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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

General Assembly Bill Falls Short of Protecting All Children in Child Care
Modest Step Leaves Children At Risk

Richmond, VA- The Virginia General Assembly approved legislation yesterday to address child care safety. The bill requires fingerprint-based background checks for some child care providers and reduces the licensing threshold for child care home providers from 6 unrelated children to 5 unrelated children.

"The conference agreement is better than current law," said Sharon Veatch, Executive Director of Child Care Aware of Virginia. "But, we have a problem with unlicensed care in Virginia and merely "better than current law" isn't much of a yardstick."

"At least 54 children, mostly infants and toddlers, have died in unlicensed care. We know that we can prevent these types of tragedies. While the measure approved by the legislature is a step in the right direction, it largely leaves the unlicensed care problem unaddressed," said Veatch.

"With regard to the background check requirements included in the conference agreement, because the measure did not require fingerprint checks for all child care providers who are currently subject to a name-based check, the provision will be confusing for parents," said Veatch. "It could result in an unintended consequence where those individuals who wish to circumvent the screening system apply to work in programs exempt from the new fingerprint-based screening requirement."

"I am most concerned that the legislature may be jeopardizing Virginia's federal child care funding since a new law passed by Congress in November requires fingerprint checks for all categories of child care. But, the conference bill exempts some categories," said Veatch. "The intent of the law was to protect children. Virginia receives more than \$100 million per year through the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant. I don't know what happens when a state passes legislation in conflict with a federal law. But, unfortunately, it's children who will pay the price."

A JLARC study of child care in Virginia conducted 25 years ago called for many protections to ensure that children are safe in child care. A Department of Social Services Task Force released a report in November recommending fingerprint-based background checks for all licensed and regulated child care providers. The task force was created as a result of legislation passed by the Assembly last year.

“It is disappointing that commissions and task forces make recommendations, but those recommendations are largely ignored,” said Veatch. “We can protect children. We can make sure that children are safe. We needed a home run on this, but what the conference agreement amounts to is a single. That’s good, but not enough on the safety scoreboard for children.”

“Children should be safe in child care,” said Veatch. “It’s that simple.”

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[Child Care Aware® of Virginia](http://www.vachildcare.org/) is a community-based network of early care and education specialists whose purpose is to deliver services to families, child care professionals and communities to increase the accessibility, availability, and quality of child care in Virginia. For more information, our website is located at: <http://www.vachildcare.org/>.

One Pagers on some of the children who have died in unlicensed child care:

- [Cami Lafkin](#)
- [Joseph Allen](#)
- [P'Nut Bodine](#)

Additional Materials:

- [Joint House-Senate Conference Agreement](#)
- [Child Care Aware of Virginia Conference Agreement Summary](#)
- [November 2014 Department of Social Services Task Force Report on Background Checks](#)