

## REVIEW FUNDING AND SUPPORT FOR VIRGINIA'S CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY CENTERS

### DRAFT STUDY PLAN

#### Study Mandate

The Commission on Youth shall convene a work group of stakeholders and develop recommendations to respond to funding gaps for Virginia's Children's Advocacy Centers. The work group should examine Children's Advocacy Centers and identify funding models that support continued access to services. The work group should consider incentives for local governments to draw down funding in addition to existing state, federal, and private funding sources.

#### Background

- Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) are child-friendly facilities that enable collaboration between child protection, law enforcement, mental health and medical professionals, and attorneys investigating child abuse and neglect. CACs allow for more coordination and care while preventing retraumatizing potential victims of child abuse and neglect. "Children's Advocacy Center" is defined in § 63.2-100.
- After receiving a referral from Child Protective Services or law enforcement, CACs facilitate evidence collection in alleged cases of child abuse and neglect through convening a multidisciplinary team to review interviews of potential victims. CACs may also provide forensic medical exams and mental health services to support potential victims.
- Virginia has 19 CACs and 10 satellite CAC locations in communities throughout the state. Virginia CACs are primarily nonprofit organizations, while a few operate within local government agencies.
- Virginia's final Fiscal Year 2025-2026 Budget allocated \$1,970,402 the first year and \$4,317,756 the second year from the General Fund and \$2,136,500 the first year and \$3,136,500 the second year from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

#### Identified Issues

- CACs are handling increasingly complex cases that require intensive coordination with law enforcement, prosecutors, and child welfare partners. Underfunding has left CACs unable to fill critical positions limiting the ability of CACs to respond to upticks in child abuse cases and provide preventative education to mandatory reporters.
- CACs in Virginia are supported by General Fund dollars, TANF program funding, local funding, and private donations.
- The CAC funding model in the Appropriation Act has not been updated in over ten years to reflect changes in Virginia's population and where services are needed.
- Facilities must undergo an accreditation process to receive funding as a CAC. This process is prohibitively expensive without government support or private donations when starting a

CAC. These funding gaps have led to current CACs opening satellite locations to reach unserved areas.

### **Study Activities**

- Convene a work group including representatives of the Children's Advocacy Centers of Virginia and other relevant stakeholders:
  - Child Protective Services
  - Commonwealth's Attorneys
  - Community Services Boards
  - House Appropriations
  - Law Enforcement
  - Local Departments of Social Services
  - Local Government Representatives
  - Office of the Attorney General
  - Office of the Executive Secretary, The Supreme Court of Virginia
  - Senate Finance and Appropriations
  - Victim Advocates
  - Virginia Commission on Youth
  - Virginia Department of Social Services
- Engage in stakeholder interviews.
- Perform site visits to regional CACs and satellite branches.
- Evaluate statewide demand for CAC services.
- Examine the role of CACs in the investigation of abuse against children.
- Research current funding streams and funding gaps.
  - Review existing state, federal, local, and private funding sources.
  - Assess the impact of the loss of federal Victims of Crime Act funds.
- Identify sustainable sources of funding.
  - Review funding models and best practices in other states.
  - Review possible incentives for local governments to draw down additional funding (above a base allocation) to support Children's Advocacy Centers through partnership arrangements that may include the allocation of space, administrative support, or other supports.
  - Review potential access to funding through various court fees or other revenue options.
- Develop recommendations for a permanent, sustainable funding model.
- Report findings and recommendations to the Commission on Youth.