



The Fairfax County Democratic Committee Urges Governor Northam, the Virginia General Assembly, and the County's Legislative Delegation to Increase Childcare Access and Affordability Across the Commonwealth

Whereas,

Access to affordable quality childcare, early education and afterschool care are known to increase children's academic, social, and emotional learning while enabling parents to work and contribute to the economy.

The supply of quality childcare for children ages 0-12 in the Commonwealth is woefully inadequate to serve all children equitably, with great disparities between localities, income levels, and race.

Access to public education for children ages 5-18 is recognized as a universal right for all, but infant care, early education, and after-school care are not despite growing evidence that quality care in each of these areas has a significant impact on a child's ability to learn and thrive.

Childcare for Infants Ages 0-2:

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has determined that, to be affordable, childcare should not exceed 7% of a family's income. In Virginia, a married couple pays an average of 14% of household income for center-based infant care and 9% for home-based care – for one child. In the case of two children, the percentages double to 28% and 18%. For a single parent of median income in the state, the cost of a single infant in a childcare center represents, on average, 47% of their income. The cost of providing high quality infant care is proportionally higher per child than for other age groups. This means many private childcare centers choose not to offer infant care, do not accept childcare subsidy vouchers as payment, or offer infant care with razor-thin/no margins.

Public funding for infant care in Virginia is limited to the states' allotment of federal funding through the early Head Start and the Childcare Subsidy Program. Early Head Start is only available to parents experiencing a disability or extreme poverty, which leaves out thousands of children. Until 2021, the Childcare Subsidy Program was only available to parents making 39-65% of the state median income and while a recent expansion (up to 85%) enables more families to qualify, this expansion was funded by federal stimulus dollars and is set to expire in 2022 unless it is renewed.

It is impossible to determine the exact need for infant care in Virginia, but nationally, approximately half of all families with children under the age of 6 find it difficult to find childcare. A survey commissioned by the Virginia Department of Social Services found that 89% of childcare provider respondents have a waiting list for infant/toddler care, with nearly as many on the waiting list as are being served.

Preschool for Children Ages 3-4:

The Virginia Kindergarten Readiness Program found that children who attend preschool are more prepared for kindergarten. This is especially true for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are 1.5 times more likely to be ready for kindergarten than their peers who do not attend preschool. Only 36% of low-income 3- and 4-year-olds, attend any form of preschool, compared to 55% of their more economically advantaged peers. Unlike many other states who include 3 and 4- year-olds in their programs, Virginia only operates a public preschool program for 4-year-olds. This program, the Virginia Preschool Initiative, only serves children deemed "at-risk," which includes 19% of the state's 4-year-olds. There is no public preschool option for 3-year-olds. This places Virginia 31st in the country in terms of public access to preschool

compared to Maryland which ranks 13th and Washington, D.C. which ranks 1st.

Afterschool Care for Children Ages 5-12:

Most school days end between 2pm and 4pm and are not in session during the summers, leaving a significant amount of time when school-age children need other care or supervision. While Virginia state law does not specify an age when children are permitted to stay at home by themselves, most counties, including Fairfax, offer guidelines suggesting children 9-12 can be left alone for increasing amounts of time, but never more than 3 hours at a time.

There is a strong link between afterschool programs and academic success. An evaluation of Virginia's 21 federally funded Century Community Learning Centers found that 81% of students improved homework completion, 74% improved their classroom behavior, 65% improved their academic performance, and 57% improved their motivation to learn. Yet currently, only 12% of Virginia's school age children are enrolled in an afterschool program.

Access to quality, affordable afterschool care is especially important among families experiencing poverty, which disproportionately affects African American and LatinX families. 51% of Virginia's school age children (602,302 children) would be enrolled in an afterschool program if one were accessible to them. In the last decade, the number of children unable to access afterschool programs in Virginia has grown by 231,736 with the primary barriers being cost and lack of safe transportation to and from the programs. As programs are not able to return to pre-pandemic capacity, the need for afterschool care is and will remain even greater.

State Investments in Childcare:

Virginia remains one of the few states without a universal preschool program for 4-year-olds, without any state funding for preschool for 3-year-olds, and without dedicated state-funding for afterschool care.

While a recent influx of over \$1 billion in additional federal funds through COVID relief bills is providing much needed support to the childcare industry and a temporary expansion of the childcare subsidy, these funds are temporary and, therefore, are not likely to result in long-term improvements or increased access to childcare.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Fairfax County Democratic Committee:

1. Urges that the Governor of Virginia and gubernatorial candidates commit to making access to quality, affordable childcare a priority for children ages 0-12 across the Commonwealth so they may have an equitable opportunity to reach their full potential;
2. Urges that every Democratic member of the Virginia General Assembly commit to establishing and funding universal childcare for children ages 0-12 that is affordable, accessible, and high-quality; and
3. Will join the Virginia Promise Partnership which is comprised of organizations and individuals working to ensure that all Virginia families have access to affordable quality childcare by 2030.

PASSED and APPROVED on this 28th day of September 2021.