions of higher education, iFoster implementation, and efforts to enact a statewide driver's licensing program foster care youth.

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## **II. Members Appointed to Serve**

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The Commission on Youth is a standing legislative commission of the Virginia General Assembly. It is comprised of twelve members: six Delegates, three Senators, and three citizens appointed by the Governor.

Membership of the Virginia Commission on Youth for the 2023 study year is listed below.

Delegate Emily M. Brewer, Smithfield, Chair  
Delegate Carrie E. Coyner, Chesterfield  
Delegate Tara A. Durant, Fredericksburg  
Delegate Karrie K. Delaney, Centreville  
Delegate Irene Shin, Herndon  
Delegate Anne Ferrell H. Tata, Virginia Beach  
Senator Barbara A. Favola, Arlington, Vice-Chair  
Senator David “Dave” W. Marsden, Burke  
Senator David R. Suetterlein, Roanoke  
Avi D. Hopkins, Chesterfield  
Jessica Jones-Healey, Smithfield  
The Honorable Christian Rehak, Radford

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### **III. Executive Summary**

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In 2019, the Commission on Youth conducted a study on “Virginia’s Foster Care System.” Commission staff met with state agencies, local departments of social services, members of the executive and judiciary branches, providers, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders across the Commonwealth to learn about challenges within the foster care system. From that study, the Commission on Youth adopted 19 recommendations.

During the 2020 Virginia General Assembly Session, the Commission on Youth introduced legislation and budget amendments to address these legislative proposals on ways to improve Virginia’s foster care system. These recommendations 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 further implemented bipartisan improvements to the foster care system. In 2022, Governor Glenn Youngkin created the Safe and Sound Task Force to bring together state and local government agencies, elected officials, the faith community, and private partners to create safe and appropriate housing placements for children in foster care, especially during emergency situations. While a number of recommendations from the Commission on Youth, legislators, and the Governor have been implemented in the past several years, there are still areas for improvement that need to be addressed.

At its May 15, 2023 meeting the Commission on Youth adopted a study plan directing staff to work with agencies and stakeholders on the topics of workforce recruitment and retention, foster and kinship care family recruitment and retention, and liability insurance for foster care agencies. The Commission on Youth also directed staff to analyze and review on-going agency efforts and recent recommendations on having a foster care point of contact at institutions of higher education, iFoster implementation, and efforts to enact a statewide driver's licensing program foster care youth.

Based on interviews with stakeholders and collaboration with state and local agencies, the Commission developed draft findings and recommendations. These draft study findings and recommendations were presented at the Commission’s September 19, 2023 meeting. The Commission received written public comment through November 13, 2023. After receiving public comment at the November 20, 2023 meeting, the Commission on Youth approved the following 16 recommendations to continue improvements in Virginia’s Foster Care System:

#### **Workforce Recruitment and Retention**

##### **Recommendation 1 – Training Academy for Family Services Specialists**

Introduce a budget amendment for the establishment of a centralized training academy model for family services specialists to better prepare staff for the difficult work of social services, increase retention through training and development of new staff, and provide a more structured and consistent foundation training program. The academy should ensure adequate technology to accommodate both in person, virtual, and blended training options.

### **Recommendation 2 – Child Welfare Stipend Program**

Encourage Virginia Department of Social Services to create more partnerships with additional colleges and universities, which would provide more opportunities for students to participate in different regions of the state.

### **Recommendation 3 – Budget Amendment to Increase Stipend Slots**

Introduce a budget amendment to increase the number of stipend slots offered to students enrolled in a full-time social work program with a commitment to work at a Local Department of Social Services.

## **Liability Insurance**

### **Recommendation 4 – Review Insurance Options for Foster Care Agencies**

Request the State Corporation Commission put together an informational report on what it would entail to enable the expansion of group self-insurance pools in Virginia to permit nonprofit and for profit private foster care agencies the ability to join a group self-insurance pool with permission of a locality for the purposes of liability insurance for foster care services. In this report, the Bureau of Insurance shall detail what steps would be necessary to accomplish such a change, including any necessary amendments to the Code of Virginia. This report shall also provide any warranted additional recommendations for the Commission on Youth's consideration. This report shall be completed and made to the Commission on Youth by November 1, 2024.

### **Recommendation 5 – Work Group to Study Liability Insurance Policy Options**

Request the Department of Social Services form a work group to study the issues, concerns, and policy options presented by the Commission on liability insurance. Included in the work group shall be: The Office of Children's Services, the State Corporation Commission, Virginia Association of Licensed Child Placing Agencies, Foster Family-Based Treatment Association, Virginia Department of Treasury, Virginia Bar Association, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia League of Social Services Executives, VAcorp, Virginia Risk Sharing Association, CSA Coordinators State Group, insurance agencies and brokers, Virginia Trial Lawyers Association (VTLA), and other relevant stakeholders. This

work group shall report back and make recommendations to the Commission on Youth by November 1, 2024.

## **Resources**

### **Recommendation 6 – Request Specific Resources be Included on iFoster Platform**

When established, request Virginia Department of Social Services to provide information on the iFoster platform to include information from universities and colleges on what supports they provide former or current foster care youth. Resources on iFoster should include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia. Information on Virginia’s Workforce and other initiatives of the Secretary of Labor should be included on the iFoster platform to assist foster care youth with obtaining meaningful employment. Encourage all state and local agency employees working with foster care children, join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

## **Higher Education**

### **Recommendation 7 – Budget Amendment for Great Expectations Position**

Introduce a budget amendment to fund a position at the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) to coordinate services for foster youth involved with the Great Expectations Program to improve access to higher education at 4-year colleges and universities. This position shall work with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia (CICV) to find partnerships with 4-year colleges and universities willing to support the foster care population in obtaining a 4-year degree.

### **Recommendation 8 – Smooth Transition from Community College to a Four-Year Degree**

Request the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia to partner with Great Expectations to have a smooth transition in order to achieve a 4-year degree, and provide a point of contact for foster care youth.

### **Recommendation 9 – Budget Amendment to Expand TAG Program**

Introduce a budget amendment to expand the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant Program to include additional money for former foster care and homeless youth who were in care or experienced homelessness after the age of fourteen.

## **Resources for Foster Families**

### **Recommendation 10 – Faster Families Highway Platform Improvements**

Request the Virginia Department of Social Services to review the Faster Families Highway by conducting a survey of local departments of social services to ensure that the platform is providing the local departments of social services with the information that they need and that the questions for the interested foster care families are appropriate. Request that Virginia Department of Social Services provide a tab on the platform with helpful marketing information that is readily available for promoting foster care. Information that is sent in “Tool Kit Tuesdays” should be placed on the platform and templates should be developed to promote best practices in the recruitment of foster families.

### **Recommendation 11 – Budget Amendment for the Exceptional Circumstances Payment Pilot Program**

Introduce a budget amendment for the continuation of the Exceptional Circumstances Payment pilot program. The program shall provide funding in emergency situations for up to \$3,000/month for up to 3 months to ensure a safe and stable placement for children/youth in foster care.

## **Substance Use**

### **Recommendation 12 – Community Collaboration for Children of Parents with Substance Use Issues**

Request the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, in coordination with the Department of Social Services, assess the barriers to availability of substance use treatment services across Virginia’s localities and make recommendations for ways that community services boards and local departments of social services can collaborate and have systems in place to address a parent’s substance use and prevent the removal of children from the home into the foster care system.

### **Recommendation 13 – Technical Assistance for Opioid Epidemic**

Request the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority provide technical assistance to local governments, including local departments of social services, that were disproportionately impacted by the opioid epidemic.

## **Driver’s License**

### **Recommendation 14 – Budget Amendment to Develop Driver’s License Program**

Introduce a budget amendment to provide support for the development and implementation of a statewide drivers' licenses program for youth in and formerly in care in obtaining a driver's license.

## **Relief of Custody**

### **Recommendation 15 – Advisory Group to Address Relief of Custody Request Increase**

Direct the Commission on Youth to review concerns surrounding the increased use of temporary and permanent relief of custody to place a child in foster care. The Commission shall convene an advisory group to assess this concern. This advisory group shall include the Department of Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, the Court Improvement Project, Local Departments of Social Services, Community Services Boards, and other relevant stakeholders.

## **Informal Kinship Care**

### **Recommendation 16 – Informal Kinship Care Stipend, Data, and Plans**

Request the Department of Social Services to review the following proposed recommendations on informal kinship care:

- Make available a stipend for informal kinship care families, similar to the stipend that foster care families receive.
- Create permanency plans for children in informal kinship care situations.
- Make available the information regarding informal kinship care arrangements, and allow formal kinship care arrangements to occur more easily.
- Virginia should be collecting data related to informal kinship care.

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## **IV. Study Goals and Objectives**

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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 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 to engage in efforts

to improve Virginia's foster care system, the Commission on Youth directed staff to work with agencies and stakeholders as follows:

- Organize different topic area 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 ongoing 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 youth.

## **A. 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 a high turnover rate of 20-30%. 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 kinship care, more needs to be done to increase the number of foster care kinship families and offer additional resources to support informal kinship care providers.

## B. STUDY ACTIVITIES

The Commission on Youth was tasked with carrying out the following study activities, according to the study mandate. Commission staff completed the study process, which involved the analysis of relevant statutes, other state laws, and conducting interviews with individuals representing interested stakeholders. The Commission on Youth completed the following 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.
- Review and develop recommendations 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.

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## V. Methodology

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The findings of this study are based on several distinct activities conducted by the Commission on Youth.

### A. RECENT WORK AND STUDIES IN FOSTER CARE

The Commission on Youth held a seminar in Richmond entitled “Foster Care for Legislators” on May 6, 2019 for over 200 attendees, including 12 representatives from legislative offices, and over 10 directors and deputy directors from various state and local agencies. A comprehensive resource document titled “Foster Care 101” was compiled by the Commission on Youth to share the foster care roles of agencies and stakeholders. Nineteen recommendations were adopted in 2019 by the Commission on Youth as a result of “Virginia’s Foster Care System” study.

The following official studies were completed recently related to foster care or adoption and contributed to this current study.

- *Study on Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth (2022)*  
Adopted iFoster and other initiatives to help this vulnerable population find employment, receive education, or obtain a credential.
- *Study on Crossover Youth Information Sharing (2021)*  
Legislation created a Memorandum of Understanding between youth serving agencies to identify foster care youth who are juvenile justice involved.
- *Barriers to Obtaining a Driver’s License for Virginia’s Foster Youth (2018)*  
Created a statewide driver's licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver's license.
- *Virginia’s Adoption Home Study Process (2017)*  
Created a uniform home study format for statewide use among local departments of social services.
- *Temporary Placements of Children (2016)*  
Introduced a successful pilot project in Virginia, which led to the eventual adoption of the Safe Families for Children model across the state.
- *Study of Unlawful Adoption (2015)*  
Led to a law requiring the State Registrar of Vital Records, when issuing a new certificate of birth pursuant to an adoption, to provide adoptive parents with a document listing all post-adoption services available to adoptive families.

## **B. INVESTIGATION AND LISTENING SESSIONS**

Commission on Youth staff researched and reviewed recent and ongoing efforts in foster care. They participated in meetings and workgroups and conducted interviews. Listed below are the activities staff completed to learn more about the foster care improvements needed.

- Attended meetings of the Virginia League of Social Services Executives, including their subgroups: Child and Family Services, Legislative Committee, and Quarterly Meetings
- Attended Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority Workshop in Abingdon
- Conducted interviews with various stakeholders:
  - Community Attention Foster Families (CAFF)
  - Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia
  - Licensed Child Placing Agencies
  - Local Departments of Social Services
    - Fairfax
    - Wythe
    - Nottaway
  - Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources
  - Parents
  - Virginia League of Social Services Executives
  - Virginia Department of Health
  - Virginia Department of Social Services

## **C. RESEARCH**

Commission on Youth staff reviewed literature related to foster care and social services. Specifically, staff analyzed articles and publications by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Casey Family Programs, Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and law review articles.

In order to gain an understanding of what challenges are specific to Virginia, staff reviewed legislation, policy, and procedures related to foster care, including recent General Assembly legislative proposals, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's (JLARC) 2018 report on foster care, the Department of Social Services' Child and Family Services Manual, other DSS reports, and information provided by local departments of social services.

Staff also reviewed related federal legislation and guidance, as well as policy initiatives undertaken in other states on topics specific to foster care. This included federal Family First legislation, the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and other states' programs to support the foster care workforce and to recruit and retain families.

Additionally, the Commission specifically focused on ways to support an overburdened workforce through training, workforce development, and the Child Welfare Stipend Program. The Commission also looked at liability as related to licensed foster care agencies. Research involved looking at what other states laws said about immunity for these workers. Staff looked at ways foster care youth continue to need resources to navigate workforce and educational opportunities, as well as assistance in obtaining a four-year degree. Recruitment challenges of foster and kinship care families were reviewed, as well as, concerns surrounding substance use. Staff learned more about the Opioid Abatement Authority and ways it could assist with the foster care system. The last two topics that this study revisited included driver’s licenses for foster care youth and the need for more supports to strengthen Virginia’s kinship care program. As a result of stakeholder interviews, the issue of parents filing for relief of custody presented as a topic that needed further study.

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## **VI. Background**

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This following section reviews the recent status of foster care in Virginia, including foster care youth and workforce and then details the recent work by the Federal Government and General Assembly on these issues.

### **Current Foster Care Numbers**

As of July 2023, 5,071 children were in foster care in Virginia. The regions with the highest numbers of children were the Piedmont region with 27.7% (1,404 youths) and the northern region with 23% (1,204 youths). The Eastern and Western regions were nearly the same with 17.7% and 17.8 %, or nearly 900 youths each. The Central region had 13.1% of the foster care youths, or 666 children.<sup>1</sup>

Currently, there are about 2,500 Family Services Specialists (FSS) who work in child welfare roles in the local departments of social services. These specialists work in the areas of Child Protective Services (CPS), CPS Ongoing and Prevention Services, as well as Foster Care and Adoption. Child Welfare FSS are the front-line workers serving the foster care children and families.

### **JLARC Foster Care Study**

In December of 2018, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) released a report titled *Improving Virginia’s Foster Care System*. The report generated 34 recommendations related to improving foster care in Virginia. Recommendation areas include:

- Safety concerns and addressing service needs of children
- State oversight of local agencies

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Department of Social Services, <https://www.dss.virginia.gov/geninfo/reports/children/fc.cgi>, July 2023.

- Recruitment and retention of foster families
- Appropriate placements and assessing use of congregate care
- Kinship care
- Delay in termination of parental rights and youth at-risk of aging out
- High worker caseloads and staffing concerns

Most of these recommendations have been addressed legislatively (Foster Care Omnibus Bill and the Appropriation Act, 2019) and via administrative action by DSS. However, several improvements to our current foster care system are still needed.

### **Family First Prevention Services Act**

In February of 2018, the federal Family First Prevention Services Act<sup>2</sup> (Family First) was enacted. This Act makes major changes to federal funding for foster care and allows states to use Title IV-E foster care funds to provide enhanced support to at-risk children and families with the aim of preventing foster care placements.

- States may access Title IV-E funds to deliver approved programs and services to families whose children are at risk of entering the foster care system. Services are reimbursable for up to 12 months.
- Federal reimbursement for children placed in congregate care for more than two weeks will no longer be permitted unless the child has a clinical need to be in a congregate care setting or meets other specified criteria.

### **Foster Care Caucus**

During the 2019 General Assembly Session, the Foster Care Caucus was formed. The bipartisan Foster Care Caucus was co-chaired by Delegate Emily Brewer (R-Suffolk) and Senator Monty Mason (D-Williamsburg). Since forming, the Caucus has met each Session or received updates. The Caucus has heard presentations from the Virginia Department of Social Services, the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, and holds discussions with other agencies and child advocacy groups.

### ***Study on Barriers to Obtaining a Driver's License for Virginia's Foster Youth (2018)***

Teens in foster care face significant barriers to obtaining a driver's license, an age-appropriate adolescent experience. A driver's license opens up opportunities made possible by driving that create a sense of normalcy and help the youth make a successful transition to adulthood. At the Commission on Youth's November 8, 2017 meeting, foster care youth gave testimony regarding the difficulty of obtaining a driver's license while in foster care. The Commission decided to

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<sup>2</sup> Public Law (P.L.) 115-123.

investigate this topic during the 2018 study year, and at the Commission on Youth’s June 6, 2018 meeting, the Commission approved a study to identify the barriers to Virginia’s foster youth in obtaining a driver’s license. Findings, recommendations, and public comments were presented at the Commission on Youth meeting, and the Commission approved the following recommendations:

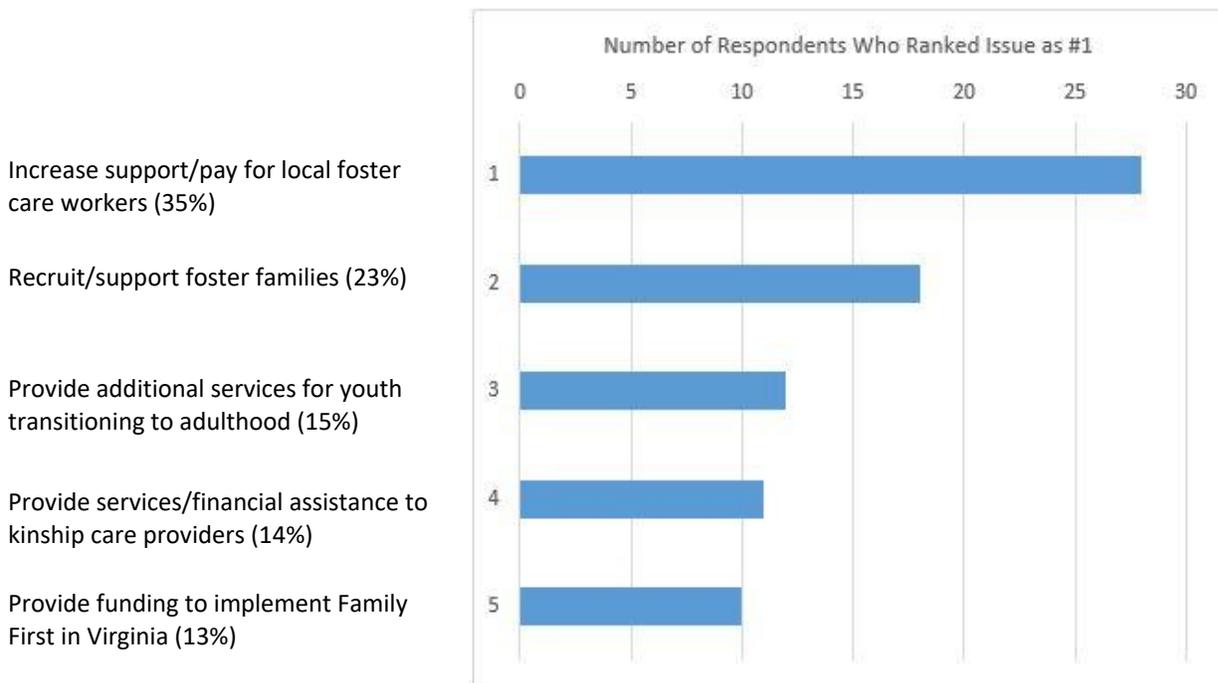
- Provide funding to support youth in foster care in obtaining their driver’s license;
- Introduce legislation to address foster parents’ concerns about automobile insurance;
- Recognize developmental and behavioral challenges for youth in foster care for earning their driver’s license;
- Educate foster parents, private providers, and foster youth on the driver’s license process, including liability insurance; and
- Include support for obtaining a driver’s license as part of the foster youth’s transitional plan.

### **Foster Care Seminar – Commission on Youth**

The Commission on Youth hosted an informational seminar on Virginia’s foster care system titled “Foster Care for Legislators” at its May 6, 2019 meeting. This seminar facilitated the work of Virginia’s lawmakers in response to JLARC’s recommendations and the requirements of implementing the Family First Prevention Act. Lawmakers were informed about the complexities of the foster care system by state and local stakeholder presentations. Legislators also had an opportunity to talk with invited foster and kinship families, foster youth, and former foster youth at a luncheon held immediately after the seminar.

Commission staff prepared a resource binder titled “Foster Care 101: A Resource for Virginia’s Legislators” to supplement the seminar presentations. Included was an overview of Virginia’s foster care system, descriptions provided by Virginia agencies and groups about how they interact with the foster care system, and selected articles and reports. A hard copy of this resource binder was distributed to Commission members and other legislators in attendance with an electronic copy posted on the Commission’s webpage. Foster care stakeholders in attendance, including frontline workers and agency heads, completed a short survey on how to improve foster care and were asked to rank five areas of the foster care system. Responses related to the top ranked priority are captured in Figure 1.

**Figure 1**  
**To improve Virginia’s foster care system, which of the following is the most important (ranked #1)**



***Virginia’s Foster Care System (2019)***

During 2019, the Virginia Commission on Youth (VCOY), as part of the Foster Care study, conducted listening sessions across the Commonwealth to receive input on Virginia’s foster care system. Stakeholders identified workforce recruitment and retention issues as the most significant barrier to improving caseworker services to the foster care population. In addition, discussions with local departments of social services revealed that difficulties in recruiting and retaining trained foster care workers disproportionately impact smaller, rural agencies. Stakeholders across the state emphasized that understaffed local departments and high turnover rates among foster care workers are negatively impacting foster children, and to improve Virginia’s foster care system, focus must be placed on recruiting and retaining a skilled, front-line foster care workforce.

VCOY’s listening sessions confirmed JLARC’s finding<sup>3</sup> that nearly three-fourths of local departments have either moderate or substantial difficulty in recruiting qualified foster care workers. This is particularly pronounced in smaller, rural agencies, where compensation levels are often lower than in larger agencies and the applicant pool may be smaller.

<sup>3</sup> Improving Virginia’s Foster Care System (2018), <https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/reports/Rpt513-2.pdf>.

The 2019 Foster Care Study addressed the following issues, and 19 recommendations were made and acted upon.

- Child welfare and foster care workforce caseloads (later expanded to encompass workforce recruitment and retention)
- Legislative action and resources needed to implement the Family First Prevention Services Act (later modified to focus on kinship care)
- Recruiting and retaining foster families
- Supporting youth transitioning from foster care to adulthood (Fostering Futures)

### ***Study on Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth (2022)***

In the spring of 2021, Commission staff formed an Advisory Group with stakeholders from a variety of organizations to learn more about workforce development for foster care youth. Presentations were provided about state and national workforce development options for foster care youth, the Virginia Community College System's Great Expectations Program, and the iFoster portal at two meetings on June 21, 2021 and October 5, 2021. Six roundtable discussions with foster care youth, foster care alumni, and foster care professionals were held throughout the state. Staff conducted research about foster care workforce development and transition outcomes, employment laws, requirements for public education guidance counselors, foster care transition programs, and other states' successes. A presentation and draft recommendations were presented at the October 19, 2021 Commission on Youth meeting. Following the receipt of public comment, 13 recommendations were adopted at the December 15, 2021 meeting of the Commission on Youth. Recommendations included the following:

- Develop an iFoster Portal;
- Add local resources to the iFoster App;
- Engage potential employers to recruit former foster youth;
- Provide business assistance for former foster youth;
- Introduce a budget amendment for Great Expectations;
- Establish a point of contact at each college for those who have experienced foster care;
- Hold virtual trainings for school counselors on trauma-informed strategies and foster care related resources;
- Have the Virginia Department of Education provide guidance to schools about career planning resources for youth in foster care or previously in foster care;
- Implement the Standards of Completion for the Independent Living Program;
- Require that Workforce Investment Opportunity Act funds are used and prioritized for the foster care population;
- Add more flexibility to the DSS foster care payment assessment tool;
- Introduce a budget amendment for driver's license assistance for foster care youth; and

- Identify and share child care resources for parenting youths who have experienced foster care.

In the adoption of this study’s recommendations, the Commission revisited several specific topics and a few new ones. These topic areas are listed and discussed further in section VII below.

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## **VII. Foster Care Study Focus Areas**

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### **A. WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

#### **Overview of Virginia’s Child Welfare Workforce**

For this study, the Commission focused on ways to support an overburdened workforce through training and workforce development. Consideration was also given to ways to increase the workforce through the Child Welfare Stipend Program.

Commission staff collected and reviewed data on the child welfare workforce. Child Welfare Family Services Specialists are on the frontlines, serving the foster care population. This group includes Child Protective Services (CPS) specialists, CPS Ongoing and Prevention Services, and Foster Care and Adoption staff. These Specialists work together as a team, especially in smaller, rural agencies. The 2,500 Family Services Specialists in the Virginia Social Services System (state and local social services) have numerous important responsibilities and challenges, including the following<sup>4</sup>:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Assessing needs and planning                               | 12. Completing mandated assessments, meetings, and paperwork           |
| 2. Contacting child, family, and others                       | 13. Dealing with information system delays                             |
| 3. Performing background checks                               | 14. Consulting others on each case                                     |
| 4. Attending training   | 15. Completing required documentation and forms                        |
| 5. Connecting children and birth parents with needed services | 16. Transporting clients to appointments                               |
| 6. Visiting foster care settings                              | 17. Handling burnout and secondary trauma                              |
| 7. Preparing for legal proceedings                            | 18. Being on-call for emergencies during all hours of the day or night |
| 8. Conducting home studies                                    |  |
| 9. Notifying parties of legal proceedings                     |  |
| 10. Traveling to and waiting in court                         |  |
| 11. Participating in court hearings                           |  |

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<sup>4</sup> Adapted from a workload measures report prepared for DSS by Hornby Zeller Associates (2008).

The job of a Family Services Specialists is especially intensive in the first 30 days for an initiated foster care case. Figure 2 lists some of the assessments, meetings, and documentation that are required to be completed in the first thirty days for each child who enters foster care.

**Figure 2: Sample List of the Assessments, Meetings, and Documentation Required in the First 30 Days for Each Foster Care Case**

Place the child on the day of removal	Copy of Pathways to Permanency
Obtain:	Client Health Report
Allergies information	Client Education Report
Medications	Copy of Transitional Living Plan
Medicaid Card	Immunization Record
Birth Certificate	Best Interest Determination Meeting for School Placement
Social Security Card	Expedited enrollment in school within 72 hours
Immunization Report	Title IV-E/Medicaid Application within 10 days
Clothing	Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) within 14 days
Send out New Child in Care alert to finance and Child's Services Office	Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment
Complete placement agreements, which may require:	Authorization to Exchange Information
Application	Procedural Safeguards
Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP)	Home visit with prior custodian
Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS)	Pathways to Permanency
Family Assessment and Planning Team (FAPT) Assessment	Begin Full Disclosure Affidavit
Therapeutic Foster Care Confirmation	Indian Child Welfare Affidavit
Placement agreement	Paternity Affidavit
Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool (VEMAT)	Relative Locator and Family Tree
Complete Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP):	Clear Search (family locator)
Transmittal	Relative Letters
Order/Underlying Petition	Visits with family – up to 3 times a week required
Legal Issues Supplement Order	Family Partnership Meeting
Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction and Enforcement Act Affidavit	Casey Life Skills Assessment
Service Member Civil Relief Act/Default Judgement Affidavit	Transitional Living Plan if applicable
Service Plan Part A	Fatherhood Registry Search
Indian Child Welfare Affidavit	5 day court hearing
Paternity Affidavit	30 day court hearing
	Service plan to court
	Mandated visit with child in placement

Source: Bedford County Department of Social Services

Local departments also have difficulties retaining foster care workers, especially those in entry-level positions in smaller, rural agencies. Tables 1 and 2 show the Family Services Retention and Turnover Data as of August 2023<sup>5</sup>, and the annual retention and turnover percentages for specific Family Services roles or positions.

<sup>5</sup> Virginia Department of Social Services data, August 2023.

**Table 1: Retention and Turnover Data for Family Services Workers (All Positions)**

Year	Retention	Turnover
2019	73%	17%
2020	85%	16%
2021	82%	18%
2022	82%	25%

**Table 2: Annual Retention and Turnover Rates for Specific Family Services Roles**

Roles	Retention			Turnover		
	2019	2020	2021	2019	2020	2021
FSS I	43%	75%	70%	35%	32%	34%
FSS II	73%	83%	80%	19%	23%	24%
FSS III	77%	90%	84%	14%	15%	16%
FSS IV	76%	88%	89%	9%	15%	14%
FSS Supervisor	88%	92%	89%	8%	8%	9%
Overall	73%	85%	82%			

## Training

Considering the demands of Family Services Specialists, Commission staff focused on the training as a way to support and retain workers. Virginia foster care worker training is based on a legacy training system developed over thirty years ago from a competency-based training model used in Ohio. Foster care workers must complete mandated training within two years of hiring. Requirements are described in Table 3.

**Table 3: Mandated Training Requirements for Foster Care Workers**

Timeframe	Number of Courses
First 3 weeks	3 (online)
First 3 months	3 (classroom) 1 (online)
First 6 months	2 (classroom) 2 (online)
First 12 months	10 (classroom) 1 (online)
First 24 months	6 (classroom)
Total	28

Source: DSS Foster Care Manual, 17.3, July 2022.

Classroom trainings are held at five regional training centers across the state and scheduled quarterly on a rotating schedule. Courses often span multiple days and can require extensive travel and overnight stay for workers who are not located near their regional training center.

There are major concerns with the timing and training content. Workers may be assigned a caseload before they attend initial training. The demands of caseloads and job expectations prevent workers from participating fully in the training, often being pulled out of training to handle urgent issues or issues for which there are no backup staff. The training content is not up to date. Foster care workers have commented that it is hard to connect the training content with real-world casework. Instead, training needs to focus on applying and practicing the new skills, policies, and procedures with 21<sup>st</sup> century strategies, tools, and skills.

### **The Butler Study: Training Services Model Assessment and Recommendations**

In August 2017, DSS contracted with The University of Denver, Butler Institute for Families, to assess DSS’s Family Services training model. Butler Study activities included the following:<sup>6</sup>

- Review of current training program
- DSS leadership self-assessment
- Survey of 2,717 staff across the state (52% response rate)
- 13 listening sessions in five regions (147 participants)

In April 2018, the Virginia Department of Social Services created a 25-member, statewide advisory group to assess the current training system and make decisions about the development and implementation of a new services training model. By April 2023, the Butler Institute began a follow-up assessment, reaffirming that an “...academy approach provides the most rigorous,

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<sup>6</sup> The Butler Institute for Families, Graduate School of Social Work, University of Denver, *Training Services Model Assessment and Recommendations* (Denver, CO: University of Denver, December 2017). Report prepared for Virginia Department of Social Services.

efficient, and integrated approach to maximize the learning experience and prepares new employees for their jobs.”

Moving to a Child Welfare Training Academy model would benefit local departments by ensuring that workers are prepared, be successful, and thrive in their position. This would strengthen Virginia’s ability to provide safe and stable environments for children and families. The long-term effect of updated and relevant training is reducing new staff turnover and extend the time that LDSS staff stay in their current agency.

## **Child Welfare Stipend Program**

### **Shortage of Family Services Specialists**

Currently, there is a shortage of child welfare workers, which is a cause of high caseloads. In order to address the shortage of graduates with a bachelor’s degree in social work (BSW) or master’s degree in social work (MSW), Virginia is allowed under federal law to undertake the Child Welfare Stipend Program (CWSP). This program is a partnership between the Virginia Department of Social Services and four public universities in Virginia, funded through Title IV-E. The partner institutions include Virginia Commonwealth University, George Mason University, Radford University, and Norfolk State University. The Program recently had 70 stipend students enrolled for new and returning full-time BSW and MSW programs.<sup>7</sup>

In the Child Welfare Stipend Program, students receive a \$10,000 stipend per year for tuition and related expenses. Students are required to participate in internships at local departments of social services and supplement their child welfare coursework with Virginia Department of Social Services training. In exchange, students commit to work at a local DSS in a foster care/adoption position, repaying each year of stipend funding with one year of work upon graduation. Because of Title IV-E funding rules, stipend program workers must fulfill their employment obligations by working in foster care/adoption positions, which is defined as 51 percent or more of the work performed must be in the areas of foster care and adoption.

The program operates near capacity and graduates about 45 students annually. Tables 4 and 5 show the 2022 CWSP class participation and graduate employment by region.

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<sup>7</sup> Annual Report: Child Welfare Stipend Program, SFY 2022. (April 2023).

**Table 4: FY 2022 CWSP Class Participation**

University	BSW	MSW
George Mason	6	15
Norfolk State	1	14
Radford	7	12
Virginia Commonwealth	1	27
Total Enrolled for FY 2022	15	68

**Table 5: Where Graduates are Employed by Region, FY 2022**

Virginia Region	Percentage of CWSP Graduates Employed FY 2022
Central	14%
Eastern	23%
Northern	29%
Piedmont	31%
Western	3%

In Virginia, child welfare workers hired in local departments of social services must have a minimum of a bachelor’s degree in social work (BSW). In recent years, many BSW programs have shifted their emphasis away from preparing students for occupations in child welfare and human services and now emphasize clinical social work, which prepares social workers for roles as therapists or other clinical occupations. As a result, it is common that many students graduating with a BSW have had no formal education in child welfare practice.

The consequence of this is that many new child welfare workers are underprepared and unable to perform the duties of their job. Most state human services agencies across the country find it necessary to devote extensive resources to design and deliver training programs in child welfare practice to compensate for skills that many social work graduates lack.<sup>8</sup> National research shows

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Morton, “A Need for Fresh Ideas on Training the Child Welfare Workforce,” *The Chronicle of Social Change*, April 9, 2019, <https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/child-welfare-2/need-for-fresh-ideas-on-training-child-welfare-workforce/34337>.

that Title IV-E stipend programs are successful in addressing the shortage of qualified child welfare workers in the U.S. For instance:

- Title IV-E stipend programs are effective in recruiting and retaining child welfare workers,<sup>9</sup> and stipend graduates are more likely to remain employed in their agencies.<sup>10</sup>
- Stipend graduates report having effective skills, the ability to change their agency from within, increased knowledge/ethics, coping skills, and assertiveness.<sup>11</sup>
- As compared to non-stipend graduates, stipend graduates have better case outcomes, as demonstrated by a reduction in the length of time it takes to achieve permanency for the children they serve.<sup>12</sup>

## **B. LIABILITY INSURANCE**

Commission staff interviewed a variety of private agencies about liability issues, including Hopetree, United Methodist Family Services, Virginia Home for Boys and Girls, Impact Living Services, Health Connect America, Embrace TFC, Intercept Health, Pinnacle Family Services, Children’s Home Society of Virginia, McGriff, Lockton, Connected Risk Solutions, USI Insurance Services, VAcorp, and CSA Coordinators State Group. The overall issue raised by licensed child placing agencies is that liability insurance for providing foster care services has gotten prohibitively expensive over the past several years.

Stakeholders attributed the increase in cost to concerns about the current state of providing foster care services. Stakeholder interviews provided a few reasons as to why insurance agencies continue to raise concerns about insuring licensed child placing agencies that offer foster care services. One reason given was the perception of inadequate screening and training of foster parents. Worker shortages and part-time workers at licensed child placing agencies contribute to the belief that there is a lack of effective screening and training for foster parents. Another reason given was the continued and increasing impact of the opioid epidemic, which is causing children to enter into the foster care system because of their parents’ substance use issues.

Brokers interviewed indicated that for many insurance agencies, the risks are too high and few insurance agencies want the added challenges. Currently in Virginia, only a handful of insurance

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<sup>9</sup> R. J. Gomez, D. J. Travis, S. Ayers-Lopez, and A. J. Schwab, “In Search of Innovation: A National Qualitative Analysis of Child Welfare Recruitment and Retention Efforts,” *Children & Youth Services Review*, 32, no. 5 (2010): 664-671.

<sup>10</sup> E. E. Madden, M. Scannapieco, and K. Painter, “An Examination of Retention and Length of Employment Among Public Child Welfare Workers,” *Children and Youth Services Review*, 4 (2014): 37-44.

<sup>11</sup> M. Scannapieco and K. Connell-Corrick, “Do Collaborations with Schools of Social Work Make a Difference For the Field of Child Welfare? Practice, Retention and Curriculum,” *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 7, no. 1 (2003): 35-51.

<sup>12</sup> P. Leung and N. Willis, “The Impact of Title IV-E Training on Case Outcomes for Children Serviced by CPS,” *Journal of Family Strengths*, 12, no. 1 (2012).

providers will cover foster care and when the providers are covering foster care agencies, they are reducing coverage limits and instituting sub-limits for areas such as sexual abuse and molestation.

The cost of insurance has increased substantially. From 2018 to 2022, the premiums at one foster care agency the Commission on Youth interviewed went from \$150,000 (general, professional, and umbrella liability) to \$480,000. Generally, there has been a three-fold cost increase in premiums over the last 5 years.

Another barrier explained to the Commission is that many insurance providers use an underwriting guideline for covering foster care, holding that foster care be no more than 25% of the overall client base. In order to obtain liability insurance coverage, most foster care agencies must go through Excess and Surplus lines.

During this study, the impact of large monetary claims and settlements and lengthy statute of limitations relating to sexual abuse against minors were raised as reasons why insurers have been backing out of the market or raising premiums. In looking at these concerns, as well as the issues raised above, it was noted that additional research and study should be done to see what reasons causing the increasing cost of liability insurance are specific to Virginia. Many stakeholders expressed their desire to be a part of any future work on this topic.

Finally, when looking at ways to address this insurance dilemma, stakeholders also wanted to ensure that the children who have been abused or neglected were centered in this discussion. These children need to have a procedure in place for recourse. It was highlighted that abused children in the foster care system should always be able to come forward and seek a judicial remedy after the state put them in a foster care home. The focus needs to be on the children themselves.

### **Liability Definitions**

There are four basic liability categories for insurance purposes. General Liability covers basic third-party risks, such as slipping and falling on your property. Professional liability covers omissions and errors. This might include the improper vetting of a foster care family. The Excess and Surplus line covers businesses with high risk that can make it hard for clients to obtain coverage in the traditional insurance marketplace. Many construction companies use this category for their businesses. This type of coverage is more expensive. Foster care typically falls into this category. An Umbrella insurance policy is extra insurance that can be purchased to provide protection beyond existing limits of an underlying policy. Insurance providers may exclude professional or sexual abuse from the umbrella coverage.

### **Sovereign Immunity**

Sovereign immunity is a doctrine in which a citizen is injured through the “fault” of the government and cannot sue the government for the injury or damages. Counties enjoy full

sovereign immunity from negligent acts. Cities are entitled to sovereign immunity if they are carrying out “governmental” functions, not “proprietary” functions. Sovereign immunity typically does not apply to acts of gross negligence. Sovereign immunity extends to the county or city employees under a four-pronged test established by *James v. Jane*, 221 Va.43 (1980).

### **Immunity and Insurance Coverage: LDSS Foster Care vs. Private Agencies**

Concerning immunity protection, at the local departments of social services (LDSS), the locality and generally the foster care worker have sovereign immunity for negligent acts or omissions. The protection for the worker does not extend to acts of gross negligence however. As for the amount of insurance carried by localities, half of the cities and 89 counties in Virginia use the VAcorp self-insurance risk pool to pay claims. For localities that are part of VAcorp, two million dollars per claim with no aggregate is the minimum amount localities are offered for liability insurance coverage. Localities may opt to get higher coverage from \$3 million to \$10 million similar to umbrella coverage. Insurance premiums for members of the VAcorp risk pool have only increased approximately ten percent in the past 30 years.<sup>13</sup>

For private agencies and their workers with respect to governmental immunity, they are not immune from tort liability. This is the case regardless of the fact that their role is similar to that of local department workers. With regards to insurance coverage requirements for private foster care agencies, it varies by locality. Each local Children’s Services Act (CSA) office contracts with the private agency for its services with insurance requirements included in the contract. The Virginia Department of Social Services licenses the private agency. The minimum amount of liability insurance coverage that is usually required in these contracts is \$1 million per claim and \$2–\$3 million aggregate coverage. Many agencies on top of their coverage purchase a \$5 million umbrella policy. Insurance requirements are not universal across all localities and some CSAs require private foster care agencies to carry higher amounts than what is listed above.<sup>14</sup>

### **Limited Liability in Other States**

The Commission on Youth analyzed the liability limits in a few states that have extended immunity to state or local government actors in some respect: Tennessee, Wisconsin, and North Carolina. Their relevant state laws are discussed below. Currently there is no 50-state survey on the existence of laws regarding limited liability for private foster care agencies. As expressed by stakeholders during this portion of the study, this information would be useful when inquiring from brokers or insurance companies on the health of markets in other states.

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<sup>13</sup> Phone Call with VAcorp, August 21, 2023.

<sup>14</sup> CSA Coordinator Survey Feedback, August 29, 2023.

## **Tennessee**

Tennessee has a law, Public Chapter No. 777 (effective July 2022), which limits the liability of a person or entity that contracts with the department of children's services to provide foster care services to children in the department's custody in the same manner that the department's liability is limited from civil actions or claims filed by the children and families who are the intended or actual recipients of those services.

## **Wisconsin**

Wisconsin has a law, 895.485 Civil Liability Exemption; foster Parents; and Agencies (enacted April 1988), that states that any agency that acts in good faith in placing a child with a foster parent is immune from civil liability for any act or omission of the agency, the foster parent, or the child unless all of the following occur: the agency has failed to provide the foster parent with any information relating to a medical, physical, mental, or emotional condition of the child that the agency is required to disclose under regulation.

## **North Carolina**

North Carolina law §131D-10.3A is an example of targeted limited liability for foster care background checks. There is no liability for negligence on the part of a supervising, State or local agency, or the employees of a State or local agency, arising from any action taken or omission by any of them in carrying out the provisions of this section regarding mandatory criminal checks.

## **C. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES – iFoster**

Current electronic resources for Virginia students searching for information on academic and vocational options and assistance are challenging to find. For youth without much support or guidance, such as foster care youth, this can be very discouraging and seem like a hopeless task. Other states have used a platform called *iFoster* that brings resources to the students and answers their questions about where and how to find help with academic and vocational interests. This platform delivered as a cell phone or computer app provides information on educational opportunities, career information, housing and living stipends or discounts, workforce development resources, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, as well as other resources. The *iFoster* platform can be customized for each locality or region so resources are relevant for each student. Students, caregivers, and organizations benefit from iFoster because information is shared in one convenient location and accessible to all.

In 2021, the Commission conducted a study on workforce development for foster care youth. One of the adopted recommendations directed DSS to develop the iFoster portal or a similar app for foster care youth. The purpose was to provide easily accessible information on workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts,

financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia for those involved in the foster care system. The budget language and funding was adopted by the 2022 General Assembly. Work is currently underway to develop this resource as directed.

#### **D. HIGHER EDUCATION**

Only 3% of youth involved with foster care will obtain a four-year college degree.<sup>15</sup> Virginia has an Education and Training Vouchers Program (ETV) for eligible foster care and adopted teens or young adults transitioning out of foster care that provides financial assistance to eligible students for education and training expenses associated with college, university, and post-secondary vocational training programs. ETV covers expenditures such as tuition; fees; room and board; rental or purchase of a computer; allowances for books, supplies, and transportation; required residential training; special study projects; childcare; and other related expenses. Eligible applicants must be between 14-25 years old, hold a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) certificate, and be enrolled in, or planning to be enrolled in, a post-secondary education or vocational training program. In addition, eligible youth must either (1) be currently in foster care or the *Fostering Futures* program, (2) have aged-out of foster care or left *Fostering Futures* after turning age 18, or (3) have left foster care through adoption or through the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program after turning 16 years old. Vouchers are limited to \$5,000 per eligible youth annually. Students are required to maintain a 2.0 grade point average, or make satisfactory progress toward completing their course of study or training. If applicable, students receiving ETV funds must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and apply separately for ETV funds each year. This program is available for five years and until the student reaches their 26th birthday. Unfortunately, ETV funds go unspent each year as a relatively low number of youth in care attend 4-year colleges or universities.

The Virginia Community College Systems' *Great Expectations* program is a community college program in Virginia for our youth involved with foster care. It is currently available in all 23 community colleges. *Great Expectations* is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia's foster youth earn post-secondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. *Great Expectations* has proven to be effective in providing students with individual assistance to apply for schools and transition into new college and training programs. Although *Great Expectations* provides one-on-one guidance for students interested and enrolled in community college, there is little individual assistance for youth involved in foster care at the four-year college or university level if students wish to pursue a four year degree or beyond.

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<sup>15</sup> Foster youth in Virginia colleges have nowhere to go during breaks. A bill wants to fix that. *Virginia Mercury*. January 19, 2023. <https://virginiamercury.com/briefs/foster-youth-in-virginia-colleges-have-nowhere-to-go-during-breaks-a-bill-wants-to-fix-that/>.

The *2022 Act of Appropriation* (Item 144 S) directed the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to “examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each public institution of higher education for students who have been involved in the foster care system” and report the findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022. The Single Point of Contact Program (SPOC) is a program that pairs students in need (homeless or foster care youth) with an individual from the college or university who will help them find resources and information on academics, financial aid, or any other need each student might have. Having a smooth transition between community colleges and four-year institutions is needed.

*Virginia’s Tuition Assistance Grant Program (VTAG)* is helpful; however, not enough funds are available for the foster care and homeless youth. Additional funds for foster care and homeless youth who were in care or who experienced homelessness after the age of 14 are needed to provide adequate support for these youth. Current efforts are not well-coordinated or accessible to all youth seeking assistance, whether it is financial assistance, finding program options, or support, such as, navigating resources, synthesizing information, decision-making, providing moral support, and encouragement.

## **E. FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARE FAMILY RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION**

There is overwhelming agreement among stakeholders that there is a shortage of agency foster care families—relative and non-relative families that are licensed and supervised by a locality. There is also wide agreement that there is a lack of private agency foster families willing to care for certain categories of youth. These difficult-to-place youth include: teenagers (who make up about a third of children in foster care), children who have special needs, children who have emotional and behavioral issues (often related to trauma) but who do not have a clinical need for a higher level of care, and sibling groups. The Commission reviewed ways that foster care families could be better supported in Virginia.

One model observed by the Commission on Youth was the Community Attention Foster Families (CAFF) recruitment and retention model. CAFF family services specialists are local employees who are assigned to foster families in Charlottesville, Albemarle County or Greene County. The CAFF family services specialists provide regular and ongoing support through face to face consultation, coordination of necessary support services while serving as a liaison between parents and social services. Foster families that are part of CAFF have access to a database of online training and resources through Foster Parent College as well as monthly training and support groups.

An effort currently underway to recruit foster families is that the Faster Families Highway which was launched in April 2022. The Faster Families Highway provides a digital resource to strengthen statewide partnerships with local departments of social services and streamlines the pathway to becoming a foster parent. Individuals interested in becoming a foster parent can register on the platform by either using a QR code or going to the site directly at [FosterVA.com](https://FosterVA.com). This platform

provides a connection point for families interested in fostering. Each Local Department of Social Services has a separate “On Ramp” to the highway to see those who are interested in becoming a foster care parent in their locality. Local departments of social services then connect with those families interested in becoming a foster care parent. The Faster Families Highway platform creates connections to potential foster families and reduces most of the outreach efforts and waiting time of traditional recruitment strategies. A review of the Faster Families Highway would be helpful in determining how effective the program is and in identifying any improvements needed.

## **F. SUBSTANCE USE**

The current opioid epidemic is overwhelming Virginia’s foster care system with children of parents with substance use issues. The epidemic is especially active in Southwest Virginia. Tazewell County is an illustrative example, where in a ten-year period, the number of foster care youth increased from 9 foster care children in 1995 to 120 foster care children in 2005 and has grown since then.<sup>16</sup> From State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2010 to SFY 2019, DSS had a 60 percent increase in foster care cases related to drug abuse. In SFY 2011, there were 408 children in foster care due to parental drug abuse and by SFY 2018, 840 children were in foster care due to parental drug abuse. From SFY 2010 through SFY 2019, foster care entries related to drug abuse increased 100 percent in the Northern Region. However, the Western Region exceeded the other four DSS regions with foster care entries related to parental drug abuse, reaching a high of 43 percent in SFY 2018. Statewide, about 30 percent of the foster care cases are related to parental drug abuse, although the trend seems to be growing somewhat.<sup>17</sup> Most of the cases related to drug abuse are in the western or northern part of the state.

At this time, a comprehensive approach has not been undertaken in Virginia to review the barriers to treatment services throughout the state. A study would help identify strategies to prevent the removal of children from the home due to substance abuse, as long as safety is ensured for the children. Parents do not have equal access to treatment services across the state. Increased access to treatment services would not only help parents overcome their substance use issues, but also prevent the overdose deaths that leave orphans.

Local departments of social services that have and continue to be disproportionately impacted by the opioid crisis need help with strategies to prevent and manage the increase of foster care children in their communities. They are struggling to process the tremendous increase of cases. Help is necessary to educate families and the community, educate the family services specialists, and to brainstorm ways to handle the consequences of substance abuse.

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<sup>16</sup> September 7, 2023 Opioid Abatement Authority Meeting Presentation by Art Van Zee, M.D. DEA----ARCOS DATA.

<sup>17</sup> Office of Research and Planning, Virginia Department of Social Service, *Trends in Foster Care Entry Associated with Parental Drug Abuse*, December 2019.

A relatively newer state agency that could and should be a part of addressing the above concerns is the Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA). The OAA was established in 2021 as an independent entity to abate and remediate the opioid epidemic through financial support in the form of grants, donations, or other assistance. Funding is used for the efforts to treat, prevent, and reduce opioid use disorder and the misuse of opioids in Virginia.

The Opioid Abatement Authority Settlement Award that is distributed to Virginia is distributed as follows:<sup>18</sup>

- 55% of the funding is distributed to the Opioid Abatement Authority:
  - 15% to cities and counties,
  - 35% to city and county partnerships,
  - 15% to state agencies, and
  - 35% unrestricted.
- 30% distributed directly to cities and counties
- 15% distributed directly to the Commonwealth

## **G. DRIVER'S LICENSES**

The Commission on Youth conducted a study in 2019 and recommended the creation of an insurance reimbursement and driver's license education program for foster youth in Virginia. In 2020, this amendment was placed in the final conference report budget but was "unallotted" due to economic uncertainty related to Covid-19. During the 2023 Session, Delegate Anne Ferrell H. Tata and Senator T. Montgomery Mason put in budget amendments \$250,000 each year for a Drivers' License Program for Foster Care Youth. These budget amendments were included in the floor approved budget in both the House and the Senate, but this item was not included in the final budget approved during 2023 Special Session I.

In 2023, the Virginia Department of Social Services developed a workgroup with key stakeholders focusing on Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) Barriers/Solutions. These barriers included driving hours and driving education, car insurance for youth in foster care under age 18, foster Parent/Caregiver support of youth driving, and additional supports for foster parents and caregivers. The workgroup and sub-groups identified barriers, created solutions, and ultimately worked towards building a statewide driver's assistance education and support program for eligible youth. This includes developing documentation, resources, partnerships, an awareness campaign, and/or recommending a guide to support the program. With financial and resource support, foster families can more easily assist their foster care child/children with the life skill of learning how to drive an automobile. Driving is an age-appropriate adolescent experience that creates a sense of normalcy and smooths the path to adulthood.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://www.oaa.virginia.gov/about/>.

## H. KINSHIP CARE

Article 63.2-100 of the *Code of Virginia* defines Kinship Care, Kinship Guardian/Guardianship, and federal-funded “Kinship care” as the full-time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives. “Kinship guardian,” “kinship guardianship,” and “federal-funded and state-funded kinship guardianship assistance program” are also defined in the *Code*. The “Federal-Funded Kinship Guardianship Assistance program” means a program consistent with 42 U.S.C. §673 that provides, subject to a kinship guardianship assistance agreement developed in accordance with §63.2-1305, payments to eligible individuals who have received custody of a relative child of whom they had been the foster parents. “State-Funded Kinship Guardianship Assistance program” means a program that provides payments to eligible individuals who have received custody of a relative child subject to a kinship guardianship assistance agreement developed in accordance with §63.2-1306. “Fictive kin” means persons who are not related to a child by blood or adoption but have an established relationship with the child or his family (§63.2-100).

When children are first placed with relatives or fictive kin, they spend less time in foster care, experience greater placement stability, and achieve permanency most of the time. Research demonstrates the benefit of kinship care and of keeping families together. Children placed with relatives or close family friends are less impacted by trauma and are less likely to run away from home. Kinship care arrangements also help maintain vital family connections, such as by keeping sibling groups together.<sup>19</sup>

The role of the kin provider also differs from a traditional non-relative foster care provider and can have specific, positive impacts on the care of the child. Relatives are less likely to request that children be removed from their care if the child’s behavior becomes difficult. Additionally, family members are more likely to maintain a nurturing relationship with children whom they have cared for as those children grow into adulthood.<sup>20</sup>

The recently enacted Family First Prevention Services Act, Public Law (P.L.) 115-123, (Family First) is designed to benefit informal kinship care by allowing states, for the first time, to use federal prevention services funds for children and kinship caregivers to help keep children safely out of foster care. Per DSS’s guidance related to Family First, eligibility for Title IV-E prevention services funds will be permitted for “a child, (and their caregivers) who is a candidate for foster care, who can remain safely at home or in a kinship home, and is identified as being at *imminent risk* of entering foster care. ... ‘Imminent risk’ means a child and family’s circumstances demand that a defined case plan is put into place within 30 days which identifies interventions, services, and/or supports, and absent these interventions, services and/or supports, foster care placement is

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<sup>19</sup> “Keeping Kids in Families,” The Annie E. Casey Foundation, April 2, 2019, <https://www.aecf.org/resources/keeping-kids-in-families/>.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

the planned arrangement for the child.”<sup>21</sup> A kinship navigator is one example of a program for which states can now use federal prevention services dollars made available by Family First.

## **I. RELIEF OF CUSTODY**

During the course of this study, the topic of relief of custody came up often in the stakeholder interviews. Parents are requesting “relief of custody” in accordance with *Code of Virginia* §16.1-277.02 from their teen child/children when parenting challenges arise, either temporarily or permanently. Local departments of social services across the state have seen an increase in the use of “relief of custody” as a way to deal with a troubled teen or child. This presents many challenges to family services specialists. For children or youth it means instability and rejection trauma from their parents. For the foster care system it means added caseloads; new foster family recruitment, education, and placements; and communicating with severely troubled youth and possible involvement with the courts or the juvenile justice system. Many challenges lie ahead for all involved. Potential strategies and potential solutions need to be discussed and studied.

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## **VIII. Findings and Recommendations**

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After presenting draft findings and recommendations at the Commission on Youth’s November 20, 2023 meeting and receipt of public comment, the Commission approved the following recommendations.

### **Finding 1:**

The development and implementation of a Child Welfare Training Academy would assist local departments in ensuring that the workforce is prepared. This would strengthen Virginia’s ability to provide safe and stable environments for children and families by reducing turnover in the local workforce and extending the time that local departments of social services’ (LDSS) staff remain focused on their mission.

Recommendation 1: Introduce a budget amendment for the establishment of a centralized training academy model for family services specialists to better prepare staff for the difficult work of social services, increase retention through training and development of new staff, and provide a more structured and consistent foundation training program. The academy should ensure adequate technology to accommodate both in person, virtual, and blended training options.

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<sup>21</sup> *Family First Prevention Services Act and Implementation Updates*, [PowerPoint], Virginia Department of Social Services, May 22, 2019, <http://dls.virginia.gov/groups/mhs/familyfirst052219.pdf>.

**Finding 2:**

Child welfare stipend graduates are more likely to remain employed at their agencies and have more effective skills, knowledge, and abilities. However, it has been a challenge to attract and connect stipend graduates to smaller, more rural local departments of social services.

Recommendation 2: Encourage Virginia Department of Social Services to create more partnerships with additional colleges and universities, which would provide more opportunities for students to participate in different regions of the state.

Recommendation 3: Introduce a budget amendment to increase the number of stipend slots offered to students enrolled in a full-time social work program with a commitment to work at a Local Department of Social Services.

**Finding 3:**

Liability insurance for foster care private providers has seen a steep increase over the past few years. Options for liability insurance are becoming more limited.

Recommendation 4: Request the State Corporation Commission put together an informational report on what it would entail to enable the expansion of group self-insurance pools in Virginia to permit nonprofit and for profit private foster care agencies the ability to join a group self-insurance pool with permission of a locality for the purposes of liability insurance for foster care services. In this report, the Bureau of Insurance shall detail what steps would be necessary to accomplish such a change, including any necessary amendments to the Code of Virginia. This report shall also provide any warranted additional recommendations for the Commission on Youth's consideration. This report shall be completed and made to the Commission on Youth by November 1, 2024.

Recommendation 5: Request the Department of Social Services form a work group to study the issues, concerns, and policy options presented by the Commission on liability insurance. Included in the work group shall be: The Office of Children's Services, the State Corporation Commission, Virginia Association of Licensed Child Placing Agencies, Foster Family-Based Treatment Association, Virginia Department of Treasury, Virginia Bar Association, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia League of Social Services Executives, VAcop, Virginia Risk Sharing Association, CSA Coordinators State Group, insurance agencies and brokers, Virginia Trial Lawyers Association (VTLA), and other relevant stakeholders. This work group shall report back and make recommendations to the Commission on Youth by November 1, 2024.

**Finding 4:**

Current electronic resources for students are challenging to find, which can be discouraging for foster youth to explore as they navigate post-secondary education options, whether it be college, vocational, or trade school.

Recommendation 6: When established, request Virginia Department of Social Services to provide information on the iFoster platform to include information from universities and colleges on what supports they provide former or current foster care youth. Resources on iFoster should include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia. Information on Virginia's Workforce and other initiatives of the Secretary of Labor should be included on the iFoster platform to assist foster care youth with obtaining meaningful employment. Encourage all state and local agency employees working with foster care children, join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

**Finding 5:**

High school foster care youth do not always have the same community support to help them explore post-secondary options. Currently, Great Expectations programs are in all 23 community colleges in the Commonwealth to help students with these challenges. This programming has proven to be effective in helping students apply for schools and transition into new programs. Although Great Expectations is currently in all community colleges, there is little programming to help foster care youth at 4-year institutions.

Recommendation 7: Introduce a budget amendment to fund a position at the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) to coordinate services for foster youth involved with the Great Expectations Program to improve access to higher education at 4-year colleges and universities. This position shall work with the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) and the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia (CICV) to find partnerships with 4-year colleges and universities willing to support the foster care population in obtaining a 4-year degree.

Recommendation 8: Request the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia to partner with Great Expectations to have a smooth transition in order to achieve a 4-year degree, and provide a point of contact for foster care youth.

**Finding 6:**

Foster care youth who age out of the system and attend college or vocational training face many challenges, including financial concerns.

Recommendation 9: Introduce a budget amendment to expand the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant Program to include additional money for former foster care and homeless youth who were in care or experienced homelessness after the age of fourteen.

**Finding 7:**

Faster Families Highway provides a platform for those interested in becoming a foster parent to be connected with Local Departments of Social Services. A review of the highway would be helpful in determining if improvements could be made in the recruitment of foster families.

Recommendation 10: Request the Virginia Department of Social Services to review the Faster Families Highway by conducting a survey of local departments of social services to ensure that the platform is providing the local departments of social services with the information that they need and that the questions for the interested foster care families are appropriate. Request that Virginia Department of Social Services provide a tab on the platform with helpful marketing information that is readily available for promoting foster care. Information that is sent in “Tool Kit Tuesdays” should be placed on the platform and templates should be developed to promote best practices in the recruitment of foster families.

**Finding 8:**

When a foster care child experiences an emergency situation, the foster family may need additional supports. Enhanced payments assist both the local departments of social services and the foster family in ensuring that the child remains in an appropriate placement.

Recommendation 11: Introduce a budget amendment for the continuation of the Exceptional Circumstances Payment pilot program. The program shall provide funding in emergency situations for up to \$3,000/month for up to 3 months to ensure a safe and stable placement for children/youth in foster care.

**Finding 9:**

One of the symptoms of the opioid epidemic track has been a huge increase in foster care in the areas most impacted by the epidemic. According to recent data, 30% of foster care admissions are linked to parental drug abuse.

Recommendation 12: Request the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, in coordination with the Department of Social Services, assess the barriers to availability of substance use treatment services across Virginia’s localities and make recommendations for ways that community services boards and local departments of social services can collaborate and have systems in place to address a parent’s substance use and prevent the removal of children from the home into the foster care system.

Recommendation 13: Request the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority provide technical assistance to local governments, including local departments of social services, that were disproportionately impacted by the opioid epidemic.

**Finding 10:**

Teens in foster care face significant barriers to obtaining a driver's license. These young people often miss out on age-appropriate adolescent experiences and opportunities made possible by driving that create a sense of normalcy, which help them make a successful transition to adulthood.

Recommendation 14: Introduce a budget amendment to provide support for the development and implementation of a statewide drivers' licenses program for youth in and formerly in care in obtaining a driver's license.

**Finding 11:**

Local departments of social services across the state have seen an increase in the use of relief of custody as a way to deal with a troubled teen or child.

Recommendation 15: Direct the Commission on Youth to review concerns surrounding the increased use of temporary and permanent relief of custody to place a child in foster care. The Commission shall convene an advisory group to assess this concern. This advisory group shall include the Department of Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, the Court Improvement Project, Local Departments of Social Services, Community Services Boards, and other relevant stakeholders.

**Finding 12:**

The Department of Social Services should continue to find ways to improve informal kinship care.

Recommendation 16: Request the Department of Social Services to review the following proposed recommendations on informal kinship care:

- Make available a stipend for informal kinship care families, similar to the stipend that foster care families receive.
- Create permanency plans for children in informal kinship care situations.
- Make available the information regarding informal kinship care arrangements, and allow formal kinship care arrangements to occur more easily.
- Virginia should be collecting data related to informal kinship care.

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## **VIII. Acknowledgments**

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The Virginia Commission on Youth extends special appreciation to the following for their assistance on this study:

- Community Attention Foster Families (CAFF) – Tiffany Polychrones and Charlsie Stratton
- Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia – Chris Peace and Sabena Moretz
- Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources – Leah Mills and Janet Kelly
- Virginia League of Social Services Executives
- Virginia Department of Health – Collin Greene, M.D.
- Virginia Department of Social Services – Danny TK Avula, M.D., Carl Ayers, Nikki Cox
- Local Departments of Social Services
  - Fairfax County
  - Nottaway County
  - Wythe County
- Legal Interns, Ashlyn Hilburn, University of Richmond School of Law and Olivia Menosky, William & Mary School of Law



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
Commission on Youth



## Improving Virginia's Foster Care System

September 19, 2023  
Amy M. Atkinson

### Recent Work in Foster Care



#### **"Foster Care for Legislators" and "Foster Care 101"**

- On May 6, 2019, the Commission on Youth held a seminar in Richmond entitled "Foster Care for Legislators."
- Over 200 people attended, including 12 representatives from legislative offices, over 10 deputies and directors from various state and local agencies.
- The Commission on Youth produced and compiled a comprehensive document titled "[Foster Care 101](#)" for legislators and the public that presented information about agencies and stakeholders' roles in helping children in foster care.
- The Commission's study resulted in 19 recommendations on "[Virginia's Foster Care System](#)" (2020) being adopted.

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## Studies in Foster Care & Social Services



- [Study on Workforce Development for Foster Care Youth](#) (2022) – Adopted iFoster and other initiatives to help this vulnerable population find employment, receive education, or get credentialed.
- [Study on Crossover Youth Information Sharing](#) (2021) – Legislation created a MOU between youth serving agencies to identify foster care youth who are juvenile justice involved.
- [Barriers to Obtaining a Driver's License for Virginia's Foster Youth](#) (2018) – Created a statewide driver's licensing program to support foster care youth in obtaining a driver's license.

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## Studies in Foster Care & Social Services



- [Virginia's Adoption Home Study Process](#) (2017) – Created a uniform home study format for statewide use among local departments of social services.
- [Temporary Placements of Children](#) (2016) – Introduced a successful pilot project in Virginia which led to the eventual adoption of the Safe Families for Children model across the state.
- [Study of Unlawful Adoption](#) (2015) – Led to a law requiring the State Registrar of Vital Records, when issuing a new certificate of birth pursuant to an adoption, to provide adoptive parents with a document listing all post-adoption services available to adoptive families.

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## Study Mandate



- May 15, 2023, the Commission on Youth adopted a study plan designed to examine and make recommendations to improve foster care.
  - 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 license program.
    - Support and participate in the Office on Children's Ombudsman study of legal representation in child dependency cases.
    - Analyze and review ongoing 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.

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## Study Activities



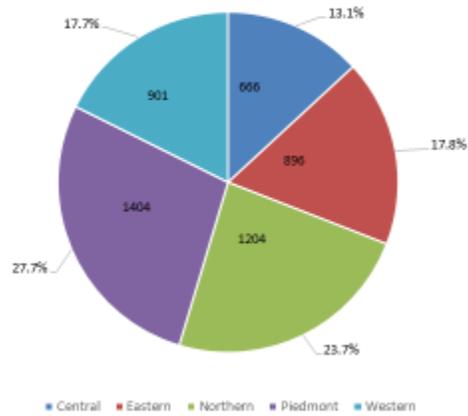
- Researched and reviewed efforts recent and ongoing efforts
- Attended meetings
  - Virginia League of Social Services Executives
    - Child and Family Services
    - Professional Development
    - Board of VLSSE
- Participated in workgroups
  - Foster Care Partnership
  - Foster Care Transition Planning
  - Additional Daily Supervision
  - Youth Driving Assistance
- Interviews
  - State Agencies
  - Local Departments of Social Services
    - Fairfax
    - Wythe
    - Nottaway
  - Community Attention Foster Families (CAFF)
  - Secretary of Health and Human Resources
  - Stakeholders
  - Parents

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## Foster Care Numbers



Foster Care Children by Region as of 8/1/2023



- As of July 2023, 5,071 children were in foster care in Virginia

<https://www.dss.virginia.gov/jeriffs/reports/children/ft.cgi>

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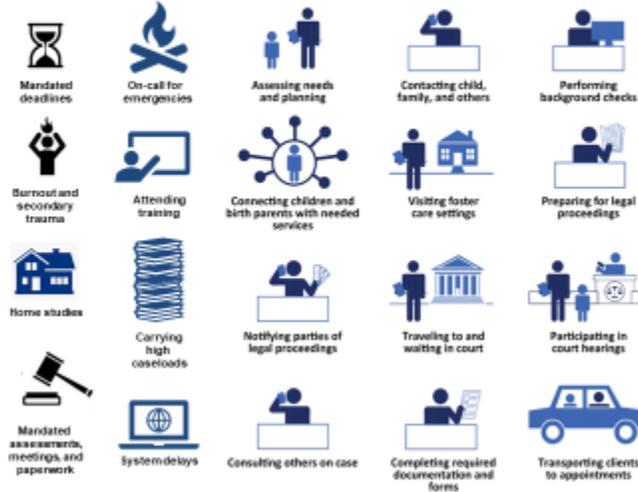
## WORKFORCE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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## Overburdened Workforce



### Sample of Family Services Specialist Responsibilities and Challenges



Adapted from Improving Virginia's Foster Care System, SARC, 2018 9

## Virginia's Child Welfare Workforce



- Approximately **2,500 Family Services Specialists (FSS)** work in child welfare roles in local departments of social services.
- Child Welfare Family Services Specialists (FSS) include specialists in Child Protective Services (CPS), CPS Ongoing and Prevention Services, and Foster Care and Adoption.
- Child Welfare FSS are the front-line workers serving the foster care population.
- **Child Welfare FSS work together as a team, especially in smaller, rural agencies.**

## Virginia's Child Welfare Workforce



### Family Services Retention and Turnover Data

Retention				
	2019	2020	2021	2022
<b>Overall</b>	73%	85%	82%	82%

Turnover				
	2019	2020	2021	2022
	17%	16%	18%	25%

## Virginia's Child Welfare Workforce



### Family Services Staff (Annual % Retention and Turnover)

Retention			
	2019	2020	2021
<b>FSS I</b>	43%	75% (+32%)	70% (-5%)
<b>FSS II</b>	73%	83% (+10%)	80% (-3%)
<b>FSS III</b>	77%	90% (+13 %)	84% (-6%)
<b>FSS IV</b>	76%	88% (+4 %)	89% (+1%)
<b>FS Sup</b>	88%	92% (+4 %)	89% (-3%)
<b>Overall</b>	73%	85% (+13%)	82% (-4%)

Turnover			
	2019	2020	2021
	35%	32% (-3%)	34% (+2%)
	19%	23% (+4%)	24% (+1%)
	14%	15% (+1%)	16% (+1%)
	9%	15% (+6%)	14% (-1%)
	8%	8% (0%)	9% (+1%)



## Training



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## Training



### **Family Services Specialist Training (FSS)**

- Mandated training for FSS must be completed within **two years** of hiring.
- Workers may be assigned a caseload before they attend initial training.
- Demands of caseloads and job expectations prevent workers from participating or fully engaging in training.
- There is a disconnect between training and real-world casework. Training does not focus enough on practicing the application of skills, policy, or procedure.

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## Family Services Training Model



- In August 2017, the Virginia Department of Social Services contracted with The University of Denver, Butler Institute for Families, to assess the Virginia Department of Social Services' Family Services training model.
  - Review of current training programs
  - Virginia Department of Social Services leadership assessment
  - Survey of staff
  - Listening sessions
- In April 2018, Virginia Department of Social Services created a 25-member statewide advisory group to assess the current training system and make decisions about the development and implementation of a new services training model.
- In April 2023, the Butler Institute began a follow-up assessment, reaffirming that an "academy approach provides the most rigorous, efficient, and integrated approach to maximize the learning experience and prepares new employees for their jobs."

VSS

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Supporting a Child Welfare Training Academy would assist local departments in ensuring that their workforce is prepared. This would strengthen Virginia's ability to provide safe and stable environments for children and families by reducing turnover in the local workforce and extending the time that local departments of social services' (LDSS) staff remain focused on their mission.

**Recommendation:**

Support the establishment of a centralized training academy model for family services specialists to better prepare staff for the difficult work of social services, increase retention through training and development of new staff, and provide a more structured and consistent foundation training program. The academy should ensure adequate technology to accommodate both in person, virtual, and blended training options.

VSS

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## Child Welfare Stipend Program



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## Child Welfare Stipend Program



- To address the shortage of BSW and MSW graduates with experience in child welfare, Virginia created the Child Welfare Stipend Program (CWSP).
- CWSP is a partnership between Virginia Department of Social Services and four public state universities in Virginia, **funded through Title IV-E**.
- CWSP most recently had **70 stipend students** enrolled for new and returning full-time BSW and MSW programs.
- Students receive a **\$10,000 stipend per year** for tuition and related expenses. Students participate in **internships** at local departments and supplement their child welfare coursework with **Virginia Department of Social Services training**.
- In exchange, upon graduation, students commit to work at a LDSS in a foster care/adoption position, **repaying each year of stipend funding with one year of work**.
- CWSP is operating at near capacity and graduates **about 45 students each year**.

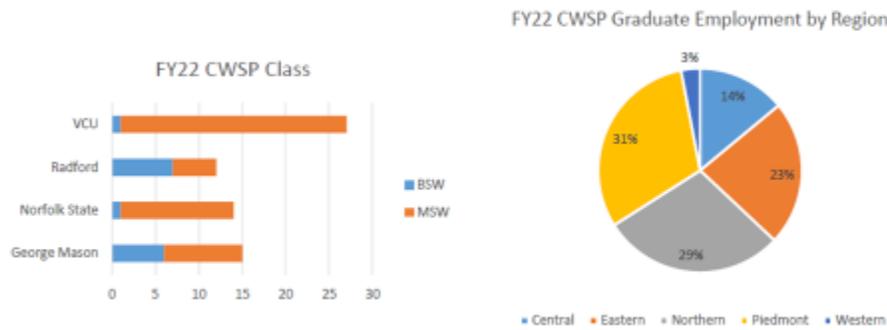
### Stipend Program Participating Universities

- Virginia Commonwealth University
- George Mason University
- Radford University
- Norfolk State University

VDSS

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## Child Welfare Stipend Program



VSS, Child Welfare Stipend Program Annual Report (State Fiscal Year 2023)

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Child welfare stipend graduates are more likely to remain employed at their agencies and have more effective skills, knowledge, and abilities. However, it has been a challenge to attract and connect stipend graduates to smaller, more rural local departments of social services.

**Recommendation:**

Encourage Virginia Department of Social Services to create more partnerships with additional colleges and universities, which would provide more opportunities for students to participate in different regions of the state.

**Recommendation:**

Introduce a budget amendment to increase the number of stipend slots offered.

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# LIABILITY INSURANCE

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## Interviewed Stakeholders



- Hopetree
- UMFS
- Virginia Home for Boys and Girls (VHBG)
- Impact Living Services
- Health Connect America
- Embrace TFC
- Intercept Health
- Pinnacle Family Services
- Children's Home Society of Virginia
- McGriff
- Lockton
- Connected Risk Solutions
- USI Insurance Services
- VAcorp
- CSA Coordinators State Group

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## Identified and Explored Issues



- Foster care is viewed as an area of high risk for insurance providers.
- The primary issues driving insurance providers' higher risk assessment:
  - Nationally, statute of limitations on foster child claims has been extended in recent years. In Virginia it has been set at 20 years since 2011 (§ 8.01-243).
  - An increase in sexual abuse and molestation claims, and large, multi-million dollar awards or settlements.
  - Concerns about inadequate screening and training of foster parents, in large part attributed to part-time workers and the worker shortage at foster care agencies.
  - Current state of foster care driven by the opioid epidemic.
- Brokers noted a dwindling number of insurance providers for foster care. The number of providers was six a few years ago, and likely less now.

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## Identified and Explored Issues



- Insurance providers are reducing coverage limits and instituting sub limits for areas such as sexual abuse and molestation (SAM). Typically, sub-limits are part of an umbrella coverage.
- Cost of insurance has gone up greatly. Example: From 2018 to 2022, the premiums at one foster care agency went from \$150k for general, professional, and umbrella liability to \$480k. Generally, it has been an over 3 fold increase in cost the last 5 years.
- An underwriting guideline that a lot of insurance companies use to determine if they will offer insurance to a foster agency is that foster care is no more than 25% of the overall client base.
- To get insurance coverage most foster care agencies are getting their liability coverage through Excess & Surplus lines.

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## Identified and Explored Issues



- Some carriers have shifted policies from claims made to occurrence.
  - Claims made – Claim needs to be made during the policy period. Can include a retroactive date or full prior acts coverage.
  - Occurrence – Claim can be made after policy ends if loss occurred during policy period.
  - This shift creates a gap in coverage that can be addressed by purchasing extended reporting period ERP or tail coverage. This is expensive (Ex. 150% of expiring premium).
- Spillover effect: It is becoming harder for insurance companies to get reinsurance.
- Concerns were expressed that this discussion should remain focused on the children and youth and that children who have been abused should not be left without recourse.

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## Definitions



- General Liability - Covers basic third party risks. Ex. Slip and fall.
- Professional Liability – Covers errors and omissions. Ex. Improper vetting of foster care family.
- Excess and Surplus line – Covers businesses with high risk that can make it hard for them to obtain coverage in the traditional insurance marketplace. This line of insurance has a higher cost (Ex. Construction and recently, foster care).
- Umbrella – Extra insurance that an entity can purchase to provide protection beyond existing limits and coverages of an underlying policy. Insurance providers may exclude professional or sexual abuse from the umbrella.

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## Private Agency vs. LDSS Foster Care



- In **local department of social services foster care**, a locality and its foster care worker places the child in a home. The locality has sovereign immunity for acts or omissions as a result of the placement.
- In most cases the local department of social services foster care worker has qualified immunity for simple negligence but not gross negligence.
- 89 counties and half of cities in Virginia use the VAcorp self-insurance risk pool to pay claims. \$2MM per claim/No aggregate is the minimum amount localities are offered for liability insurance coverage.
- Localities can opt to get higher coverage from \$3MM up to \$10MM, which acts like an umbrella.
- Premiums or "contributions" have seen a ~10% rate increase over the past 30 years.

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## Private Agency vs. LDSS Foster Care



- In **private agency foster care**, the local CSA contracts with the private agency for its services. The private agency is also licensed by the Virginia Department of Social Services. Insurance requirements are included in the contract.
- The minimum amount of liability insurance that is commonly required in these contracts is: \$1MM per claim/\$2MM or \$3MM aggregate.
- Many agencies have a \$5MM umbrella.
- Insurance requirements are not uniform across CSAs.
- Private agencies and their workers are not immune from tort liability.

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## Sovereign Immunity and Qualified Immunity



- Counties enjoy full sovereign immunity from negligent acts.
- Cities are entitled to sovereign immunity if they are carrying out “governmental” functions, not “proprietary” functions.
- Sovereign immunity extends to its employees as qualified immunity under a four pronged test established by *James v. Jane*, 221 Va. 43 (1980).
- Sovereign immunity generally does not apply to acts of gross negligence.

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## Other Immunity Laws



- Virginia Tort Claims Act (VTCA) – Applies a limited waiver of immunity of up to \$100,000 for “damage to or loss of property or personal injury or death caused by the negligent or wrongful act or omission of any employee while acting within the scope of his employment under circumstances where the Commonwealth..., if a private person, would be liable to the claimant for such damage, loss, injury or death.”
- § 32.1-111.4:3. Provision of emergency medical services – Permits a not for profit emergency medical services agency that contracts with a county or city be deemed to be an instrumentality of the county, city, or town and, as such, exempt from suit for damages done incident to the provision of emergency medical services.
  - Similar provision for firefighting services: § 27-6.02.

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## Limiting Liability in Other States



- **Tennessee**
  - Public Chapter No. 777 (Effective date: July 2022)
  - This law limits the liability of a person or entity that contracts with the department of children's services to provide foster care services to children in the department's custody in the same manner that the department's liability is limited from civil actions or claims filed by the children and families who are the intended or actual recipients of those services.
- **Wisconsin**
  - 895.485 Civil liability exemption; foster parents; and agencies (Enacted April 1988)
  - Any agency that acts in good faith in placing a child with a foster parent is immune from civil liability for any act or omission of the agency, the foster parent, or the child unless all of the following occur: The agency has failed to provide the foster parent with any information relating to a medical, physical, mental, or emotional condition of the child that the agency is required to disclose under regulation.

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## Limiting Liability in Other States



- **North Carolina**
  - Example of targeted limited liability.
  - § 131D-10.3A. – Foster Care background checks.
  - There is no liability for negligence on the part of a supervising agency, or a State or local agency, or the employees of a State or local agency, arising from any action taken or omission by any of them in carrying out the provisions of this section regarding mandatory criminal checks.
- Currently there is no 50-state survey on the existence of laws regarding limited liability for private foster care agencies.
- This information would be useful when inquiring from brokers or insurance companies on the health of markets in other states.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Liability insurance for foster care private providers has seen a steep increase over the past few years. Options for liability insurance are becoming more limited.

**Recommendation:**

Amend the *Code of Virginia* to give qualified immunity to private foster care agencies and their foster care workers that contract with localities for acts of negligence that result from their services. The intent is to align private agency immunity with the local departments of social services.

**Recommendation:**

As a response to the increasing cost of verdicts, amend the *Code of Virginia* to apply a monetary cap for negligence cases resulting from the placement of the child by a private foster care agency. The cap should be set at \$500,000.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Recommendation:**

Request the State Corporation Commission form a work group to study the expansion of group self-insurance pools in Virginia to permit nonprofit and for profit private foster care agencies the ability to join a group self-insurance pool with permission of a locality for the purposes of liability insurance for foster care services. This group shall analyze the feasibility of such a change, run sample cost savings analysis scenarios, and review any other barriers as contemplated by the group. Included in the work group shall be: the Virginia Department of Social Services, Virginia Association of Licensed Child Placing Agencies, Foster Family-Based Treatment Association, Virginia Department of Treasury, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Association of Counties, VAcorp, Virginia Risk Sharing Association, CSA Coordinators State Group, insurance agencies and brokers, and other relevant stakeholders. This work group shall report back and make recommendations to the Commission on Youth by November 1, 2024.

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## Findings and Recommendations



### **Recommendation:**

Request the Department of Social Services form a work group to study the issues, concerns, and above listed policy options. Included in the work group shall be: The Office of Children's Services, the State Corporation Commission, Virginia Association of Licensed Child Placing Agencies, Foster Family-Based Treatment Association, Virginia Department of Treasury, Virginia Bar Association, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia League of Social Services Executives, VAcorp, Virginia Risk Sharing Association, CSA Coordinators State Group, insurance agencies and brokers, and other relevant stakeholders. This work group shall report back and make recommendations to the Commission on Youth by November 1, 2024.

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## **HIGHER EDUCATION Point of Contact**

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## Foster Care Education and Training



### Education and Training Vouchers Program

- Provides financial assistance to eligible students for education and training expenses associated with college, universities, and post-secondary vocational training programs.
- Covers expenditures associated with post-secondary education and vocational training programs.
- Vouchers to attend shall not exceed \$5,000 per eligible youth per year.
- Must make satisfactory progress toward completing their course of study or training.
- Historically, ETV funds go unspent each year as a relatively low number of youth in care attend a 4-year college or university.
- Youth who attend community colleges qualify for grant funding and do not have a need to access ETV.

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## Point of Contact



- Only 3% of youth involved with foster care will obtain a four-year college degree.
- Great Expectations is a nationally recognized program that helps Virginia's foster youth earn the postsecondary credentials they need to achieve an independent and successful life. Great Expectations is currently available at 21 of Virginia's Community Colleges.
- The *2022 Acts of Appropriation (Item 144 S.)* directed the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to "examine the feasibility of having a point of contact at each public institution of higher education for students who have been involved in the foster care system" and report the findings to the Commission on Youth by November 30, 2022.
- Single Point of Contact Program (SPOC) is a program that assigns students in need (homeless or foster care) with an individual from the college or university to help them find resources and information on academics, financial aid or any other need they may have.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** The current electronic resources for students are challenging to find, which can be discouraging for foster youth to explore post-secondary education options, whether it be college, vocational, or trade school.

**Recommendation:**

When established, request Virginia Department of Social Services to provide information on the iFoster platform to include information from universities and colleges on what supports they provide former or current foster care youth. Resources on iFoster should include workforce development assistance, educational opportunities, housing and living stipends or discounts, financial supports, internship and employment opportunities, and other resources that are available in Virginia. Encourage all state and local agency employees working with foster care children, join and use the iFoster App with their foster care clients, assist foster care youth in subscribing to the App themselves, and remain current with newly added or updated resources.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** High school foster youth do not always have the same community support to help them explore post-secondary options. Currently Great Expectations programs are in all 23 community colleges in the Commonwealth to help students with these challenges. This programming has proven to be effective in helping students apply for schools and transition into new programs. Although Great Expectations is currently in all community colleges, there is little programming to help foster care youth at 4-year institutions.

**Recommendation:**

Request Great Expectations to explore potential partnership and expansion of programming to include public 4-year colleges and universities. Great Expectations programs at community colleges would partner with the nearest colleges to help start new programs.

**Recommendation:**

Request the Council of Independent Colleges in Virginia to partner with Great Expectations to have a smooth transition in order to achieve a 4-year degree and provide a point of contact for foster care youth.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Foster care youth who age out of the system and attend college or vocational training face many challenges including financial concerns.

**Recommendation:**

Expand the Virginia Tuition Assistance Grant Program to include additional money for former foster care and homeless youth who were in care or experienced homelessness after the age of fourteen.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Virginia needs more positions dedicated to expanding programs and working with universities and Great Expectations to ensure that the efforts to increase and improve foster care youth's access to higher education is attainable and executed efficiently.

**Recommendation:**

Introduce a budget amendment to fund a position at either State Council of Higher Education Virginia (SCHEV) or the Virginia Department of Education, dedicated to ensuring that the expansion of Great Expectations is done efficiently and to continuing to explore other ways to improve opportunities for foster care youth aging out of the system as well as former homeless youth.

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## FOSTER AND KINSHIP CARE FAMILY RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

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### Types of Foster Care Placements



- **Relative and non-relative foster care**—when a child is placed with foster parents who have been trained and approved by a local department.
- **Therapeutic foster care**—when a child who needs a higher level of care is placed with non-relative foster parents trained by a private agency.
- **Congregate care**—when a child who needs the highest level of care or supervision is placed in a group home or residential treatment facility.

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## Recruitment of Foster and Kinship Care Families



- When Children are first placed with relatives they spend less time in foster care, experience greater placement stability, and achieve permanency 96% of the time.
- Children who are placed in foster families spend less time in care, experience greater placement stability, and achieve permanency at higher rates than children placed by private agencies or in congregate care.
- Private agencies provide an important role in serving children with greater needs who require additional services.

## Effect of Private Placement on Children



- Title IV-E requires that foster children are placed in the **least restrictive, most family-like setting** consistent with the best interests and needs of the child.
  - Children who are placed with therapeutic foster families or in congregate care settings can be placed **far away from their communities, schools, and families**.
  - Therapeutic foster care and congregate care settings often are **more restrictive** than regular foster families, and limit a child's ability to form healthy attachments and develop independence.
  - Placing children with families **minimizes the trauma** of removal.
  - It is well established in child welfare research that **foster children have better outcomes when placed with a family**.

## Retention of Foster Families



- Virginia Department of Social Services activities:
  - 2022 data shows that parents who had been fostering 3-5 years made up the largest group, followed by 1-2 years and less than a year. The smallest group was more than 10 years.
  - In-service trainings to approved foster families as well as support groups to families currently fostering.
  - The Consortium for Foster, Adoptive and Resource Family Training (CRAFFT) provides regional support to local departments of social services in developing recruitment and retention plan.
  - To further support retention of foster families, the Resource Family Program will provide instruction to local departments of social services in its upcoming guidance release (January 2024).

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## Community Attention Foster Families (CAFF)



- Commission staff did a site visit to Charlottesville on August 28 to learn more about the Community Attention Foster Families (CAFF) recruitment and retention model.
- CAFF family services specialists are assigned to foster families in Charlottesville, Albemarle County or Greene County when a child or children are placed in the family's home.
- CAFF family services specialists provide regular and ongoing support through face to face consultation, coordination of necessary support services while serving as a liaison between parents and social services.
- CAFF families have access to a database of online training and resources through Foster Parent College as well as training and support groups offered monthly by CAFF.

<https://charlottesville.org/243/Community-Attention-Foster-Families>

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## Faster Families Highway



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## Recruitment of Foster and Kinship Care Families



### The Faster Families Highway

- Launched in April 2022, Faster Families Highway provides a digital resource to strengthen statewide partnerships with local departments and streamline the pathway to becoming a foster parent.
- Individuals interested in becoming a foster parent can register on the platform by either using a QR code or going to the site directly at [FosterVA.com](https://FosterVA.com).
- Provides a connection point for families interested in fostering.
- Each Local Department of Social Services has an individual "On Ramp" to the highway to see those that are interested in becoming a foster care parent in their locality.
- Local departments of social services then connect with those families interested in becoming a foster care parent.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Faster Families Highway provides a platform for those interested in becoming a foster parent to be connected with Local Departments of Social Services. A review of the highway would be helpful in determining improvements could be made in the recruitment of foster families.

**Recommendation:**

Request the Virginia Department of Social Services review the Faster Families Highway by conducting a survey of local departments of social services to ensure that the platform is providing the local departments of social services with the information that they need and that the questions for the interested foster care families are appropriate. Request that Virginia Department of Social Services provide a tab on the platform with helpful marketing information that is readily available for promoting foster care. Information that is sent in "Tool Kit Tuesdays" should be placed on the platform and templates should be developed to promote best practices in the recruitment of foster families.

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## Enhanced Payment



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## Recruitment of Foster and Kinship Care Families



### Virginia Enhanced Maintenance Assessment Tool

- As recommended by the Commission's Workforce Development Study for Foster Care Youth (2021), VDSS convened a stakeholder group to examine the feasibility of adopting a new uniform assessment tool in determining the enhanced payments for children in foster care with additional needs.
- In 2022, VDSS convened a workgroup and also gave input on the establishment of a pilot program that provided one-time additional funding to foster parents with a child who needs near constant supervision during an exceptional circumstance.
- The pilot program, Exceptional Circumstances Payment Program, was launched in February 2023.
- As of June 5, 2023, 47 foster care children have been referred, with 41 receiving additional funding.
- LDSSs can request funding of \$3,000, pro-rated for the month, for up to 3 months.
- LDSSs report that ECP helps support foster families with emergency situations.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** When a foster care child experiences an emergency situation, the foster family may need additional supports. Enhanced payments assist both the local departments of social services and the foster family in assuring that the child remains in an appropriate placement.

### Recommendation:

Introduce/support a budget amendment for the continuation of the Exceptional Circumstances Payment pilot program. The program shall provide funding in emergency situations for up to \$3,000/month for up to 3 months to ensure a safe and stable placement for children/youth in foster care.

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## Kinship Care



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## Recent Kinship Care Legislation



- **Collaborative Placement Program:**  
HB 653 (Wampler - 2022) – The Department shall establish and implement a collaborative local board placement program to increase kinship placements and the number of locally approved foster homes. Such program shall require local boards within each region work collaboratively to (i) facilitate approval of kinship foster parents through engagement, assessment, and training and (ii) expand the pool of available foster homes within and across the localities of such local boards.
- **State-Funded Kinship Guardianship Assistance program:**  
SB 1328 (Mason - 2021) – Creates the State-Funded KinGAP program to facilitate child placements with relatives, including fictive kin, and ensure permanency for children not eligible for the Federal-Funded KinGAP program.

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## Definitions



- § 63.2-100 of the Code of Virginia defines "Kinship care" as the full-time care, nurturing, and protection of children by relatives.
- "Kinship guardian," "kinship guardianship," and "federal-funded and state-funded kinship guardianship assistance program" are also defined in the Code.
  - "Federal-Funded Kinship Guardianship Assistance program" means a program consistent with 42 U.S.C. § 673 that provides, subject to a kinship guardianship assistance agreement developed in accordance with § 63.2-1305, payments to eligible individuals who have received custody of a relative child of whom they had been the foster parents.
  - "State-Funded Kinship Guardianship Assistance program" means a program that provides payments to eligible individuals who have received custody of a relative child subject to a kinship guardianship assistance agreement developed in accordance with § 63.2-1306.
- "Fictive kin" means persons who are not related to a child by blood or adoption but have an established a relationship with the child or his family. ( § 63.2-100)

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## Kinship Care Continuum



Informal Kinship Care		Formal Kinship Care	
No state involvement or funding	Family seeks state assistance	Child welfare contact but child is not in DSS custody	Child is in DSS custody = Kinship Foster Care
	TANF-only, but no child welfare contact	"Facilitated care arrangements"	KinGAP possible

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## Benefits of Kinship Care



- Children placed with relatives or close friends:
  - are lesser impacted by trauma, and
  - are less likely to run away.
- Kin arrangements help maintain vital connections and keep sibling groups together.
- Relatives are less likely to request that children be removed if their behavior becomes difficult.



<https://www.aact.org/resources/keeping-siblings-together>

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## SUBSTANCE USE

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## Substance Use



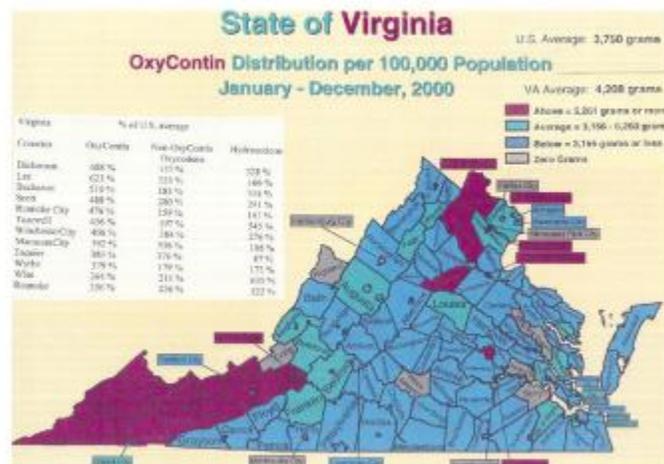
### Opioid Epidemic Overwhelming Virginia's Foster Care System with Children of Addicts

- Tazewell County
  - 1995 – 9 foster care children
  - 2000 – 58 foster care children
  - 2005 – 120 foster care children
- Statewide
  - 1995 – 1,323 foster care children
  - 2005 – 5,693 foster care children
- 30% of foster care admissions stem from parental drug abuse.

[https://www.ncsl.org/legislative-courts/opioid-epidemic-foster-home-children/article\\_ScBd992-22e-11ee-987-0711b-60241.html](https://www.ncsl.org/legislative-courts/opioid-epidemic-foster-home-children/article_ScBd992-22e-11ee-987-0711b-60241.html)

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## Substance Use



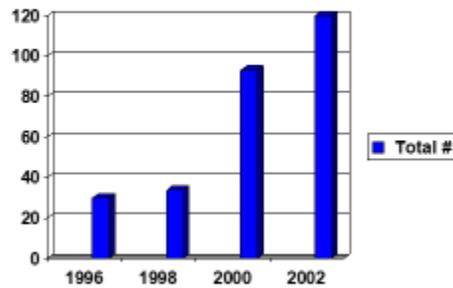
September 3, 2013 Opioid Abuse with Authority Meeting Presentation by Art van Zee, M.D. DEA—ARCOS DATA

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## Substance Use



### Total # Children Placed in Foster Care Lee County, VA



Lee County Department of Social Services

September 7, 2022 Opioid Abatement Authority Meeting Presentation by Art Van Zee, M.D. DEA—ARCS DATA

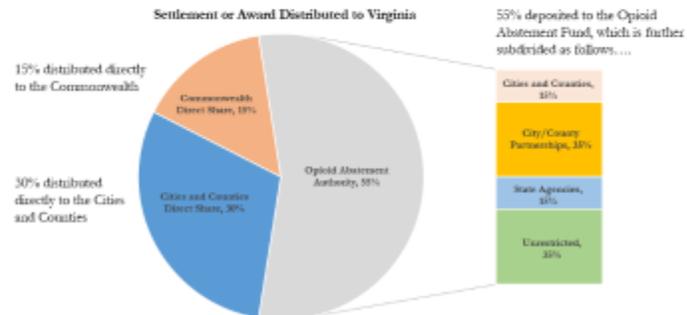
63

## Substance Use



### Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA)

- Established in 2021 as an independent entity to abate and remediate the opioid epidemic through financial support in the form of grants, donations or other assistance for the efforts to treat, prevent, and reduce opioid use disorder and the misuse of opioids in Virginia.



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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** One of the symptoms of the opioid epidemic track has been a huge increase in foster care in the areas most impacted by the epidemic. According to recent data, 30% of foster care admissions are linked to parental drug abuse.

**Recommendation:**

Request the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services in coordination with the Department of Social Services assess the barriers to availability of substance use treatment services across Virginia's localities and make recommendations for ways that community services boards and local departments of social services can collaborate and have systems in place to address a parent's substance use and prevent the removal of children from the home into the foster care system.

**Recommendation:**

Request the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority provide technical assistance to local governments, including local departments of social services, that were disproportionately impacted by the opioid epidemic.

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## DRIVER'S LICENSES

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## Drivers' License Program



### Virginia's Efforts to Create a Driver's License Program for Foster Youth

- The Commission conducted a study in 2019 and recommended to create an insurance reimbursement and educational program for a driver's license program in Virginia.
- In 2020, this amendment was placed in the final conference report budget, but was "unallotted" due to economic uncertainty related to Covid.
- During the 2023 Session, Delegate Tata and Senator Monty Mason put in budget amendments for \$250,000 each year for a Drivers' License Program for Foster Care Youth. These budget amendments were included in the floor approved budget in both the House and the Senate, but this item was not included in the final budget approved during 2023 Special Session I.

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## Drivers' License Program (continued)



### Virginia's Efforts to Create a Driver's License Program for Foster Youth

- In 2023, Virginia Department of Social Services developed a workgroup with key stakeholders focusing on
  - DMV Barriers/Solutions: driving hours and driving education.
  - Car insurance for youth in foster care under age 18.
  - Foster Parents/Caregivers support of youth driving and additional supports for foster parents and/caregivers.
- The workgroups are identifying barriers, creating solutions, and ultimately working towards building a statewide drivers assistance, education, and support program for eligible youth. This includes developing documentation, resources, partnerships, an awareness campaign, and/or recommending a guide to support the program.

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Teens in foster care face significant barriers to obtaining a driver's license. These young people often miss out on age-appropriate adolescent experiences and opportunities made possible by driving that create a sense of normalcy, which helps them make a successful transition to adulthood.

**Recommendation:**

Introduce/support a budget amendment to provide support for the development and implementation of a statewide drivers' licenses program for youth in and formerly in care in obtaining a driver's license.

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**RELIEF OF CUSTODY**

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## Findings and Recommendations



**Finding:** Local departments of social services across the state have seen an increase in the use of relief of custody as a way to deal with a troubled teen or child.

**Recommendation:**

Direct the Commission on Youth to review concerns surrounding the increased use of temporary and permanent relief of custody to place a child in foster care. The Commission shall convene an advisory group to assess this concern. This advisory group shall include the Department of Social Services, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, the Court Improvement Project, Local Departments of Social Services, Community Services Boards, and other relevant stakeholders.

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## Public Comment

Written public comment must be  
received by 5:00 p.m.  
on November 13, 2023.

Submission instructions are available  
online: (<http://vcoy.virginia.gov>).

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