



Family & Children's Trust Fund of Virginia

December 6, 2023

The Honorable Glenn Youngkin
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor Youngkin:

The Family and Children's Trust Fund (FACT) was created in 1986 as a public-private partnership to raise funds, increase awareness and advise on policies for the prevention of family violence, including child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, sexual assault, and elder abuse and neglect. FACT is the only organization in Virginia that addresses family violence across the lifespan. With administrative support provided by the Virginia Department of Social Services and funding oversight from a gubernatorial appointed board, FACT receives income through dedicated license plates' sales, a state-income tax check-off program, casino revenue proceeds and other private donations. One of FACT's duties, as outlined in the *Code of Virginia*, is to advise the Governor on issues related to child abuse and neglect and family violence.

With this charge in mind, we are writing to endorse the following proposed budget requests from the Virginia Department of Social Services, all of which are critical to effective prevention and intervention of family violence:

Kinship Care/Relative Foster Homes and Alternative Living Arrangements

FACT commends your leadership in addressing the critical issue of placements for children in the foster care system through the establishment of the Safe and Sound Taskforce. We know that kinship placements can be a safe, expedited, out-of-home placement option for many children and decrease the burden on the already overwhelmed foster care system. Studies also show that, in most cases, children achieve better outcomes when placed with safe, appropriate kin versus with families they don't know in the foster care system. Currently, there is very limited financial support available for these placements. Kin caregivers are expected to absorb most of the costs required to house and care for the child placed in their care. That imposes a significant burden on families and even prohibits many placements from occurring. Funding of this initiative would address this issue and result in increased availability of kinship care opportunities for children in need. (DPB Document ID# ab19a114-a67d-4502-bd2a-bd5f2365178e)

Implement Standardized Training Academy of Local Agencies

In state fiscal year 2022, there were 52,894 children, about 1,000 per week, reported as possible victims of child abuse or neglect. Of these, 4,911 resulted in founded investigations, 8,179 resulted in unfounded investigations, and 39,804 resulted in family assessments. Child welfare professionals care deeply about these children but struggle to keep up with their burgeoning caseloads. Local departments face multiple challenges in addressing chronic staff shortages of workers who are ill-equipped to manage the level of complexity presented daily by these cases. A long-identified issue associated with the high rates of staff turnover in these jobs is a lack of preparedness of workers to deal with the large volume of cases, extensive administrative requirements and level

of trauma exposure faced in these positions. This is particularly true for younger workers, many of whom have only recently graduated from college. Implementation of a standard training academy, which would be evidence-based and modeled after the training academy established for state police, would address many of the issues faced by this beleaguered labor force and result in improved responses to cases and compliance with administrative requirements, and increase resilience to the secondary trauma exposure experienced by workers. (DPB Document ID# 7ad21bcf-3c40-4801-ae88-bd840fe710db)

Strengthening Households and Transforming Communities with the Whole Family Approach

The Virginia Department of Social Services and community action agencies have demonstrated they can bring lasting improvements to the lives of Virginia's families and children through the implementation of the Whole Family Model through community action. This innovative approach transcends the existing silos in social services delivery, ushering in a comprehensive, integrated solution that addresses the needs of both children and adults within a family unit. The adoption of this model is important if we are to reduce reliance on public assistance and alleviate inter-generational poverty for low-income families through workforce participation. The lessons learned from the successful pilot are ready to be implemented across the state to lift families out of poverty. We know that supporting stability in parents and children is a significant protective factor against abuse and neglect. (DPB Document ID# 1d81cb35-93d3-492e-96ad-6c6f8412e84e)

Support Agency Information Technology Transformation

VaCMS was implemented in 2014 to create a single system for processing and delivering benefits across the Commonwealth, such as Medicaid, SNAP, TANF, EAP, and the Child Care Subsidy program. This critical system is outdated by almost a decade and requires updating to continue to provide key services to Virginians. Updating this data system is needed to assist in staying in compliance with federal reporting requirements, collecting data needed to increase access to services, and better determining outcomes of families and children receiving assistance. These benefits provide a lifeline to survival for many families throughout the Commonwealth and are foundational to stability. (DPB Document ID# 15d812fb-f3d9-4c55-8c33-ef04280df8cf)

I thank you for your leadership in the Commonwealth and your attention to these issues.

Sincerely,



Linda D. Wilkinson, Chair
FACT Board of Trustees

c: The Honorable John Littel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources
 The Honorable George L. Barker, Co-chair, Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee
 The Honorable Janet Howell, Co-chair, Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee
 The Honorable Barry D. Knight, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
 Danny TK Avula, MD, MPH, Commissioner, Virginia Department of Social Services
 Kathryn A. Hayfield, Commissioner, Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitation Services
 Mike Tweedy, Senior Legislative Fiscal Analyst, Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee
 Susan E. Massart, Legislative Fiscal Analyst, House Appropriations Committee