

Proposed: October 8, 2014

Adopted: October 8, 2014



## **ALEXANDRIA CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES COLLABORATIVE COMMISSION**

Department of Community and Human Services Center, 2525 Mount  
Vernon Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22301

*Sean McEneaney*  
Chairperson

### **2015 LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT AGENDA**

Established in 2012, the Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission (CYFCC) advocates for Alexandria's children and youth (prenatal to 21 years) and their families by advising City Council, the Alexandria City Public School Board, and City and School staff on policies that affect children, youth and their families; promoting the coordination, alignment and effectiveness of services provided to children, youth and their families by the City, Alexandria City Public Schools and private organizations; studying and promoting research and best practices; and raising awareness at the State and Federal level about the unique needs and experiences of Alexandria, Virginia.

Through its advocacy efforts, the Commission seeks to educate the public and policy-makers about the issues affecting children, youths, and families, and to promote and support beneficial public policy.



## LEGISLATIVE CALL TO ACTION

Alexandria's Children, Youth and Families Collaborative Commission (CYFCC) offers this call to action to leaders at the federal, state and local level to support early care and learning opportunities, strong public school education, employment, and housing.

### FEDERAL

**Access to Affordable, High-Quality Child Care:** The Commission supports and encourages efforts to make child care available, affordable, and of high-quality through federal investments in the Child Care and Development Block Grant and effective policies.

**Preschool Opportunities:** The Commission supports and encourages efforts to make access to high-quality preschool a reality through investments and policies in partnership with the federal government and the states.

**Fingerprint Background Checks:** The Commission supports and encourages efforts to make a national background check database accessible and affordable to child care providers.

*The Commission also supports initiatives of the U.S. Departments of Education, Labor, Health & Human Services, and Housing & Urban Development that support vulnerable children, youths and families.*

### STATE

**Virginia Preschool Initiative:** The Commission supports and encourages expansion of the Virginia Preschool Initiative to reach additional at-risk children, as well as review of the policy and program details for successful implementation by localities.

**Affordability of Child Care:** The Commission supports and encourages efforts to expand access to affordable, high-quality child care that meets the needs of working families in our state, including sufficient funding for child care subsidies for eligible low-income working families.

**Fingerprint Background Checks:** The Commission supports and encourages efforts to establish state policy requiring fingerprint background checks for prospective and current child care employees and volunteers.

**Child Day Care Fee System:** The Commission supports and encourages efforts to increase state funding for payment rates to providers, and to direct the use of savings from child care system automation and unused federal child care dollars to raise the payment rates for subsidized child care.

**Integrated Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System:** The Commission supports and encourages the continued development and maintenance of Project Child Hands and the other components of the Virginia Longitudinal Data System.



**Comprehensive Kindergarten Readiness Assessment:** The Commission supports and encourages the development of a comprehensive readiness assessment methodology to measure children’s developmental readiness for kindergarten.

*The Commission also supports initiatives of the Commonwealth’s Department of Health that support vulnerable children, youths and families.*

### CITY

**Virginia Preschool Initiative:** The Commission encourages City Council and Alexandria City Public Schools to maximize the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) allocation from the state so that eligible at-risk 4 year olds are enrolled in the program. Further, the Commission supports mixed delivery of VPI – that is, continued partnerships so that public schools and community-based providers are VPI grantees able to serve families.

**Affordability of Child Care:** The Commission encourages City Council to make local funds available so that Alexandria’s low-income working families have access to child care subsidies and are not turned away due to state limitations.

**Fingerprint Background Checks:** In the absence of national and state action, the Commission encourages City Council to establish local policy requiring fingerprint background checks for prospective and current child care employees and volunteers.

**Comprehensive Kindergarten Readiness Assessment:** In the absence of state action, the Commission encourages the public schools board to establish policy that promotes development of a comprehensive readiness assessment methodology to measure children’s developmental readiness for kindergarten.

**Youth Employment:** The Commission encourages and supports policy to develop workforce readiness employment opportunities for teens and young adults that will prepare them for careers in the new global economy.

**Public School Physical Plant Capacity:** The Commission supports and encourages policy that promotes collaboration between private providers, including nonprofits and for-profits, and the Alexandria City Public Schools to build physical plant capacity for the City’s growing population of children and youths.

**Workforce Rental Housing:** The Commission supports and encourages a comprehensive workforce housing plan that balances the growing need for market rate housing and housing affordable to working and low-income families.



## Background: Problems and Solutions for Children

**Preschool Opportunities:** High-quality early learning opportunities put children on a path to success in school and in life. Unfortunately, too many families do not have access to these opportunities. Child development research and economic research both point to the value of investments in smart policies for preschool learning opportunities, and there is a growing interest at the federal, state and local level across the United States and across political parties.

In Virginia, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) is funded at the state level, with a required local match. VPI is intended to serve at-risk 4 year old children. Each school division sets its own criteria for the children who are eligible to participate; however, most children who attend VPI live in low income families, below 185% of poverty, or meet other criteria, such as non-English speaking parents or moderate developmental delays. Some school districts choose to put more local investment into VPI and therefore draw down more state match. As of 2012, VPI reached only 16% of Virginia's 4 year olds.

There are opportunities to serve families through the school districts (such as, a preschool classroom at an elementary school) as well as through community-based early care and education programs. This mix is valuable in Alexandria for meeting the needs of children and families.

**Affordability of Child Care:** In addition to ensuring the safety and quality of child care, and working with providers to connect the dots between payment rates and cost of high-quality services, there are important policies supporting the affordability of child care.

Income-eligible families (as determined by each state) can get help to off-set the cost of child care – if sufficient funds are available. Nationally, only one in six eligible children are reached with current levels of federal and state investment; thousands of families are turned away or added to a “waiting list” in Virginia.

Child care subsidies are a crucial support for low-income working families when the cost of child care in Virginia is more than \$10,000 per year on average or an infant in a child care center and more than \$7,500 per year on average for a preschooler in a child care center. This is simply out of reach for low-income working families (and many middle class families, too).

**Fingerprint Background Checks:** Parents need to be assured that their early care and education providers and others who come into contact with their children, including volunteers, are safe and trusted caregivers. At a minimum, families should rest assured that a comprehensive background check has taken place on all child care providers, but unfortunately Virginia (and many states) falls short. Even though Virginia does require a criminal background check for child care providers it is not an FBI check and, therefore, limited in usefulness.

Currently, there is no single, all-encompassing background check database available in the U.S. While still not all-encompassing, a Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) check is the best background check currently available, yet it is not always accessible to youth-serving organizations. Individual states are the gatekeepers of criminal history information and they can decide who can access the information, as well as who can have access to the FBI's information. In fact, 34 states bar access to FBI information. Those



that do allow access to the FBI information charge significant fees (ranging from \$24 - \$59 per person), and have turnaround times as long as six weeks.

*(Progress in 2014: In its 2014 legislative sessions, the General Assembly formed task force to study implementation of fingerprint background checks.)*

**Child Day Care Fee System:** Although the payment rates to providers for subsidized child care services (“maximum reimbursable rates”) in the Commonwealth for preschool age and school age children was recently increased, the rates are still far below what is needed to support quality early education and care for Virginia’s children. The recent increases brought the rates up to the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. The federal government recommends reimbursement at the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile of a market rate.

Federal policy requires that states establish payment rates for subsidized child care services that ensure eligible children equal access to comparable early education services. Although Virginia conducts a market survey every two years, as required by federal policy, the rates are not updated regularly to reflect the current market. Virginia’s recent increases are the first for school age care since 2001 and the first for preschool age care since 2004. Infant and toddler rates were not increased.

When payment rates do not reflect the true market cost for early education, low-income families often have to pay higher fees than they can afford for early education services. When this happens, the value of wages earned shrinks, preventing families from advancing to true self-sufficiency. In addition, due to the impact on their budget bottom line, providers may choose not to serve low-income families, thereby limiting access for low-income families to good quality options for early education.

*(Progress in 2014: In its 2014 legislative sessions, the General Assembly asked the Department of Social Services to study implementation of a tiered reimbursement system and report to the Governor and Assembly by November 30, 2014.)*

**Integrated Early Childhood Longitudinal Data System:** One of the components of the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS) is Project Child Hands. Project Child Hands enables local and state agencies to track service receipt and outcomes over time and across agencies at the child or family level; tracks individuals over time without tracking personal information; builds on other systems to make administrative data useful beyond the immediate reporting period; and is built to bring in additional data and connect with the other components of the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (i.e. Virginia Longitudinal Data System; Virginia Department Of Education, State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, Virginia Community College System, and Virginia Employment Commission).

This comprehensive data collection and analysis system serves as a powerful tool to study the behaviors and transitions of students from preschool to public school, through college, and into the workforce. With this information, policy-makers and advocates can more easily and readily formulate effective and beneficial education and workforce policy.

**Comprehensive Kindergarten Assessment:** Kindergarten readiness assessments can provide critical information regarding children’s level of preparedness for formal schooling. Using such assessments can help communities better understand the effectiveness of their early care and education systems, and determine where gaps may exist in particular areas of readiness or among particular groups of children in terms of their transition into kindergarten. Assessment information about children’s readiness for school is also critical for teachers and families who are interested in promoting future success through school-



family partnerships that support children as they transition into the public school system; and, also allows stakeholders on multiple levels (policymakers, administrators, and classroom teachers) to make strategic decisions regarding appropriate interventions and targeted funding for the purpose of effecting the most change in the most efficient manner.

*(Progress in 2014: During its 2014 session, the General Assembly declined to add \$1 million funding request for Virginia Early Childhood Foundation for this purpose.)*

### Background: Problems and Solutions for Youths

**Youth Employment:** While the recent economic downturn has increased unemployment in the general population, teens and young people have suffered particularly. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 16.3% of youths in the City of Alexandria between the age of 16 and 24 years old were unemployed at the end of December 2012. This compared to an overall unemployment rate of 4.2% for all ages in the City for the same period.

It is essential that Alexandria invest the resources necessary to educate its young people, if the City hopes to emerge from the current fiscal crisis with a workforce prepared to take on the new regional and global economy.

**Public School Physical Plant Capacity:** Alexandria's ability to compete effectively in the regional economy depends heavily on the City having a well-educated workforce. By enriching the educational experience and developing strong academic and practical skills for our young people, they will be prepared to successfully pursue higher education or enter the workforce. The Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) faces many challenges to raising the quality of the educational system in the City, not the least of which is the steadily increasing student enrollment. Enrollment has been increasing at a rate of 4% annually, atop a growing base of students. This increase is imposing a heavy burden on school facilities and the delivery of education. This increase in demand is likely to continue, and will require both improving existing school facilities and constructing new facilities, as well as increasing partnerships with nonprofits which have both resource capacity and facilities.

### Background: Problems and Solutions for Families

**Workforce Rental Housing:** In Alexandria the number of rental housing units affordable to working families has declined since 2000 by one-third. Alexandria has 3,710 publicly assisted rental units, yet in 2010 more than 10,000 households needed housing. While there is no consensus on the exact quantity and type of workforce housing or how it should be funded, there is little disagreement that Alexandria needs to provide for the underserved and working residents of the City that make an important contribution to our local economy.

*(Progress in Virginia: In FY2015, City Council added \$150,000 to the Rent Relief Program.)*