



Families Forward Virginia
2022 POLICY AGENDA

POLICY PRIORITIES

Every public policy we advocate for focuses on ways to promote safe, stable and nurturing relationships for all children to assure that they can reach their full potential. Every child is filled with tremendous promise, and we have a shared obligation to foster their potential. It's clear that we have not all experienced this pandemic in the same way. Through our 50 affiliates across Virginia, we're seeing children and families – who were already struggling – desperately seeking help, dealing with job loss, stressing about how to pay bills such as rent, utilities and food, and facing lost or no health insurance.

Improve and Expand Maternal and Infant Health Services

What: Create a Home Visiting benefit in Virginia's Medicaid program.

Why: Home visiting programs promote healthy birth outcomes, enhance school readiness, address behavioral health needs and connect parents to services, prevent child abuse and improve health disparities. Medicaid reimbursement will allow the state to leverage federal funds to serve more families.

What: Fund randomized controlled trials for CHIP's evidence base.

Why: Virginia has been funding its own homegrown home visiting program, CHIP, for many years with great outcomes. Now is the perfect time to provide additional funding to help CHIP become an Evidence Based Program so that it can leverage its current Virginia funding with national funding streams.

Reform the Child Welfare System

What: Prevent unnecessary foster care placements by enhancing programs and resources for kinship caregivers.

Why: Children do better in families, yet kinship caregivers receive minimal support in creating safe and supported environments for children. For those who are placed with family members, Virginia doesn't have a system to ensure their ongoing safety and permanency.

What: Make the Children's Cabinet a permanent part of the Executive Branch.

Why: Services for children are spread across multiple secretariats. These services and programs need unified leadership, tighter coordination, and greater alignment. Only the Children's Cabinet brings all of the relevant secretariats and agencies together at the highest levels of executive leadership to tackle systemic problems.

What: Appropriate funding to boost salaries and hire additional child welfare caseworkers so that child-welfare and foster-care cases are managed appropriately and effectively.

Why: Children's lives are at risk because the child welfare system is critically understaffed. High caseworker turnover rates (40% before 18 months) interfere with stability, safety, and permanency efforts for families and children. More caseworkers are required in local communities to protect children, reduce caseloads, and protect and supervise children who are no longer with their parents.

Strengthen Economic Supports to Families

We support making Virginia's Earned Income Tax Credit refundable.

We support the creation of a state level refundable Child Tax Credit in Virginia.

Why: Improved household financial security has proven to reduce the risk factors for child abuse and neglect. Policies that strengthen family financial security can go a long way toward reducing childhood adversity and enhancing the relationships that help children thrive. When families face financial hardship, it sets the stage for more stress and less tuned-in interaction with children. Boosting family incomes through emergency direct payments, tax credits and paid family leave can relieve pressure, helping to head off childhood adversity before it happens.

We support guaranteed Paid Sick Leave and/or Paid Family Leave for Virginia's families.

Why: Paid leave has been associated with lower infant mortality and higher rates of immunizations. Studies have found that paid leave increases exclusive breastfeeding and may improve women's economic outcomes.

Parental Resilience and Success

We support increased access to Behavioral Health Services for parents, including treatment for substance use disorder.

Why: Behavioral health services and substance use treatment for parents reduces child maltreatment, improves family outcomes, and keeps families together by preventing foster care placement.

We support better addressing the co-occurrence of child abuse and domestic violence with additional treatment services, and reforming and increasing education on healthy relationships, that includes information on boundaries and consent, for parents and children.

Why: Child physical abuse is 15 times more likely to occur in families where domestic violence is present.

We support reforming laws that currently punish sex trafficking survivors while also improving access to services for victims and survivors.

Why: Common practice is to treat sex-trafficking victims as criminals, as opposed to survivors that need help to escape their traffickers and disrupt cycles of abuse.

Change social norms to support parents and positive parenting

We support helping parents learn more effective disciplinary measures that do not rely on fear and submissiveness, and which enhances children's capacity to grow up to be self-sufficient and responsible people. This is done through programs such as Home Visiting and parenting education.

Why: Studies have shown that spanking can be a source of toxic stress for children and can stunt brain development by reducing connective tissue between brain cells. As a general rule, all parents want what's best for their children. We also know

that children don't come with instruction manuals, yet parenting is one of the most difficult jobs even in good times. All parents need help learning how to raise and teach their children. It's especially critical for parents who didn't have good role models themselves, don't have help from relatives or can't access programs such as home visiting where they learn skills and understand what behaviors and skills are appropriate for specific ages.

We support actively dismantling the root causes of stress and anxiety that can lead to child abuse, including systemic structural racism and discrimination. Racial and economic disparities have life-threatening consequences for families.

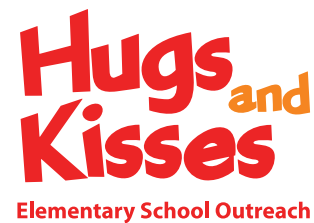
Why: Children need safe, stable environments and relationships to thrive, but decades of housing discrimination – including unfair lending practices that work against families of color today – mean that they are less likely to live in neighborhoods with

access to good jobs. Long commutes and low wages place enormous pressure on parents. Chronic stress can lead to a toxic stress response – flooding the body with dangerous levels of stress hormones – and making anger, hostility and depression more likely. This set of cascading consequences helps explain the link between race and child abuse or neglect.

Provide quality childcare and education early in life

We support creating universal access to high quality childcare for every family in Virginia.

Why: Childcare is necessary infrastructure for Virginia's economy. Affordable and accessible childcare for Virginia families allows parents to work. This increases payroll taxes, enables parents to support their children while disrupting the cycles of abuse, poverty and neglect.



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