

2018 Public Policy Agenda in Brief

January 2018



In Brief: Child Care Aware of Virginia is committed to promoting quality child care for children throughout the Commonwealth. Children should be safe and parents should have choices among quality settings that will promote their children's healthy development.

Our recommendations for the General Assembly promote both: safe settings for children and quality choices for parents.

Child Care in Virginia

Every week throughout Virginia, parents of young children need child care in order to go to work. In too many communities, child care is difficult to find, more difficult to afford, and parents too often have far too few choices to meet their needs.

In Virginia,

- 387,037 children under age 6 have working parents;
- 496,000 children age 6-12 have working parents.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2016 American Community Survey 1 Year Estimates.

Child Care as an Economic Development Strategy

Parents need child care in order to work and working parents pay taxes. Quality child care benefits children as well as parents. Investing in quality child care is a two-generation economic development plan – assisting today's workers and the next generation.

The Condition of Child Care in Virginia

The good news is that Virginia continues to make progress in implementing the state's child care quality rating system, Virginia Quality. However, only a small percentage of programs are currently participating and national studies rank Virginia low on state licensing standards – the gateway to quality.



Recommendations for the General Assembly

Child Care Aware of Virginia recommends that the General Assembly review state child care policies and strengthen requirements to ensure that all children whose families need child care are in a safe setting that promotes their healthy development.

Background Checks

Comprehensive background checks (*a fingerprint check against state and federal records, a check of the sex offender registry and child abuse registry*) for all staff working in centers and all adults in family child care homes that are licensed, regulated or registered are currently required to promote child safety. The background check requirement is scheduled to expire in July of 2018.

- The provision that ends the requirement for background checks should be repealed. Children should be safe in child care.

License-Exempt Care

In 2016, the General Assembly passed legislation to require a review of Virginia's 14 categories of license-exempt care. A study was published in December of 2016, which reviewed each category and recommended policies to promote child safety. Statutory revisions should be made to conform with the study recommendations.

- License-exempt programs should be required to register with the Department of Social Services.
- License-exempt programs should be required to post signage on the premises indicating that they are not licensed, not inspected, and self-certify basic health and safety requirements.
- License-exempt programs should be required to have some minimum protections for children (e.g., at least one staff member with CPR certification, staff background checks, attendance records, an emergency evacuation plan, adhere to safe sleep practices for infants, and follow current Virginia laws on the transportation of children - if applicable).

Tough Penalties for Providers Operating Illegally

In 2016, Joseph's Law was enacted to charge providers with a felony (instead of a misdemeanor) if they are operating illegally and a child dies in their care. Despite several cases in the past year involving illegal operation and child deaths, providers are not being charged with a felony.

- Convene commonwealth attorneys to review Joseph's law and make recommendations so that the law is utilized as intended.

Breakdown the silo between Child Care Licensing and Virginia's quality rating & improvement system.

- Require child care licensing to be integrated within VA's quality rating system. As programs exceed licensing standards, they would move up levels within the rating system.
- Require providers receiving subsidy to participate in the quality rating system so that parents can better understand the quality of programs.

Quality Set-Aside

Over the next five years,

- Gradually increase the percentage of Child Care and Development Block Grant funds spent on quality related activities.
- Invest in Child Care Resource and Referral agencies within communities to strengthen the quality of care and assist families in finding quality child care.

Training and Professional Development

- Adopt a framework to strengthen the professional development of the early childhood workforce including:
 - Training courses that are intentional, sequential, competency-based and lead toward a higher level of skill or certification;
 - Support for programs to strengthen the workforce such as T.E.A.C.H. and W.A.G.E.\$;
 - Technical assistance as either follow up to training to ensure that training is translated to practice or independent TA to better meet the needs of each program;
 - Support training for child care providers to assist in earlier identification of children who are in need of early intervention; and,
 - Based on Caring for our Children, increase Virginia's training requirement from 16 hours to 30 hours of initial training and 24 hours of annual training.

Inspections/Monitoring

- Prohibit self-certification without documentation.
- Require uniform policies with regard to inspections for all child care programs.

Licensing Threshold

- Require a license for all paid providers as soon as they regularly care for at least one unrelated child.
- Provide a modest increase in the licensing fee to invest in a T.E.A.C.H. and W.A.G.E.\$ program to strengthen the quality of the child care workforce.

Subsidy Access to Quality Care

- Set subsidies based on the most recent market rate survey at the 75th percentile or tiered reimbursement based on quality indicators.

Tax Incentives

Review the tax code for ways to provide:

- An incentive for families to choose quality child care;
- Greater participation in Virginia's quality rating system;
- Training and additional education for child care teachers and directors to offer high quality child programs; and
- Incentives for businesses to support quality.