



Families Forward Virginia
2021 POLICY AGENDA

POLICY PRIORITIES

Expand Home Visiting Programs

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

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

Reform the Child Welfare System

What: Appropriate funding to boost salaries for and hire additional child welfare case workers to effectively manage child-welfare and foster-care cases.

Why: Children's lives are at risk because the child welfare system is critically understaffed. High caseworker turnover rates (40 percent within 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.

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 the relevant secretariats and agencies together at the highest levels of executive leadership to tackle systemic problems.



Strengthen Economic Supports for Families

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.

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

We support increasing TANF supports by raising cash benefit levels, expanding eligibility and removing barriers to participation.

Why: Improved household financial security has proven to reduce the risk factors for child abuse and neglect. Additional financial resources will help families with children meet basic living needs including food, shelter, child care and clothing.

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 reduce child maltreatment, improve family outcomes and keep 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 increasing education and training on healthy relationships 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 and 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.

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.

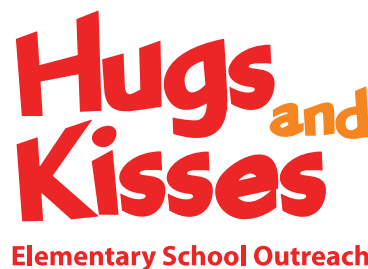
We support actively dismantling the root causes of stress and anxiety that can lead to child abuse, including systemic structural racism and discrimination. Racial and economic disparities have life-threatening consequences for families.

Why: Study after study proves that racism has been traumatizing Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and other peoples of color, causing them painful emotional, physical and psychological harm.

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 and enables parents to support their children while disrupting the cycles of abuse, poverty and neglect.



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