

Proposed: January 27, 2014
Adopted: January 27, 2014



RESOLUTION

DATE: January 27, 2014

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Programs & Assessment Committee
Julie Jakopic, Chair

RESOLVE TO: TO APPROVE 2014 LEGISLATIVE SUPPORT AGENDA

SUMMARY

Approval of this Resolution by the Trustees will authorize the Programs & Assessment Committee to work with elected officials, community organizations, and others to educate and advocate on behalf of Hopkins House in support of the specified public policy issues.

ACTION REQUESTED

To authorize the Programs & Assessment Committee to present to the public and elected officials the position of the Hopkins House Trustees and their rationale on the below described matters of public policy during the 2014 calendar year.

DISCUSSION

Hopkins House has long maintained a strong partnership with state and local officials in supporting the education and workforce training needs of children, youths, and adults residing and working in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Although the Commonwealth, as well as the City of Alexandria, Arlington and Fairfax counties where Hopkins House programs and offices are located, has made considerable investment in programs for children, youths, and adults, additional need, especially among the low-income, remains.

Given the significant cuts in the federal budget and related support to states and local government jurisdictions in 2014, thousands more of the Commonwealth's children, youths, and families are in even greater need. As such, state and local officials, in partnership with nonprofits, must work harder, with less, to do more for those in need.

Virginia must invest the resources necessary to educate its citizens, beginning at birth, if we hope to remain competitive in the global economy; and, nonprofits must partner with government so

that Virginia emerges from the current fiscal crisis with a workforce prepared to take on the new global economy and an economy able to support the employment needs of a robust workforce. To be sure, modest investment today will pay considerable tangible and social dividends for years to come.

Lawmakers and the public need to know that smart investment in education and workforce training programs are good for the economy – today and in the future:

- For every dollar invested in early childhood education, \$7-16 are generated in special education savings, child welfare savings, decreased grade retention, reductions in juvenile crime, reductions in adult crime, increased earnings by parents, and increased tax contributions; and,
- In order to remain a strong economy, Virginia needs well-educated, highly skilled, and motivated youths and adults.

The Hopkins House Trustees have long recognized that investments in effective education and workforce training programs can and do save public funds by minimizing the need for more costly social services later in life.

The Hopkins House Trustees are committed to working collaboratively with government officials, community groups and faith-based institutions, and others in developing resources to help meet the education and workforce training needs of all children, youths, and adults in the Commonwealth and particularly those at-risk.

LEGISLATIVE ITEMS TO SUPPORT

1. MAINTAIN STATE AND LOCAL FUNDS FOR CHILD CARE SUBSIDIES FOR LOW-INCOME WORKING FAMILIES

During periods of economic downturn, a secure source of state and local dollars is needed in the Commonwealth to defray the cost of child care for economically disadvantaged families not participating in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Virginia Initiative for Employment and not Welfare (VIEW), known as “Fee System Child Care.” State and local investments in helping families move off welfare and into long-term economic stability are undermined when Fee System Child Care is not adequately funded by state and local governments.

Research indicates that the employment and economic independence of parents is jeopardized when affordable child care is outside their reach. Parents may be forced into unemployment in order to care for their children; forced to begin or return to welfare programs; or forced to place their children in unregulated and potentially unsafe child care settings, or worse yet, leave them to care for one another alone.

Without subsidies to meet market prices, low-income working families may not be given access to the quality child care and early childhood education that helps young children arrive at kindergarten prepared and ready to learn. Child care assistance is essential for continued economic growth. It also contributes to low unemployment, preserves state and local investments

in welfare to work programs, and provides excellent opportunities for a true partnership between localities and community-based organizations.

The median annual income of families receiving Fee System Child Care subsidies is \$25,836 in Northern Virginia -- a region where the average cost of full-time preschool child care ranges from \$8,000 to \$12,000 per year. These families are truly the working poor who require some assistance with child care costs in order to help them achieve self-sufficiency.

The Hopkins House Trustees support efforts to maintain and increase state and local government funding for Fee System Child Care.

2. INCREASE CHILD CARE PROVIDER REIMBURSEMENT RATES

Additional funding is needed to increase the payment rates for subsidized child care services (maximum reimbursable rates). Federal policy requires that states establish payment rates for subsidized child care services that ensure eligible children equal access to comparable child care 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 has not increased its school age child care rates since 2001; or its infant, toddler, and preschool child care rates since 2004.

When payment rates do not reflect the true market cost for child care, low-income families often have to pay higher fees than they can afford for child care 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 child care.

The Hopkins House Trustees support efforts to increase state funding to raise the payment rates for subsidized child care.

3. MAINTAIN FUNDING FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDER SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

The Virginia Child Care Provider Scholarship Program (VCCPSP) offers current and future child care workers a foundation in the care and development of children. The program, funded through Virginia's share of the federal Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF), provides assistance for child care workers to attend college courses at Virginia institutions of higher learning. VCCPSP scholarship recipients must be an employee of a child care program located in Virginia, or a Virginia resident who is employed in a non-Virginia child care program, or a Virginia resident who has declared their intent to become employed in child care. The VCCPSP pays the cost of college tuition and the technology fee for up to two courses per semester. Any additional fees for travel or expenses, such as books, are the responsibility of the child care worker.

Funding for the VCCPSP is likely to be affected by cuts in federal CCDF funds to the Commonwealth. This would result either in smaller or fewer VCCPSP scholarships. Investment of state funds to make up any loss of federal funds would be a smart investment of taxpayer dollars both in quality education for children and workforce training for youths and adults.

The Hopkins House Trustees support efforts to maintain state funding for the Virginia Child Care Provider Scholarship Program.

4. FINGER PRINT CHECKS FOR CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Parents need to be assured that their child care providers and others who come into contact with their children, including volunteers, are not sex offenders, violent offenders especially related to child abuse or neglect, and have not engaged in other behaviors that endanger the well-being and care of children.

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. The FBI check is the only truly nationwide check available. 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.

For employment at childcare centers, Virginia has mixed requirements:

Federal Finger Prints	State Finger Prints	Criminal Record Check	Child Abuse Registries	Sex offender Registries
NO	NO	YES	YES	NO

The federal Child Protection Improvements Act of 2004 created a pilot program whereby selected youth-serving organizations would have access to timely, inexpensive FBI background checks. Of the nearly 40,000 checks conducted in the pilot program, 6.1 percent of all applicants were found to have criminal records that rendered them unfit to work with children (including convictions of criminal sexual conduct with a child, aggravated criminal assault, rape, homicide, and other "serious" felonies). Forty percent of these individuals had a criminal record from other states, meaning that only a nationwide check would have caught the criminal record; and, 26 percent of these individuals showed a different name on their record than the one they used on their job application.

A bill to extend and expand the Act and make it permanent is now working its way through Congress. The Act would create universal access to nationwide background searches by designating a criminal history review entity or organization to process background checks on prospective employees and volunteers for youth-serving organizations; provide participating organizations with reliable and accurate information as to whether an individual's criminal record bears upon his fitness to work or volunteer with children; create a "one-stop" system where a local organization could elect to obtain both a state and FBI search in one place; keep the fee for nationwide background checks and criminal history review as low as possible for youth serving organizations, no more than the actual cost – with a maximum of \$25; and, ensure that individuals that are subject to background checks can request their full criminal histories and challenge their accuracy and completeness, and receive a prompt response from the jurisdiction holding the records.

Some childcare advocates in Virginia are pushing for state legislation to require FBI background checks. However, absent government funding, such a mandate would financially burdensome on some organizations.

The Hopkins House Trustees support permanent enactment of federal and state child protection laws including FBI background checks.

4. RAISE VPI ELIGIBILITY LEVEL

The Virginia Preschool Initiative is a State-sponsored program that provides State funding to be matched with local funding to pay for preschool for at-risk 4-year-olds. The current formula used to determine a locality's funding is based in part on the percentage of a locality's children that qualify for a free lunch through the USDA lunch program. For a child to be eligible for a free lunch, the child's family income must be at or below 130 percent of the federal poverty guidelines (this is slightly more than \$30,000 annually for a family of four).

Raising the eligibility level to 185 of poverty (slightly more than \$43,000 annually) would cover more low-income families and provide preschool opportunities to more children.

The State should also seek to use more accurate numbers to project the number of preschool-aged children within a locality. Projections are now based on free lunch eligibility forms submitted by all K-12 students, but older students often do not return forms to the school to indicate whether they are eligible for free or reduced lunches. By basing projections on the number of eligible kindergarten students only, the Virginia Department of Education projections of the number of VPI eligible 4-year olds in a locality would be more accurate.

The Hopkins House Trustees support raising the VPI eligible level to 185% of federal poverty and encouraging Virginia officials to use a more reliable method for projecting locality utilization levels.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Under this Resolution, authority is granted to the Committee to utilize available funds allocated to the Office of the President & Trustees in order to attend meetings with elected officials and groups to articulate this Legislative Agenda. Therefore, the financial impact of approval of this Resolution will, at most, be incremental to the currently authorized Organization budget.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

Julie Jakopic, *Chair*
Justin Wilson, *Vice Chair*
Ray Menefee, *CAO*
Joie Acosta

Sarah Klein
Maggi Wanis
Jacque Walker
Amy Liu-Witmer