

****UPDATE:** Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, there will be significant changes to the new 2020-2022 state budget that could impact some of the programs and changes described below.

Expand Home Visiting

Home visiting added as a service to the Medicaid program. The budget includes \$11.8 million GF in the second year of the biennium. Service is under development now and planning launch in 2021.

Reform the Child Welfare System

- **Hire Additional Caseworkers:** Budget includes a little over \$30 million over biennium to hire additional staff. This is connected to the Family First Prevention Services Act.
- **Increase Caseworker Salaries:** Budget includes a 6 percent increase in starting base salaries for local caseworkers. An additional \$5.6 million GF in each year of the biennium for salary compression issues and raise base salaries of local DSS case workers.
- **Revamp Caseworker Trainings**
- **Foster Care Kinship Support:** DSS will develop a plan to provide statewide access to a Kinship Navigator Program. DSS will create an emergency approval process for kinship caregivers and develop foster home certification standards for kinship caregivers. KinGap is expanded to Fictive Kin (a person who the child has a history of a strong relationship with who is not related by blood).

Trauma Informed Care

Family and Children's Trust Fund of Virginia is included as a dedicated recipient of additional revenue from Casinos in future years. It is estimated that FACT could receive an additional \$300,000 per year in 4 to 5 years. This would increase FACT's ability to fund Trauma Informed Community Networks and their services across the Commonwealth.

Parental Resilience & Success

- **Behavioral Health Services for Parents:** An additional \$3 million in state funds is included to extend FAMIS MOMS eligibility from 60 days postpartum to 12 months. Budget also includes funding to expand inpatient substance use treatment services for those enrolled in FAMIS MOMS.
- **Family Life Education Reform:** HB 1336 (Del Keam) requires every School Board to review its Family Life Education curriculum at least once every 7 years.
- **Adult Dental Medicaid Benefit:** Roughly \$34 million GF for comprehensive adult dental benefits for Medicaid recipients. This will become available to all adults enrolled in Medicaid on January 1, 2021.

Physical Punishment of Children

- **Child Abuse Prevention Plan:** The final budget headed to the Governor for approval includes language requiring the Commonwealth to create a 5-year Child Abuse Prevention Plan. The plan requires multiple state agencies to collaborate with stakeholders (such as Families Forward Virginia, Voices for Va's Children, Va Poverty Law Center, etc.) on a Child Abuse Prevention Plan that focuses on primary prevention with a public health framework. The final draft of the plan is due on July 1, 2021.
- **Children's Ombudsman:** HB 1301 (Del Hurst) creates The Office of the Children's Ombudsman as an independent agency to investigate any complaints relating to the state and local Department of Social Services, child-placing agencies and child-caring institutions to ensure appropriate and quality care in foster care and adoptive homes. The Ombudsman would be appointed by the Governor of Virginia and would have the ability to do legislative advocacy. The approved House/Senate Conference budget includes over \$400,000 and 4.5 new positions to staff the Children's Ombudsman within the Office of the Governor and outside any state agency. The state will work to get the Office up and running in 2020.

Improve Childcare Affordability

The Virginia Department of Social Services has changed the way they administer the Childcare Assistance for Working Families program. They have improved usage and increased access to this important subsidy so that it is serving more families.

Enhance Family Self Sufficiency

- **Refundable EITC:** The refundable EITC bill died early in session. Attempts to get it included as part of the big cigarette/tobacco tax bill failed as that also died in subcommittee.
- **Increase TANF supports:** Increase TANF income eligibility so more families can qualify and increases cash assistance by 15 percent. This would equate to an approximately \$55 addition per month for a two-person household. Even with this eligibility increase, only working families in deep poverty – below 50 percent of the federal poverty level – would be eligible for TANF.

Early Childhood Education

Early Childhood Reform legislation (SB578/HB1012) pushed by the Administration to move oversight for all early education programs to the Department of Education. This received bipartisan support from the House and Senate. Both bills are on the way to the Governor's desk to sign into law. Additional Investments in Early Childhood total more than \$85 million over the biennium.

Family Friendly Work Policies

All these bills unfortunately died. However, there are significant efforts at the federal level to address these policies due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

