



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Commission on Youth

Senator Harry B. Blevins, *Chairman*
Delegate John S. Reid, *Vice Chairman*

General Assembly Building, Suite 517B
Richmond, Virginia 23219-0406

Executive Director
Amy M. Atkinson

804-371-2481
FAX 804-371-0574
<http://coy.state.va.us>

April 10, 2006

TO: The Honorable Timothy M. Kaine, Governor of Virginia
and
Members of the Virginia General Assembly

In 2003, the Commission on Youth unanimously approved action directing the Commission on Youth to undertake a two-year study for the purpose of identifying elements which strengthen families and to determine strategies for strengthening family service systems within the Commonwealth.

This report, consisting of an executive summary and study presentation, is submitted for your consideration. The Commission on Youth would like to recognize the assistance provided by a number of agencies, organizations and individuals in completing this study.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amy M. Atkinson".

Amy M. Atkinson
Executive Director

**FINAL REPORT OF THE
VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH**

Strengthening Families

**TO THE GOVERNOR AND
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA**



COMMISSION ON YOUTH REPORT DOCUMENT 13

**COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
RICHMOND
2005**

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From the Virginia House of Delegates

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Glen Francis
Marvin H. Wagner

Commission on Youth Staff

Amy M. Atkinson, Executive Director
Joyce Garner
Leah Hamaker
Marilyn Jackson

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I. Authority for Study

Section 30-174 of the *Code of Virginia* establishes the Commission on Youth and directs it to "...study and provide recommendations addressing the needs of and services to the Commonwealth's youth and their families." This section also directs it to "...encourage the development of uniform policies and services to youth across the Commonwealth and provide a forum for continuing review and study of such services."

Under Section 30-175, the Virginia Commission on Youth has the power and duty to "undertake studies and to gather information and data in order to accomplish its purposes as set forth in Section 30-174, and to formulate and present its recommendations to the Governor and the General Assembly." In addition, "at the direction or request of the legislature by concurrent resolution or of the Governor, or at the request of any department, board, bureau, commission, authority or other agency created by the Commonwealth or to which the Commonwealth is party, study the operations, management, jurisdiction or powers of any such department, board, bureau, commission, authority or other agency which has responsibility for services to youth."

In 2003, the Commission on Youth elected to assess and identify elements which strengthen families. A two-year study plan was adopted. In the first year, the Commission analyzed measures other states were taking, as well as reviewed federal initiatives that were designed with the goal of strengthening families. In the second year, the Commission determined strategies and recommendations to strengthen family service systems within the Commonwealth.

II. Members

Members of the Commission on Youth are:

Senator Harry B. Blevins, Chair, Chesapeake
Delegate Mamy E. BaCote, Newport News
Delegate Robert H. Brink, Arlington
Delegate Mark L. Cole, Fredericksburg
Delegate William H. Fralin, Jr., Roanoke
Senator R. Edward Houck, Spotsylvania
Senator Yvonne B. Miller, Norfolk
Delegate John S. Reid, Vice Chair, Chesterfield
Delegate Robert Tata, Virginia Beach
Miss Vanessa Cardenas, Arlington
Mr. Glen Francis, Portsmouth
Mr. Marvin H. Wagner, Fredericksburg

III. Executive Summary

In 2003, the Commission on Youth elected to conduct a two-year study in order to assess and identify elements which could assist in strengthening Virginia's families. This study initiative was in response to growing awareness that strong families are better able to combat poverty, juvenile delinquency, welfare dependency, and teen

pregnancy. Several states have taken steps to revise policies and practices in both income support programs and systems policies in order to promote and strengthen the family. Additionally, a number of states have reviewed and/or implemented a variety of programs with the purpose of strengthening the family. A number of these policy approaches were reviewed to ascertain which ones could best be utilized in Virginia.

In the first year of study, the Commission analyzed measures other states were taking and assessed federal initiatives developed to strengthen families. In the second year, the Commission analyzed state and local services available in the Commonwealth with the purpose of strengthening family service systems. A statewide Advisory Group and three Regional Workgroups were convened to assist in the study effort. All of the assembled groups were comprised of professionals and policymakers with expertise in children and family issues. Using information from these meetings, strategies and recommendations were made to strengthen Virginia's families. This report addresses the problem of obesity among children and adolescents in Virginia.

Based upon an analysis of the issues and the input of the Regional Workgroups and the Advisory Group, the Commission on Youth adopted the following recommendations:

IMPROVED STATEWIDE COORDINATION

Recommendation 1

Strengthening Family Statewide Task Force & Plan

The Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, to convene a Statewide Task Force for the purpose of developing a plan to assess, identify, and communicate ways to strengthen families within the Commonwealth. The Statewide Task Force shall also focus on existing efforts and make recommendations for linking and integrating such efforts. All child-serving agencies in the Commonwealth shall participate in this effort. Members shall include representatives from the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Office of Comprehensive Services, the Virginia Department of Health, and the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court. Representatives from the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, faith-based organizations, and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce shall also be invited to participate in this effort. The Secretary of Health and Human Resources shall report the plan to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees and the Virginia Commission on Youth.

Strengthening Family Summit

Direct the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, to convene a Statewide Summit charged with assessing, identifying, and communicating ways to strengthen families in the Commonwealth. This shall be pursuant to §63.2-703. Topics addressed shall include community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. All child-serving agencies in the Commonwealth shall participate in this summit. Members shall include representatives from the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Department

of Education, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Department of Social Services, the Office of Comprehensive Services, the Department of Education, the Virginia Department of Health, and the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court. Representatives from the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, faith-based organizations, and private sector organizations that serve families and children, and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce shall also be invited to participate in this effort. This summit shall be convened prior to the 2007 General Assembly Session, with a report of the findings from the summit being submitted to the Virginia Commission on Youth.

DATA COLLECTION

Recommendation 2

Collection of Data on Marriage and Divorce Rates

Amend the Code of Virginia to direct the State Registrar of the Virginia Department of Health to compile, publish, and distribute aggregate data on the number of marriages and divorces that occur each year within the Commonwealth. Such information shall be broken down by locality and include information regarding age, race, and any other pertinent information. Such information shall be posted on the agency website. Additionally, the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth shall request, via letter, that the Virginia Department of Health report on its progress to the members of the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.

Collection of Data on Local and Regional Service Barriers and Needs

Request, by letter, that the Virginia Municipal League (VML) and the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, conduct a statewide survey ascertaining existing partnerships and best practices that strengthen Virginia's families. The survey will include questions on program strengths at the regional level, barriers that exist in serving families and solutions/programs that can address these gaps or barriers. The results of the survey shall be communicated to the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.

IMPROVEMENT OF INFORMATION & REFERRAL SERVICES

Recommendation 3

Inclusion of all Family- and Child-serving Agencies in the I&R System

Direct that all state and local child-serving agencies within the Commonwealth be included in the Virginia Statewide Information and Referral System (I&R System). The Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Education, and the Secretary of Public Safety shall assist in this effort by requesting all agencies they oversee to submit information to the I&R System.

Training and Education on the I&R System

Direct the Department of Social Services to communicate with all child-serving agencies located within the Commonwealth about the availability of the statewide I&R System and that all child-serving agencies located within the Commonwealth be informed and trained on the availability of the I&R System, as outlined in § 63.2-226 of the Code of Virginia. This information shall also be communicated via the Department of Social Services' broadcast system on their agency-wide Intranet so that all local and regional offices can be better informed about the Statewide I&R System. Moreover, information

on the Statewide I&R System shall be included within the Department's electronic mailings to all local and regional offices at least biannually.

Marketing and Promoting Virginia's I&R System

Direct the Department of Social Services to work with I&R providers and other public and private partners to develop strategies to market and promote Virginia's I&R System, along with the 211-phone campaign currently under development. A report on these activities shall be submitted prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees as well as to the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth.

211 System

Request the Chair of the Commission on Youth to send a letter to the CEO of Verizon outlining the importance of the Virginia I&R System and requesting that Verizon waive its connection fee for 211. (Verizon is charging a considerably higher connection fee than the other companies.)

Implementation of a 211 System in Virginia

Request the Chair of the Commission on Youth to send a letter to the Governor encouraging him to contact the CEO of Verizon outlining the importance of the Virginia I&R System and requesting that Verizon waive its connection fee for 211.

Increase Funding for I&R System

Introduce a budget amendment increasing funding for Virginia's I&R system to allow for implementation of the statewide, 24-hour 211 system.

Improving Virginia's I&R Website

Direct the Department of Social Services, in conjunction with Virginia Information and Technologies Agency, to develop a plan to modify Virginia's current I&R System webpage to make it more comprehensive and user-friendly. This plan shall be submitted prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees, as well as to the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth.

MENTORING FOR AT-RISK POPULATIONS

Recommendation 4

Family to Family Mentoring - Adults

Request by letter that the Virginia Department of Social Services to encourage localities to utilize "family to family" mentoring. This program model helps low-income families move toward financial self-sufficiency by providing training and technical assistance to existing and developing mentoring programs to increase the number and quality of mentoring relationships for children and youth at risk, and adults in transition from welfare to work.

Support Virginia's Involvement in the NGA Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy

Request the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth to send a letter to the Secretary of Public Safety and Secretary of Health supporting Virginia's participation in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy. Moreover,

request the Virginia Policy Academy to consider incorporating messages about the benefits of healthy relationships and strong families in program formulation, as well as the importance of transition plans and services for juveniles returning to the community.

COMMUNITY-BASED HEALTHY FAMILY PROGRAMMING

Recommendation 5

Continuation of Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative Grants

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services to continue funding for the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative grants to provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. Such grant activities will address training needs, parenting programs, youth programs, programs for newlyweds, community marriage initiatives, and healthy relationship promotion. Such grants shall be funded by the Federal Safe and Stable Families or other appropriate funds.

IMPROVED FAMILY ADVOCACY

Recommendation 6

Family Advocacy Network

Request the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to lead a collaborative effort with other child serving departments, parents, and advocacy organizations to develop and implement a statewide parent/family resource and advocacy program that is coordinated with existing programs. This is also a recommendation from the State Executive Council Study on Relinquishment of Custody Study as well as from the 330 F Report (2004). The Secretary shall report on these efforts to the Chair of the Commission of Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.

Recommendation 7

Continuation of Study Efforts

Request that the Commission on Youth monitor efforts taking place in the Commonwealth regarding efforts to strengthen families and update the Commission on Youth on such developments prior to the 2006 General Assembly.

IV. Study Goals and Objectives

The Commission's study plan provided six objectives for studying ways to strengthen Virginia's families.

These were:

- Identify and assess those elements that will serve to strengthen Virginia's families;
- Analyze measures other states are taking, as well as the various federal initiatives available to assist in strengthening families;
- Coordinate with various agencies to ascertain specific services/programs for children and families;
- Identify data sources and analyze data;

- Determine strategies to strengthen family service systems in the Commonwealth; and
- Formulate recommendations for the Commission on specific policy options that strengthen families.

In response to these study objectives, the Commission undertook the following activities:

1. Collected information on:
 - Federal initiatives;
 - Other states' efforts; and
 - Regional and statewide information on service needs and barriers.
2. Collected national and statewide data identifying the following:
 - Marriage/Divorce rates;
 - Non-Marital births;
 - Single parent families; and
 - Welfare reform and impact upon the family.
3. Convened a statewide Advisory Group to provide assistance and expertise in analysis of the issues.
4. Convened three Regional Workgroups to identify regional-specific barriers and solutions.
5. Identified inconsistencies and policy questions that could be resolved.
6. Developed appropriate, feasible, and cost-effective recommendations to address the identified barriers.

V. Methodology

Commission on Youth staff developed a study work plan to guide the efforts of this study. Following its approval, the Commission relied upon several research and analysis activities.

A. ANALYSIS OF OTHER STATES' LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

During the first year of the study, Commission on Youth staff conducted an extensive literature review of existing state policies and legislation. In addition, staff reviewed related resources published by government agencies, private organizations, and advocacy organizations. In the course of the analysis, staff reviewed a variety of these publications and source documents. Research was specifically conducted to ascertain other states' diverse policies on strengthening families, promoting two-parent families, and reducing divorce to ascertain if they could be implemented effectively in Virginia. Staff reviewed these policies and legislative activities and disseminated them to the Advisory Group and Regional Workgroups for further discussion and analysis.

B. REVIEW OF VIRGINIA'S EXISTING POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

During the first year of the study, Commission on Youth staff received information from the Virginia Department of Health on existing programs designed to promote and foster strong families. Information on all of the Department's programs with the mission of strengthening the family with specifics given on the mission of the program, funding of the program, evaluation of success, number of individuals served, regions/localities

served by the program and how the program is important in the effort to strengthen the family was shared with the Commission. Detailed information on programs specifically funded with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) funds was also received.

In the second year of this study, staff received information on programs funded by the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS). DSS awarded grants to local projects to provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to help strengthen healthy marriages or to help troubled marriages. Several of these projects were also designed to help single individuals to develop skills that will lead to healthy stable families and/or healthy marriages. This information was analyzed to assess what service needs were addressed by these programs and what gaps or barriers remain.

C. STATEWIDE ADVISORY GROUP

In the second year of the study, Commission on Youth organized a statewide Advisory Group to examine the issues and provide relevant expertise. The 13-member Advisory Group included representatives of the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Social Services, the Office of Comprehensive Services, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Education, the Department of Health, and the Office of the Executive Secretary, Supreme Court of Virginia. Representatives of other organizations with an interest in serving families were also included in the study effort, including representatives from the Virginia Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), the Virginia Municipal League (VML), the Virginia Family Foundation, the Virginia Association of Baptists, and the Marriage Builders Alliance of Richmond. The Advisory Group membership is provided as Appendix A.

The Advisory Group was asked to assume the following responsibilities:

- Identify issues impacting efforts to strengthen families in Virginia;
- Identify both services and barriers at the state level;
- Discuss existing services;
- Offer suggestions for conducting of study; and
- Evaluate proposed findings and recommendations.

The Advisory Group convened once during the course of the study (October 25, 2004). At this meeting, the Advisory Group identified and refined the issues. Group members subsequently completed their work via electronic and telephone communication to finalize the findings and recommendations.

D. REGIONAL WORKGROUPS

During the second year of the study, the Commission on Youth convened three Regional Workgroups to provide a regional view on service provision necessary for strengthening families. These groups met during on the following dates at the following venues:

- Tidewater – Virginia Beach, August 16, 2004
- Northern Virginia – Manassas, September 17, 2004
- Southwestern Virginia – Roanoke, October 21, 2004

Each workgroup included representatives from local communities, non-governmental and community-based organizations, academic institutions, and the private sector. In addition, representatives of relevant state and local governments including social services, health, schools, juvenile justice, and child welfare agencies were invited to participate. The three workgroup membership lists are provided as Appendix B.

A questionnaire was distributed to the workgroup members so they could provide information not covered during the course of the meetings. The questionnaire is provided as Appendix C, as is a synopsis of the issues identified by each of the workgroups, Appendix D.

E. RESEARCH ON BEST PRACTICES

During the first and second year of the study, Commission on Youth staff conducted an extensive literature review on best practices for strengthening families. A great deal of research and literature has been compiled on the success of state and federal initiatives that are designed to strengthen families. Commission staff conducted an extensive search of both Internet and library sources and then reviewed and analyzed this large body of research. The relevant literature is included in the body of this report.

F. SURVEY OF LOCAL SERVICES AND MODEL PROGRAMS

In 2005, the Commission on Youth, with assistance from the Virginia Municipal League (VML), the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), and the Virginia League of Social Service Executives (VLSSE), conducted a statewide survey of partnerships and best practices to strengthen Virginia's families. The survey included questions on programs and strengths that exist at the regional level, barriers which exist in serving families, and solutions/programs to address these gaps or barriers. The survey instrument is provided as Appendix E.

VI. Background

Family structure in the United States has changed dramatically in the past half-century. The traditional family has been impacted by penetrating societal change, such as divorce, declining marriage rates, increased rates of cohabitation, and single-parent families. Many have concluded that the breakdown of the family exacts a high cost on children, families, and taxpayers. Examples of such costs include poverty, welfare dependency, juvenile delinquency, and teen pregnancy.

These problems are complex and multi-faceted, and the service array delivered to these fragile families is frequently provided by more than one agency. From an economic perspective, it can be argued that many of the services delivered would not be required had the family been offered key services that would have precluded family dissolution. Policymakers are beginning to search for solutions that actively promote improved service delivery with the goal of strengthening the family. Because there is no defined national policy for families, there is still no central focus within the cabinet

structure of the Executive Branch. The United States has no agency devoting its attention entirely to families.¹ This is also true for Virginia.

In response to this concern, the Commission on Youth conducted a study to ascertain how policies and programs can be better designed or improved to better strengthen Virginia's families. The goal of this study was to determine which policies can best address the diverse needs of families in the Commonwealth, while also addressing the impact of the breakdown of the traditional family. In its review, the Commission addressed the controversial issues that are impacting families, while offering solutions that are the most cost-effective and the least duplicative. Current trends in family composition were reviewed, as well as federal legislation, state strategies, and their implications for Virginia. In this study report, Virginia programs which designed to strengthen families are discussed, along with the Commission's findings and recommendations.

A. BENEFITS OF STRONG FAMILIES

According to testimony before a subcommittee of the U.S. Congress, the family is the "most powerful, most humane, and the most economical system for building competence and character" in children and adults.² Strong families are central to social and economic development as well as the creation of vigorous, sustainable communities. The health of America's communities is intricately linked to the well-being and vitality of the nation's families.³ Communities and individuals both reap the benefits that strong families offer. Additionally, the family has historically served as a safety net during hard times. Families have bolstered its members against economic and social tensions. Members of strong families are perceived as healthier, happier, and better adjusted. Policy-makers, professionals, and family members are recognizing that one of the best ways to help individuals, both children and adults, is to focus on their families. Families carry out a variety of functions critically important to society. They share resources, economically support their members, and care for the elderly, the sick, and the disabled in ways that no other institution can do or do as well.⁴ The family is also the essential provider of safety and security for children. Moreover, 75 percent of Americans believe that family is the most important factor in achieving personal happiness.⁵

Strong families are vital components of strong cities and towns. Further, strong families also provide a productive workforce that promotes and sustains economic growth at the local level.⁶ Strong families influence communities by voting, volunteering, and forming robust neighborhoods. Conversely, communities have observed that they also incur the costs associated with the breakdown of the family.

¹ Karen Bogenschneider, "Building Policies that Put Families First: A Wisconsin Perspective," *Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars Briefing Report*, March 1993.

² Bogenschneider.

³ National League of Cities, "YEF Audio conference to Focus on Strengthening Families," *Nation's Cities Weekly* 25 March 2002: 3.

⁴ Bogenschneider.

⁵ Will Lester, "Family Comes First in U.S., Japan," *Associated Press*, 24 July 2005.

⁶ Julie Bosland, "New Agenda for Strengthening Families Bolsters Municipal Efforts," *Nation's Cities Weekly*, 14 March 2005.

Changes that occurred in family life also have a direct impact to the quality of community life.

B. SHIFTING DEMOGRAPHICS

Declining marriage rates, increased rates of de facto marriage, divorce, and single-parent families are trends that are being witnessed in communities across the nation. The following information is taken from the "U.S. Census Report on America's Families and Living Arrangements 2000," issued in June 2001.⁷ In 2000, there were only 2.3 million marriages. Nearly two in ten Americans had not married by age 45, specifically, 18.1 percent. Another 15.5 percent of men and women age 35 to 45 were unmarried, almost triple the 6.1 percent of unmarried adults in this age bracket in 1970. In 1960, 66 percent of Americans were married and living together; whereas, in 2000, only 53 percent of Americans were married and sharing a home. Much of this has to do with the rise of cohabitation. In 2000, according to the Census, 4.9 million couples were living together at any moment in time; in 1960, that number was 430,000; the 2000 numbers reflect an increase of 11 times in 40 years.

In 2001, 69 percent of children in the U.S. lived in two-parent families, a drop from 77 percent in 1980.⁸ This statistic reflects the escalating divorce rate. The percentage of adults under 45 years old who marry is at around the 90-percent level, while the percentage of first marriages ending in divorce may be as high as 50 percent.⁹ This is up from the 1976 estimate that one-third of all marriages will end in divorce.¹⁰

C. VIRGINIA DEMOGRAPHICS

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 3 million of the state's population of approximately 5.5 million (age 15 years and over) are married. Of this number, 500,000 (15 years and over), are divorced. As of 2001, approximately 30,000 divorces were awarded in Virginia, a 10 percent increase since 1990. As of 2000, there were 275,523 single-parent families with children under 18 years of age.¹¹ The number of children residing in single-parent households has increased 4.1 percent from 1990 to 2000, placing Virginia 32nd in the country. About one in five children under age six live with their mother and approximately one in three of these children live in poverty.¹² Chart 1 includes the percentages of marriages, divorces, and separations in Virginia. The Federal Poverty Guidelines for 2006 are provided in Table 2.

⁷ Jason Fields and Lynne Casper, "America's Families and Living Arrangements: March 2000," U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC. June 2001, March 2006 <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2001pubs/p20-537.pdf>>.

⁸ Jennifer Macomber, Julie Murray, and Matthew Stagners, "Service Delivery and Evaluation Design Options for Strengthening and Promoting Healthy Marriages, Investigation of Programs to Strengthen and Support Healthy Marriages," The Urban Institute, 2005.

⁹ Rose Kreider and Jason M. Fields, 2001, "Number, Timing, and Duration of Marriages and Divorces: Fall 1996," Current Population Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, DC, February 2002, March 2006 <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/p70-80.pdf>>.

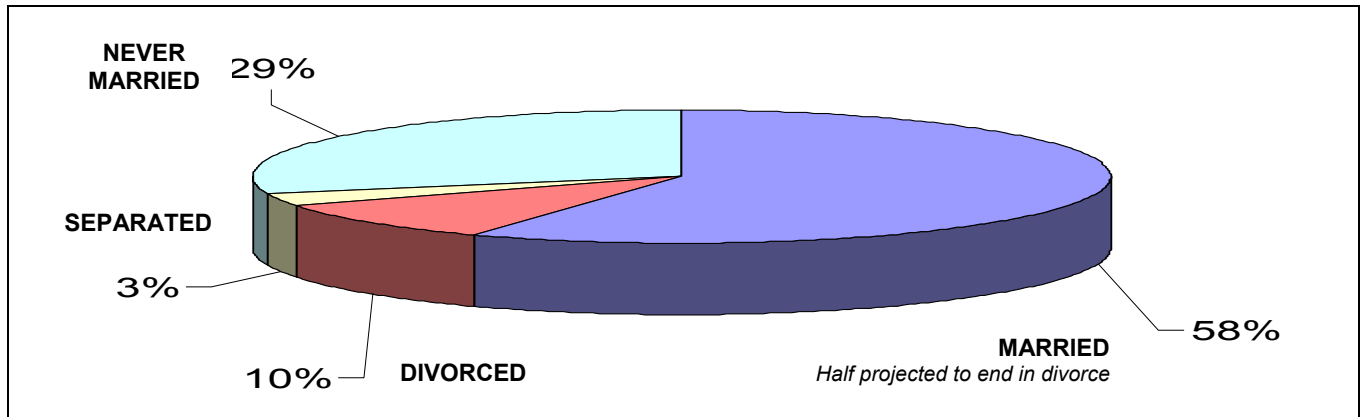
¹⁰ Rose Kreider and Jason M. Fields.

¹¹ United States Census Bureau, "Marital Status for the Population 15 Years and Over for the United States, Regions, States, Puerto Rico and Metropolitan Areas," 2000.

¹² Voices for Virginia's Children, "Virginia Kids Count Research Brief on Single Parents," 2003.

Chart 1

**Marital Status in Virginia
2000**



Source: U.S. Census -- DP-2. Profile of Selected Social Characteristics, 2000.

The following information is taken from the Weldon Cooper Center.¹³ In 2000, the number of households headed by males with no spouse present and containing children under age 18 jumped by 78 percent. In 1990 there were just over 28,000 of these households; by 2000 the number had increased to 49,800. There were more single-mom than single-dad households—133,300 in 1990 and 186,600 in 2000. The increase in both kinds of households reveals that one-fourth of all Virginia households that contained parents and their children were headed by a single parent. The actual proportion, 27 percent, was the same in both metro and non-metro areas, but the numbers did vary by locality. This is reflective of the fact that the percentage of families headed by a single parent has more than tripled and the divorce rate has more than doubled since 1960.¹⁴

D. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Research reveals that the rise in the divorce rate has serious consequences for both families and children. Nationally, in 1999, about 35 percent of children in single parent homes were living in poverty, compared to 6 percent of children residing in married-couple families.¹⁵ Moreover, children raised in single-parent homes were at greater risk of poverty, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, and were more likely to divorce as adults. Studies have shown that children growing up without two married parents also experience other consequences. These children are twice as likely to drop out of school, 50 percent more likely to abuse substances and to have less stable

¹³ Weldon Cooper Center, 2003.
<http://www3.ccps.virginia.edu/demographics/2000_Census/DemoProfiles/Place_data/DP1Cpl.xls.
November 2003>.

¹⁴ Virginia Department of Social Services, *Study of Prevention and Divorce Programs, House Document Number 43*, 1995.

¹⁵ Courtney Jarchow, "Strengthening Marriage and Two-Parent Families," National Conference of State Legislatures, 2003.

relationships as adults, and more than 50 percent likely to have a child as a teen.¹⁶ Research has indicated that the absence of a father increases the risk of the number of negative outcomes for children, including lower educational attainment, increased likelihood of teenage childbearing, and diminished early labor force attachment.¹⁷ Conversely, evidence indicates that two-parent families have a direct link to positive economic outcomes, as well as a direct relationship to other tangible affirmative outcomes. Table 1 lists a variety of outcomes associated with two-parent families. The statistics on child poverty indicate that the decline in the marriage rate and the rise of divorce may have contributed to the high levels of child poverty. When poor single mothers are married to single men of similar age, race, and education, the marriage boosts the family out of poverty in about 80 percent of cases.¹⁸

A recent study report revealed annual U.S. divorce costs to be at \$33.3 billion or \$312 per household.¹⁹ The report estimates that the direct and indirect costs to state and federal governments of an average divorce are \$30,000. The costs were divided into three categories:

1. direct costs to the state, including child support enforcement, Medicaid and Temporary Assistance to Need Families (TANF) funds;
2. direct costs to the federal government, such as food stamps and public housing; and
3. indirect costs to the state and federal governments, which included a host of social problems caused by divorce, such as unwed childbearing and delinquency.

Table 1

**Positive Outcomes
Linked to Two-Parent Families**

Children growing up without two-parent families were:

- twice as likely to drop out of school;
- 50% more likely to abuse substances/alcohol;
- have less stable relationships as adults; and
- more than 50% likely to have a child as a teen.

Sources: *The Consequences of Divorce for Adults and Children* by Paul Amato; *Growing Up with a Single Parent, What Hurts, What Helps* by Sara McLanahan and Gary Sandefur, as cited by Jarchow and Tweedie, 2003.

Program costs for health and human services, public safety, and education continue to rise; many feel that this may be attributed to the collapse of the family.²⁰ In Virginia,

¹⁶ Jarchow.

¹⁷ Sara McLanahan and Julien Teitler, "The Consequences of Father Absence," Office of Population Research, Princeton University, Sept. 1997.

¹⁸ Robert Rector, Kirk A. Johnson, and Patrick F. Fagan, "The Effect of Marriage on Child Poverty," The Heritage Foundation, Center for Data Analysis Report #02-04, 15, 12 April 2002, <<http://www.heritage.org/Research/Family/CDA02-04.cfm>>. March 2006.

¹⁹ David Schramm, "The Costly Consequences of Divorce in Utah: The Impact on Couples, Communities, and Government—A Preliminary Report," Utah State University, 2003.

²⁰ Schramm.

about one in five children under age six live with their mother²¹ and approximately one in three live below poverty. The current poverty guidelines are shown in Table 2.

These findings show that marriage, family structure, and father involvement all have a direct impact on child well-being. There is also a direct link between poverty and family structure. Most policies and programs have primarily focused on the specific needs of children, youth, the elderly, women, the disabled, and the poor, with little attention to the families in which these individuals live.²² Based on these more recent research findings, policymakers are looking to formulate programs that strengthen marriage, encourage responsible fatherhood, and provide parenting skills to low-income parents as a component of their welfare service.

E. FEDERAL LEGISLATION TO PROMOTE STRONG FAMILIES

The statistics cited have stimulated discussion among policymakers at the national, state, and local levels. At the federal level, interest has been focused primarily on decreasing poverty and other societal costs by promoting and strengthening two-parent families.

Table 2
**2006 Federal Poverty Guidelines
for the 48 Contiguous States
and the District of Columbia**

Family Size	Gross Yearly Income	Gross Monthly Income	Approximate Hourly Income
1	\$9,800	\$817	\$4.71
2	\$13,200	\$1,100	\$6.35
3	\$16,600	\$1,383	\$7.98
4	\$20,000	\$1,667	\$9.62
5	\$23,400	\$1,950	\$11.25
6	\$26,800	\$2,233	\$12.88
7	\$30,200	\$2,517	\$14.52
8	\$33,600	\$2,800	\$16.15
Over 8 (per child)	+\$3,400	+\$283	+\$1.63

Source: *Federal Register*, Vol. 71, No. 15, January 24, 2006, pp. 3848-3849.

One such initiative is the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), which authorized the TANF Program. The four

²¹ Voices for Virginia's Children, "Virginia Kids Count Research Brief on Single Parents," 2003.

²² University of Wisconsin-Extension, "Building Policies that Put Families First: A Wisconsin Perspective. Wisconsin Family Impact Seminars Briefing Report, "Center for Excellence in Family Studies, 1993.

objectives of the TANF program, as described in Section 401 of the Social Security Act and 45 CFR § 260.20 of the TANF regulations, are:

1. to provide assistance to needy families so that children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;
2. to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
3. to prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies and establish annual numerical goals for preventing and reducing the incidence of these pregnancies; and
4. to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.²³

States must use the TANF block grant funds to meet as least one these four objectives. These goals reflect the large body of evidence that associates negative consequences for children who reside in lower income, single-parent households.

Another federal initiative with the goal of strengthening families is the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act (PSSF). This law was part of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act which established a new subpart 2 to Title IV-B of the Social Security Act.²⁴ Congress reauthorized the PSSF (P.L. 107-133) in 2001. PSSF provides states with funds to:

- Prevent or eliminate the need for out-of home placements of children;
- Promote family strength and stability;
- Enhance parental functioning;
- Protect children; and
- Assess and make changes in state and local service delivery systems.

PSSF was created to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, improve the quality of care and services to children and their families, and ensure permanency for children by reuniting them with their parents, by adoption or by another permanent living arrangement.²⁵ PSSF funds may be combined with state and local government funds, as well as private funds to provide services to prevent unnecessary separation of children from their families. These services may include those that support the parenting and healthy marriage initiatives to increase relationship skills within the family, as well as other community family-based services for at-risk families.²⁶

F. SUCCESS OF FEDERAL LEGISLATION

There has been much debate about the success of these federal initiatives. Findings related to PRWORA reveal an overall decline in the welfare rolls during the first two years of welfare reform. The following information was obtained from testimony

²³ Karen Gardiner, Michael E. Fishman, Plamen Nikolo, Asaph Glosser, and Stephanie Laud, "State Policies to Promote Marriage, Washington, DC, United States Department Of Health And Human Services," 2004.

²⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, "Promoting Safe and Stable Families: Title IV-B, Subpart 2, of the Social Security Act, March 2006, Title IV-B, Subpart 2, of the Social Security Act.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

²⁶ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

given by Jenifer Zeigler of the Cato Institute before the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Committee on Ways and Means.²⁷ Based on Census data and other evaluations of PRWORA, there is a consensus that welfare reform was successful in reducing caseloads. Caseloads began to even out in most states by 1998, although some states that experienced the most significant initial declines began to see caseloads edge back up after this two-year period. As the economy began to slow in 2001 and 2002, 26 states experienced higher caseloads than the year before, although all state caseloads remained significantly below pre-reform levels.

Poverty rates also declined every year following reform until 2001.²⁸ Poverty rates, after 2001, remained below pre-reform rates.²⁹ Poverty rates declined for women, children, and minorities. Child poverty rates declined from 20.5 percent in 1996 to 16.2 percent in 2000, the lowest level in more than 20 years.³⁰

Other benefits of welfare reform were noted in the decline of the teen birth rate. This is particularly important since teenagers who give birth are significantly more likely to sink into poverty. Teen parents are more likely not to finish school and to continue the cycle of teenage parenthood. Moreover, females who give birth out of wedlock as a teen are more likely to have additional non-marital births later in their life. This is particularly noteworthy since children residing in single-parent households are significantly more likely to be poor. While teenage births peaked in 1991 at 61.8 percent, they have fallen by 27 percent in the past decade.³¹

The following information was obtained from Urban Institute.³² The 1997, 1999, and 2002 rounds of the National Survey of America's Families studied the changes in children's living arrangements since the creation of TANF. Between 1997 and 2002, children living in single-mother families declined significantly in key subgroups of children—those ages five and under and those in families with incomes in the lowest percentile. However, there were also significant increases in the shares of ages living with two unmarried parents, in keeping with the trend of cohabitation.

Studies regarding the effectiveness of PSSF were not quite as clear. The main goal of PSSF is family preservation. Programs with varying approaches to service have been successful in improving family or child functioning. Family preservation programs in two states resulted in higher assessments by clients of the extent to which goals have

²⁷ Jenifer Zeigler, "Testimony given before the Subcommittee on Human Resources of the House Committee on Ways and Means," 10 February 2005, Cato Institute <<http://www.cato.org/testimony/ct-jz021005.html>> March 2006.

²⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, "Poverty in the United States: 2002," September 2003 <<http://www.census.gov/prod/2003pubs/p60-222.pdf>> November 2003.

²⁹ Zeigler.

³⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, as cited by Zeigler.

³¹ Elizabeth Terry-Humen et al., "Births Outside Marriage: Perceptions vs. Reality," Child Trends Research Brief, April 2001, 2.

³² Gregory Acs and Sandi Nelson, "The More Things Change -- Children's Living Arrangements since Welfare Reform," 6 October 2003, The Urban Institute, March 2006 <<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310859>> March 2006.

been accomplished and of overall improvement in their families' lives.³³ These results are promising because they show that families are pleased with their assigned programs and that they feel they have learned skills to improve the quality of their family lifestyle. However, it is undeniable that there are evolving challenges confronting families which are part of the welfare system. Such programs are beneficial in that they provide parenting, employment, financial management, and other life skills, with the goals of enhancing the well-being of children and teaching parents how to become more skilled family members.

G. STATES' POLICIES TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES

States are pursuing policies that delay teen childbearing, prevent non-marital births, and support couples who are married. However, because some marriages and couple relationships do end, states are also designing policies that support consistent and positive father-child (mother-child) involvement when parents and children do not reside in the same household.³⁴

States are also devising their TANF programs to help client families address a wide range of serious life problems—from poor workforce skills, to depression, to substance abuse—so that these families can become stronger, more self-sufficient, and more stable environments in which to raise their children. Many states are incorporating education and skill-building services in their TANF programs to assist current and future parents, on a voluntary basis, acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to form and sustain healthy relationships.³⁵

In seeking to collect this information, staff conducted a literature review of other states' policies as well as related resources published by government agencies, private organizations, and advocacy organizations. In the course of the analysis, staff reviewed a variety of these publications and source documents. Research was specifically conducted to ascertain other states' diverse policies on strengthening families and promoting two-parent families to determine whether they could be implemented effectively in Virginia.

Policies in States' Welfare Programs

Few state legislatures have the ability to fund new programs. Accordingly, many states have utilized TANF funds to fund services to couples, define two-parent families for purposes of establishing welfare eligibility, and create marriage or family formation policies to encourage two-parent families. When TANF was reauthorized in 1996, states were given authority to revisit rules in their state TANF programs that restricted the inclusion of two-parent families. This is based on the data that asserts that fewer needy two-parent families receive assistance than single-parent families. Forty percent of single-parent families with an income below the federal poverty level receive TANF

³³ Westat, Chapin Hall Center for Children, James Bell Associates, "Evaluation of Family Preservation and Reunification Programs: Final Report - Volume One," Dec. 2002.
<<http://aspe.hhs.gov/HSP/evalfampres94/Final/Vol1/index.htm>> March 2006.

³⁴ Kristin Anderson Moore, "Family Structure and Child Well-Being, A Presentation to the Children's Rights Council," 17 July 2003.

³⁵ Courtney Jarchow, "Strengthening Marriage and Two-Parent Families." National Conference of State Legislatures, 2003.

benefits, compared to only 10 percent of two-parent families.³⁶ In response to this change, as of August of 2002, 33 states had modified eligibility requirements for TANF assistance to no longer limit assistance to two-parent families. Virginia is one state that made such a policy modification. States that do not allow for this are: Arizona, California, DC, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Mississippi, Missouri, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Washington.

Marriage incentives are another strategy states are including in their welfare programs.³⁷ Nine states have marriage incentives for welfare recipients. For example, West Virginia instituted a \$100 monthly "bonus" for recipients who marry or choose to marry the parent of their children. Alabama, Mississippi, North Dakota, and Oklahoma disregard a spouse's earnings for a limited time when determining eligibility. One tribal agency located in California provides to welfare recipients upon marriage a one-time bonus of \$2,000, as well as an additional \$1,500 if they marry in a Native American wedding ceremony.³⁸ These policies are perceived by many to be coercing marriage using financial incentives. Virginia does not employ incentive strategies.

Several recent studies have found that these activities have been effective. Researchers have also noted that since a TANF goal includes responsible fatherhood, states have been using their TANF funds to support programs designed to increase and maintain contact between biological fathers and their children, even when marriage does not occur.³⁹ A comprehensive listing of states' initiatives that encourage marriage and strengthens two-parent families is provided as Appendix F.

Programs in Marriage Education, Parenting, Divorce, and Relationship Skills

States are also taking steps to educate couples about the effects of divorce on children. Twenty-six states have one or more activities in this area. Nineteen states enacted laws that mandate education for divorcing couples. Generally the focus is on requiring parents (as opposed to couples with no children) to attend an educational program on the effects of divorce on children and to discuss parenting issues. There are laws in eight states that require all parents to attend a class while they are pursuing a divorce.⁴⁰ Virginia is also one of the states which has successfully implemented education programs within the divorce process. Michigan, which already has a voluntary program, is considering legislation that would require a pre-divorce program on the effects of divorce on children. However, similar bills failed in five states. Kansas' failed bill would have required education on the effect of divorce on the child involved, including developmental stages, responses to divorce, symptoms of maladjustment, and education and counseling options for the child.

³⁶ Jarchow.

³⁷ Jarchow.

³⁸ Theodora Ooms, Stacey Bouchet, and Mary Parke, "Beyond Marriage Licenses: Efforts in States to Strengthen Marriage and Two-Parent Families," Center for Law and Social Policy, April 2004.

³⁹ Robert Mincy and Helen Oliver, "Age, Race, and Children's Living Arrangements: Implications for TANF Reauthorization." The Urban Institute, April 2003 <http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/310670_B-53.pdf> March 23, 2006.

⁴⁰ Ooms, et al.

Virginia law requires the court to order parties in a divorce action to attend educational seminars when they are parents of a child whose custody or visitation is contested.⁴¹ Such seminars are designed to educate the parties on the effects of separation or divorce on children, parenting responsibilities, options for conflict resolution and financial responsibilities.⁴² Virginia's existing policy on marriage education is viewed as being quite successful, with participants ranking the programs as being informative and edifying. The cons surrounding Virginia's policy are structural in nature. First, judges state that the law does not enable them flexibility in ordering the parenting classes, that a divorce action must be filed before a judge can issue an order. Moreover, judges have stated they would like to have flexibility in ordering such classes. A law passed by the 2004 General Assembly eliminated the requirement that parties be mandated to attend educational seminars if the divorce is uncontested.⁴³

Research does suggest that marriage education may assist couples in improving relationships and avoiding divorce.⁴⁴ A recent review of literature found marriage therapy could significantly improve the marital satisfaction for about half of the couples that participated.⁴⁵ Such therapy can also be beneficial in high-risk circumstances including alcoholics, drug users, domestic violence and depression. For example, a study of 88 male alcoholics and their wives participating in such marriage counseling programs found that proportion of wives reporting any violence by the husband dropped from 48 percent to 16 percent.⁴⁶ Twenty-two states have created some form of marriage education, particularly in low-income and at-risk communities. To date, approximately 517 Arizona couples have participated in TANF funded marriage-education classes. Low-income couples with children receive a voucher to pay 100 percent of the class cost, while the state pays for 85 percent of the cost for other couples. Funding is available through July 2005. Michigan also uses a program to use TANF funds to create stable family units, improve parenting, and help parents return to work after the birth of a child. Counseling or marriage education courses are offered through Head Start, unemployment offices, drug-rehabilitation centers, child support enforcement, and community- and faith-based organizations. However, many of these programs take much time and deliberation to implement and are dependant upon the availability of funding.

Surveys reveal that many youth and adolescents desire to marry but are pessimistic, since they may have experienced divorce in their homes. It is evident that children learn about relationships and marital commitment by observation. Skills that can assist youth in building strong relationships and avoiding conflict are seldom taught in the home. This is relevant because only 40 percent of American children reach age 18 with the marriage of their biological father and mother intact.⁴⁷ Most education efforts in this

⁴¹ Virginia Code §16.1-278.15 and §20-103.

⁴² By statute, the fee for such education is based on the party's ability to pay; no fee in excess of \$50 may be charged.

⁴³ Virginia Acts of Assembly, Chapter 732, 2004.

⁴⁴ Maggie Gallagher, "Marriage and Public Policy, What Government Can Do," Institute for American Values, 2002.

⁴⁵ Gallagher.

⁴⁶ Gallagher.

⁴⁷ Jarchow.

arena have focused on adults contemplating marriage, unwed parents, and couples at risk of divorce. However, several states have taken steps to educate youth about what is necessary in order to have healthy relationships and how to assist them to build the skills necessary for strong relationships. High schools in two states offer some marriage education courses. Florida requires all high school students to complete a class in relationships and marriage. The Florida Marriage and Preservation Act, which was enacted in 1998, mandates instruction in marriage skills education for all 9th and 10th graders.⁴⁸ Utah also offers courses that focus on a range of issues, including dating, money management, communication, marriage preparation, and parenting skills.⁴⁹ Other states have integrated existing efforts within the community to teach about healthy relationship skills. The benefits of such an approach is clear; the school is an ideal place for primary prevention and this form of intervention is early enough to educate youth before they are contemplating marriage.

Creation of Commissions, Task Forces, and Information Campaigns

As indicated in Appendix F, several states have pursued broader efforts in order to emphasize the importance of marriage to the public. Examples of such initiatives include the launching statewide commissions with the goal of supporting marriage. At least five states have created commissions to examine marriage programs in the state, to oversee state marriage initiatives, or to create an environment for healthy marriage in the state.⁵⁰ Arizona created the Marriage and Communication Skills Commission (2000), New Hampshire's legislature created a committee to study the establishment of a marriage education and enhancement program (2002), Florida Commission on Marriage and Family Support (2003), Louisiana created the Commission on Family and Marriage (2001), and Utah's Governor initiated the Governor's Marriage Commission (1998). Other states are also implementing public information campaigns similar to the anti-smoking campaigns as a way to reach a large and diverse audience, influence public opinion and, hopefully, impact divorce. Both Oklahoma and Arkansas have initiated public information campaigns to reduce the state divorce rate by one-third or more. Arizona and New Mexico proposed legislation to produce media campaigns to promote the benefits of marriage but these initiatives ultimately failed.⁵¹ These policy alternatives are controversial because they are perceived to be embracing a touchy subject. However, they can also be cost-effective ways to provide information about marriage education opportunities. Opponents have also stated that research has shown that marriage does not always improve a single parent's economic situation. In addition, such policies are most effective when they are coordinated with other policies such as family violence policies or other state family and child initiatives.

H. VIRGINIA'S INITIATIVES TO STRENGTHEN FAMILIES

Virginia currently has several programs to reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock births, strengthen two-parent families, and reduce teen pregnancy. The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) has collaborated with the Department of Social Services (DSS) since 1998 to operate programs with TANF funds specifically designed to

⁴⁸ Jarchow.

⁴⁹ Jarchow.

⁵⁰ Jarchow.

⁵¹ Karen Gardiner, et al.

strengthen families. While several of these programs are state initiatives, the majority are set forth by Virginia's TANF State Plan Requirements and address one of the four purposes of the TANF program.

The following information was taken directly from a presentation to the Commission on Youth by David Suttle, M.D., Director of the Office of Family Services for the Virginia Department of Health (VDH).⁵² The programs VDH administered as of September 2004 are listed in the following paragraphs. However, in the 2004-2006 Acts of Assembly, Item #365, \$1.5 million each year of the biennium was appropriated for the development of grants to engage present and former TANF recipients in activities to achieve and maintain self-sufficiency. The grant funds were to be awarded through a competitive process. Accordingly, several of these programs discussed below were not renewed, but are included for informational purposes.

Virginia Abstinence Education Initiative (VAEI)

The VAEI mission enables youth to develop attitudes and skills necessary to delay sexual involvement until marriage. VAEI funds and oversees five model school-based abstinence education programs that incorporate the principle of the eight-point federal definition of abstinence.

Virginia Fatherhood Campaign (VFC)

VFC works to address the negative health and developmental outcomes associated with a father's absence from the family. It also involves fathers in supporting children and keeping them involved with their children and families, as well as improving the quality of their parenting. The VFC conducts regional workshops and training for public and private non-profit family service providers.

Right Choices for Youth (RCFY)

RCFY helps communities organize around positive societal messages for youth development. The goal is to enable young people to make right choices and avoid unhealthy risk behaviors concerning alcohol, drugs, sex, tobacco, and violence. Started in 1999, RCFY has been solely supported through TANF funds.

Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI)

TPPI programs employ several strategies to help reduce teenage pregnancy. Teen parents are more likely not to finish school, to live in poverty, and to continue the cycle of teenage parenthood. Some programs also provide mentoring and one-on-one counselling. Many programs use the "Baby Think it Over" infant simulators. VDH is working with sites to evaluate the effectiveness of the approach. Between 1993 and 2001, the overall state teenage pregnancy rate per 1,000 females ages 10-19 declined from 38.9 to 29.7, a drop of nearly 25 percent. TPPI strengthens the family unit by helping adolescents avoid early pregnancy before they are ready to start families.

Bright Futures Guidelines

These guidelines were developed under the leadership of the Maternal and Child Health Bureau, U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. They recognize

⁵² David Suttle, M.D., "Strengthening Families Initiatives, Presentation to the Virginia Commission on Youth," Virginia Department of Health, Office of Family Services, 3 September 2003.

that partnerships between the family, health professionals, and communities are necessary to promote the optimal health of children and their families. One major goal is to increase family skills, knowledge, and participation in health promotion and prevention activities.

Care Connection for Children (CCC)

There are an estimated 190,600 children with special health care needs in Virginia. This Title V (state program for these children has transitioned its service delivery model to a family-centered model. Title V is the Community Prevention Grants Program that funds collaborative, community-based delinquency prevention efforts. Centers have evolved from Children's Specialty Services Clinic System that has operated in Virginia since the 1930's. These centers provide care coordination to children with physical disabilities. The CCC network consists of six centers affiliated with hospitals providing pediatric specialty services. Centers work with various parent support groups to improve care for children with special health care needs. Care coordination helps to strengthen families as it helps families obtain insurance, find a medical home, get referrals to specialists, get needed services and coordinated care between multiple providers for their children.

Child Development Clinics

As part of the Children with Special Health Care Needs Program, VDH operates eleven federally funded child development clinics across the state. Their goal is to promote the optimal physical, social, mental, and emotional development and well-being of children served. Services are community-based and family-centered. Families are included in planning treatment. Children may be referred from any source such as parents and local physicians. The clinics work closely with local school systems and social service agencies. Services have operated in Virginia since 1955. Currently, clinics are located in Arlington, Danville, Fredericksburg, Gate City, Harrisonburg, Lynchburg, Newport News, Norfolk, Petersburg, Roanoke, and Winchester.

Pediatric Screening and Genetic Services

The Office of Family Health Services manages several newborn and early childhoods screening programs, including:

- The Virginia Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Program;
- The Newborn Screening Services Program;
- Lead-Safe Virginia (Prevention & screening for lead poisoning); and
- Pediatric Screening and Genetic Services.

These programs strengthen the family unit through early identification and referral into treatment for conditions that cause disability or even death in some cases. Of the 95,000 plus infants born in Virginia each year, an estimated 3,700 babies are born with disabilities that may impede their ability to hear, learn and grow into healthy children and adults.

Virginia Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Program

As mandated by the Code of Virginia, newborns are screened for hearing impairment prior to hospital discharge through this program. In 2002, 95 percent of infants born in Virginia received this screening, which resulted in 66 confirmed cases of congenital hearing loss. This program helps strengthen families by promoting principles related to family-centered care.

Virginia Newborn Screening Services

As mandated by the Virginia Code, newborns are tested for eight conditions. Finding these infants and giving them early treatment prevents serious complications, such as mental retardation, permanent disabilities or death. In 2002, 87 infants identified with one of these conditions received treatment.

Virginia Newborn Screening Services

Metabolic treatment services are provided infants in medically indigent families through MCV in Richmond and the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Special food products are provided for children and pregnant women in Virginia who have been diagnosed with phenylketonuria (PKU). In 2002, 109 persons received formula and/or food products through the state program.

Lead Safe Virginia

Lead poisoning interferes with normal brain development. Elevated blood-lead levels are associated with lower IQ's. The primary source of lead exposure in our environment is dust from lead-based paint, found in many of Virginia's 1.8 million homes built before 1978. This program works to eliminate children's exposure to lead in the Commonwealth by providing public health education to families about lead poisoning. Families of children with elevated blood-lead levels receive counselling on nutrition, environmental lead hazard assessment and lead hazard reduction and medical case management. Families are linked to resources to help make their home lead safe.

Healthy Child Care Virginia

This program promotes safe and healthy day care sites and seeks to enhance programs and their ability to help children achieve optimal brain, emotional, and physical development. Approximately 100 public health nurses have been trained as child care healthy consultants to offer training and assistance to day care providers, both licensed and unlicensed.

Virginia Healthy Start Initiative (VHSI)

Aimed at reducing infant mortality and low birth weight babies among African Americans. African Americans are disproportionately affected by poor birth outcomes and have twice the rate of infant deaths as whites. Started in four communities: Norfolk, Portsmouth, Petersburg and Westmoreland. VHSI provides nutrition services for pregnant women and infants and case management services. VHSI is important in strengthening families because it provides support to pregnant women and their families, improves birth outcomes and encourages the positive growth and development of their children so they can contribute to society.

Resource Mothers in Virginia

This program mentors teens and young adults to ensure healthy babies and healthy families in 27 communities and 80 localities. Since its inception in 1986 it has been successful in:

- Reducing the number of low birth weight babies;
- Delaying repeat pregnancies;
- Increasing the number of teens who stay in school or work; and
- Strengthening families by encouraging father's involvement and support of the baby.

Statutory Rape Awareness Project (Sexual Coercion)

“Statutory rape” is not a legal term in Virginia. This causes some confusion around the issue. A common understanding of statutory rape refers to an adult’s engaging in sexual activities with a minor teen. Components of the project include data collection, an awareness campaign, and training.

At the Virginia Department of Social Services, the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative supports families in developing skills and identifying resources to equip them for positive parenting and healthy relationships. The following information is taken from *House Document 97(2005)*.⁵³

Through the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative, DSS has awarded twelve grants to projects that provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. A listing of the grants that were in effect as of November 2005 is provided as Appendix G.

Grantees include public agencies, domestic violence prevention programs, faith-based organizations, and other non-profit or community-based groups. This initiative is interested in innovative approaches to locally identified needs and funded projects must demonstrate measurable positive changes in the lives of the participants and their families. Projects include activities such as classes, seminars, workshops, inventories, conferences, support groups, and preventive counseling designed to strengthening families through improved relationship and parenting skills. Organizations were encouraged to pursue a variety of activities including developing a community network or marriage task force, establishing support groups, create training to promote healthy relationship skills, conducting training and curriculum for the newly married, and developing community-based parenting programs. Geographic and rural/urban representation, as well as diversity among types of programs, was addressed in making the awards, as was the need to adequately report program outcomes.

Additional programs could be created to ensure that local teenagers are educated about the attributes of healthy marriage and relationships. This project is continuing in FY06 and is funded at \$250,000 through the Safe and Stable Families grant to Virginia. In the 2006 project, fatherhood programs have been added as a focus area and four pilot prisoner reentry programs that include family to family mentoring are being developed.

I. ASSESSMENT OF VIRGINIA'S PROGRAMS

Virginia has a diverse array of programs designed to reduce non-marital births, provide appropriate work supports, offer suitable health care screenings, address fatherhood involvement, and offer positive societal messages for youth development. Virginia also has a strong child support enforcement system that increases the financial well-being of children and several initiatives with the goal of decreasing teen pregnancies. Other state agencies are also collaborating with Virginia DSS and VDH by offering supportive services to TANF clients. These programs promote improved child health and increasing family self-sufficiency. Moreover, Virginia has been awarded over

⁵³ Virginia Department of Social Services, "Report on the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative," *House Document 97*, 2005.

\$7.9 million in bonuses for successfully placing welfare participants in jobs, and improving job retention and wage advancement.⁵⁴ Virginia was awarded such bonuses for three consecutive years. As of 2000, the number of Virginia's TANF Families dropped from 66,244 to 30,078, a decline of 59 percent. The comprehensive array of services offered to this vulnerable population had much to do with this decline in the caseload.⁵⁵

Evidence of the effectiveness of policies and initiatives in Virginia—as well as those of other states—is somewhat limited, since these programs are relatively new. However, a study conducted by New Jersey revealed several interesting points. First, although marriage is rare for TANF recipients in the first few years after they enter the program, the small number who do marry fare significantly better economically.⁵⁶ Interventions that succeed in encouraging marriage may also succeed in improving family economic well-being. This pattern suggests a substantial opportunity for increasing two-parent families through innovative program and policy changes. This study, however, also addresses the need for policies promoting healthy marriage to be a part of a larger strategy focusing on work and employment skills in order to reduce welfare dependence and improve economic well-being. Virginia's existing programs encourage this approach and offer a broad array services that address parenting skills, employment, financial management, and other life skills, with the goals of enhancing the well-being of all family members.

VII. Findings and Recommendations

The Commission on Youth, after thorough review and analysis of the identified issues, federal initiatives, states' practices, and Virginia's existing activities, offers the following findings and recommendations. The statewide Advisory Group and Regional Workgroups provided assistance in the development of these findings and recommendations, which were approved by the Commission on Youth on December 8, 2004.

A. IMPROVED STATEWIDE COORDINATION

Findings

States are beginning to explore programs that strengthen marriage, encourage responsible fatherhood and parenting, and provide parenting skills to low-income parents as a component of their welfare services. These policies stem from the goal of the federal Welfare Reform Act that encourages the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

⁵⁴ Virginia Department of Social Services, "Virginia Receives \$7.9 million Welfare Bonus," <http://www.dss.virginia.gov/news/2004/pr_tanf_10_18_04.pdf> March 2006.

⁵⁵ Southern Institute on Children and Families, "Southern Governors' Policy on TANF Reauthorization," <<http://www.kidsouth.org/pdf/sgatanfreport.pdf>> March 2006.

⁵⁶ Robert G. Wood, Anu Rangarajan, and John Deke, "Marriage Patterns of TANF Recipients: Evidence from New Jersey," Trends in Welfare to Work. Mathematica Policy Research. October 2003 <<http://www.mathematica-mpr.com/publications/PDFs/tanfmarriage.pdf>> March 2006.

Virginia does not have such a coordinated statewide effort. In 10 states (Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah), the governor, legislators, or other high ranking policy officials have publicly focused on ways to strengthen the family, particularly strengthening marriage and two-parent families. Other states have launched major policy initiatives, including the enactment of laws or executive-branch actions that establish and fund programs designed specifically to promote and strengthen marriage and reduce divorce rates. Moreover, statewide summits, media campaigns, proclamations, or handbooks have been developed, focusing on marriage-strengthening policies or other means of strengthening fragile families.

Given the positive effects of marriage on family stability, income, and children's outcomes, policymakers nationwide have been discussing the role of government in promoting healthy marriage, especially among low-income families. However, it is important to note that marriage is not a social policy solution. A marriage with serious conflict is often worse for children's well-being than divorce or single-parenthood. State initiatives should consider how to design programs that support healthy marriages, as opposed to encouraging marriage or discouraging divorce on a broad scale.

Recommendation 1

Strengthening Family Statewide Task Force & Plan

Direct the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, to convene a Statewide Task Force for the purpose of developing a plan to assess, identify, and communicate ways to strengthen families within the Commonwealth. The Statewide Task Force shall also focus on existing efforts and make recommendations for linking and integrating such efforts. All child-serving agencies in the Commonwealth shall participate in this effort. Members shall include representatives from the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Office of Comprehensive Services, the Virginia Department of Health, and the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court. Representatives from the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, faith-based organizations, and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce shall also be invited to participate in this effort. The Secretary of Health and Human Resources shall report the plan to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees and the Virginia Commission on Youth.

Strengthening Family Summit

Direct the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, to convene a Statewide Summit charged with assessing, identifying, and communicating ways to strengthen families in the Commonwealth. This shall be pursuant to §63.2-703. Topics addressed shall include community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. All child-serving agencies in the Commonwealth shall participate in this summit. Members shall include representatives from the Department

of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, the Department of Education, the Department of Juvenile Justice, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, the Department of Social Services, the Office of Comprehensive Services, the Department of Education, the Virginia Department of Health, and the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court. Representatives from the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia Association of Counties, faith-based organizations, and private sector organizations that serve families and children, and the Virginia Chamber of Commerce shall also be invited to participate in this effort. This summit shall be convened prior to the 2007 General Assembly Session, with a report of the findings from the summit being submitted to the Virginia Commission on Youth.

B. LIMITED ACCESS TO DATA ON VIRGINIA'S MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE RATES

Findings

Families have undergone a transformation in the last 30 years: divorce rates have increased, fertility has declined, and marriage and childbearing have been postponed to later ages. The Regional Workgroups and the Statewide Advisory Group convened by the Commission on Youth stated that access to data on Virginia's incidence of marriage and divorce was needed and would be extremely beneficial for policy formulation, planning, and program delivery.

Virginia relies heavily upon private-providers, the faith-based community, and localities in providing services to help sustain healthy marriages, avoid unhealthy marriages, and to improve child outcomes by promoting stable homes. Marriage and divorce data, although collected by the Virginia Department of Health's State Registrar of Vital Records and Health Statistics, is not readily available. Pursuant to § 32.1-267, the State Registrar is charged with collecting records showing personal data for the married parties, the marriage license, and the certifying statement of the facts of marriage. Moreover, pursuant to § 32.1-268, the State Registrar is charged with collecting information on the final decree or divorce or annulment of marriage granted by a court in the Commonwealth. Access to this type of data is also needed to identify trends, such as the percentage of children living with two biological parents over a certain length of time or the percentage of couples that are cohabiting over time. This will assist policymakers to determine Virginia's ability to target resources and programs to specific regions and help in developing program goals and strategies.

Recommendation 2

Collection of Data on Marriage and Divorce Rates

Amend the Code of Virginia to direct the State Registrar of the Virginia Department of Health to compile, publish, and distribute aggregate data on the number of marriages and divorces that occur each year within the Commonwealth. Such information shall be broken down by locality and include information regarding age, race, and any other pertinent information. Such information shall be posted on the agency website. Additionally, the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth shall request, via letter, that the Virginia Department of Health report on its progress to the members of the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.

Collection of Data on Local and Regional Service Barriers and Needs

Request, by letter, that the Virginia Municipal League (VML) and the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), in conjunction with the Virginia Commission on Youth, conduct a statewide survey ascertaining existing partnerships and best practices that strengthen Virginia's families. The survey will include questions on program strengths at the regional level, barriers that exist in serving families and solutions/programs that can address these gaps or barriers. The results of the survey shall be communicated to the Virginia Commission on Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.

C. NEED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM FOR CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Findings

There is no single source or information clearinghouse for Virginia families or those working with children and families which provides information about organizations or services as a resource for children, adolescents, and families, which in turn enables improved access to health, education, juvenile justice, mental health, mental retardation, and substance abuse services, and educational resources. A clearinghouse could be a timesaving and vital link to information on services for youth and families, community members, professionals, and policy makers. The clearinghouse could include information on issues related to the skills needed and resources available for parents and caregivers of young children. Such a resource could potentially broaden the scope of information and collaboration among service providers and strengthen service delivery..

Senior Navigator

While Virginia does not possess such a clearinghouse for children, there exists a resource for the aging population. Senior Navigator provides free information about health and aging resources to Virginia seniors, with a focus on senior-related issues such as health and aging, financial and legal concerns, health facilities, assisted living and housing, exercise programs, support groups and more. Thus, it is possible to create a clearinghouse to serve a specific population.

Virginia's Information and Referral (I&R) System

Virginia has a resource in existence that could potentially serve as a clearinghouse for children, families, and other family serving entities. The Virginia I&R System has existed for almost a quarter of a century. Section 63.2-222 of the Code of Virginia established a statewide I&R system which is designed to collect and maintain accurate and complete resource data on a statewide basis. The I&R system:

- 1. Collects and maintains accurate and complete resource data on a statewide basis;*
- 2. Links citizens needing human services with appropriate community resources to satisfy those needs;*
- 3. Assists in planning for human services delivery at the local, regional and state levels;*
and
- 4. Provides information to assist decision-makers in allocating financial and other resources to respond to state and local human service priorities.*

Administrative Oversight of Virginia's I&R System

Pursuant to § 63.2-226, the Department of Social Services has administrative responsibilities for the statewide system. Services may be accessed through a toll-

free number (800-230-6977) which is automatically routed directly to one of six regional providers. A database is available on the Internet at <http://www.vaiandr.com>.

The sole source contractor for FY 2004-2006 is the Council of Community Services, located in Roanoke, Virginia. Virginia's system is divided into six regions with information and referral programs and partners serving each region. The six centers are: Council of Community Services (Roanoke), Family Resource & Referral Center (Staunton), Northern Virginia Regional Commission (Annandale), the Planning Council (Norfolk), United Way of Central Virginia (Lynchburg), and the United Way of Greater Richmond & Petersburg (Richmond).

Funding and Results of the Virginia I&R System

The Virginia Department of Social Services provides \$755,665 in funds to the sole source contractor to provide information and referral services. Of this amount, 88 percent are federal funds and 12 percent are state funds. Currently, the cost to operate the statewide system is \$1,664,817 annually, with providers funding the difference from other contracts or regional and local funds. Funding has remained stagnant for the past six years.

The I&R database lists more than 7,219 organizations and 20,044 human service programs throughout the state. The I&R system assisted 153,154 citizens last year and provided more than 163,869 referrals to residents of Virginia to help them access human service organizations throughout Virginia.

Structure of Virginia's I&R Website

Some states' I&R/211 systems use client-based servers while some use web-based systems. However, the current system - which is client-server based - is in use because it was less expensive when implemented and because a web-based system might be down when the Internet is not available. This could hamper I&R efforts when they are particularly needed, such as after Hurricane Isabel. Other variables also must be considered, such as incorporating information from other sources.

In 2003, the statewide I&R website received an average of 9,910 web page hits a month (118,921 per year). Visitor hits average 1,600 per month (19,203 per year).

Future Plans of Virginia I&R System

The number 211 is a national abbreviated dialing code that offers free access to health and human information and referral services. The goal is for the number to be universally recognizable, making a critical connection between individuals and families in needs and the appropriate community based organization and government agencies. Virginia's I&R System and the Virginia Department of Social Services have partnered to expand the current I&R System to a 211 system to make it a more accessible and user-friendly service. With the implementation of 211 Virginia, all participants can offer the citizens of Virginia greater access to the resources contained in the I&R system. At this time, the efforts have been stalled due to extensive contract negotiations. Verizon is charging a considerably higher

connection fee (\$70,800) than the other companies. Some of the other phone companies are charging a fee but nothing as high as Verizon. The second highest fee is approximately one-tenth of the Verizon fee.

Recommendation 3

Inclusion of all family and child serving agencies in the I&R System

Direct that all state and local child-serving agencies within the Commonwealth be included in the Virginia Statewide Information and Referral System (I&R System). The Secretary of Health and Human Resources, the Secretary of Education, and the Secretary of Public Safety shall assist in this effort by requesting all agencies they oversee to submit information to the I&R System.

Training and education on the I&R System

Direct the Department of Social Services to communicate with all child-serving agencies located within the Commonwealth about the availability of the statewide I&R System and that all child-serving agencies located within the Commonwealth be informed and trained on the availability of the I&R System, as outlined in § 63.2-226 of the Code of Virginia. This information shall also be communicated via the Department of Social Services' broadcast system on their agency-wide Intranet so that all local and regional offices can be better informed about the Statewide I&R System. Moreover, information on the Statewide I&R System shall be included within the Department's electronic mailings to all local and regional offices at least biannually.

Marketing and promoting Virginia's I&R System

Direct the Department of Social Services to work with I&R providers and other public and private partners to develop strategies to market and promote Virginia's I&R System, along with the 211-phone campaign currently under development. A report on these activities shall be submitted prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees as well as to the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth.

211 System

Request the Chair of the Commission on Youth to send a letter to the CEO of Verizon outlining the importance of the Virginia I&R System and requesting that Verizon waive its connection fee for 211. (Verizon is charging a considerably higher connection fee than the other companies.)

Implementation of a 211 System in Virginia

Request the Chair of the Commission on Youth to send a letter to the Governor encouraging him to contact the CEO of Verizon outlining the importance of the Virginia I&R System and requesting that Verizon waive its connection fee for 211.

Increase funding for I&R System

Introduce a budget amendment increasing funding for Virginia's I&R system to allow for implementation of the statewide, 24-hour 211 system.

Improving Virginia's I&R Website

Direct the Department of Social Services, in conjunction with Virginia Information and Technologies Agency, to develop a plan to modify Virginia's current I&R System

webpage to make it more comprehensive and user-friendly. This plan shall be submitted prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session to the Chairs of the Senate Finance and House Appropriations Committees, as well as to the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth.

D. EDUCATION FOR ADULTS AND HIGH RISK POPULATIONS

Findings

There is a gap in services available to adults, particularly adults transitioning from the correctional setting into the community. Programs that provide life/work skills and leadership training for individuals needing a second chance (reentering ex-offenders) assist in fostering community revitalization. Moreover, such programs connect culturally and economically disadvantaged communities and provide training in life skills, job skills, leadership models, and one-on-one coaching to unemployed primarily previously incarcerated individuals.

Mentoring Model—*Mentorship is firmly grounded in the notion that individuals develop according to the way they make use of knowledge in the environment. Mentoring programs, in accordance with the guidelines under Welfare-to-Work, TANF, and VIEW, are aimed at helping clients achieve self-sufficiency. Help is provided according to the client's needs, including budgeting, parenting skills, nutrition education, etc. Mentors have a positive impact that helps ex-offenders avoid patterns of negative behavior, supports strong families, and contributes to public safety. Through Virginia's Faith-Based and Community Initiative, staff at the Department of Social Services is currently assisting their local agencies and other community-based organizations to establish mentoring programs in support of self-sufficiency and strong families.*

National Governor's Association Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy—*Virginia participates in the National Governor's Association (NGA) Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy. NGA's Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy is working with seven states to develop strategic action plans for prisoner reentry that coordinate services across agencies, both at the state and local level, and build on lessons from current research. The other participating states are Georgia, Idaho, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, and Rhode Island.*

Currently, Virginia is in the process of developing a Prisoner Reentry Plan. Strategies to support and strengthen families are also being considered such as the development of mentoring programs to prepare both offenders and their families for reentry. Mentors will be used to work with newly-released offenders and their families. Emphasis will be placed on showing participants how to avoid patterns of negative behavior to promote public safety, strong families, and stable communities.

Recommendation 4

Family to Family Mentoring - Adults

Request by letter that the Virginia Department of Social Services to encourage localities to utilize “family to family” mentoring. This program model helps low-income families move toward financial self-sufficiency by providing training and technical assistance to existing and developing mentoring programs to increase the number and quality of mentoring relationships for children and youth at risk, and adults in transition from welfare to work.

Support Virginia’s Involvement in the NGA Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy

Request the Chair of the Virginia Commission on Youth to send a letter to the Secretary of Public Safety and Secretary of Health supporting Virginia’s participation in the National Governor’s Association (NGA) Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy. Moreover, request the Virginia Policy Academy to consider incorporating messages about the benefits of healthy relationships and strong families in program formulation, as well as the importance of transition plans and services for juveniles returning to the community.

E. CONTINUATION OF CURRENT EDUCATION EFFORTS IN VIRGINIA

Findings

In 2003, the Virginia Department of Social Services, through the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative, awarded grants to organizations that provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. The Department offered \$300,000 in grants to organizations seeking to achieve these goals. The grant cycle commenced in October of 2003 and was extended through September of 2004. Participants included community and faith-based organizations, non-profits and public agencies. Grant awards ranged from \$15,000 through \$30,000. The grant was to promote innovative approaches to locally identified needs. Projects included activities such as classes, seminars, workshops, inventories, conferences, support groups, and preventive counseling designed for use before, after, or at any stage in a marriage. Project areas included the following elements:

- 1. Training to form and sustain a stable family and healthy marriage. Participants included married or single adults, program staff, marriage program leaders, facilitators, and mentors.*
- 2. Parenting programs were developed or current programs were enhanced to incorporate a marriage component and topics such as communication, conflict resolution, and relationship-building skills.*
- 3. Youth programs were offered to ensure that local teenagers would be better prepared for healthy dating relationships and marriage.*
- 4. Education in healthy relationship was offered to assist single parents in forming constructive relationships that are conducive to building a healthy relationship for the child and the non-custodial parent. Singles that have experiences abuse or domestic violence were also educated in making healthy relationship choices and given tools in how to build healthy families and marriages.*
- 5. Newlywed programs were developed at the community-level to provide support for the newly married.*

Local marriage initiatives were developed with the purpose of forming effective community networks or Marriage Task Force that would promote better public understanding of what healthy relationships require along with education regarding resource availability. Support groups or activities were also offered in order to better promote healthy marriages.

Recommendation 5

Direct the Virginia Department of Social Services to continue funding for the Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Initiative grants to provide community-based family preservation and supportive services designed to strengthen marriages and stabilize families. Such grant activities will address training needs, parenting programs, youth programs, programs for newlyweds, community marriage initiatives, and healthy relationship promotion. Such grants shall be funded by the federal Safe and Stable Families or other appropriate funds.

F. LACK OF A FAMILY ADVOCACY NETWORK IN VIRGINIA

Findings

As noted by the State Executive Council's Custody Relinquishment Workgroup, the Department of Mental Health Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services' Special Populations Workgroup, and the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services' 330 F (Budget Directive) Workgroup. Virginia lacks a strong, organized family advocacy network. Such networks have proven in other states to be effective resources in helping families and children navigate the complex public and private systems of children's services. These networks have also successfully advocated for system improvement.

Recommendation 6

Request the Office of the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to lead a collaborative effort with other child serving departments, parents, and advocacy organizations to develop and implement a statewide parent/family resource and advocacy program that is coordinated with existing programs. This is also a recommendation from the State Executive Council Study on Relinquishment of Custody Study, as well as from the 330 F Report (2004). The Secretary shall report on these efforts to the Chair of the Commission of Youth prior to the 2006 General Assembly Session.

G. CONTINUATION OF STUDY EFFORTS

Findings

In 2004, the Commission on Youth convened several Regional Workgroups to more closely examine the local barriers that caregivers, parents, providers, and policymakers face in serving this population. The focus groups discussed issues specific to their regions and developed strategies to aid in strengthening the Commonwealth's family service system. In addition, a statewide Advisory Group was convened to assist with reviewing the focus groups' findings. The Advisory Group also formulated initial recommendations that would assist in strengthening family service systems within the Commonwealth.

Pertinent issues to this study were identified and evaluated by systemic and economic impacts. Barriers and solutions were identified by both the regional focus groups and the Statewide Advisory Group that require further analysis and study. Several regional best practices were identified by the Regional Workgroup members; however, more evaluation needs to be conducted to ascertain whether these approaches can be applied effectively across the Commonwealth.

Recommendation 7

Request that the Commission on Youth monitor efforts taking place in the Commonwealth regarding efforts to strengthen families and update the Commission on Youth on such developments prior to the 2006 General Assembly.

VIII. Conclusion

The above recommendations acknowledge that policies to strengthen families should be coordinated with other effective antipoverty strategies. These recommendations do not establish program preferences for two-parent families, but are offered to reduce barriers facing both single parent and two-parent families within the Commonwealth.

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William R. Butler, LCSW
Clinical Services Coordinator
Virginia Beach Department of Human Services
Mental Health/Substance Abuse Division, Child and Youth Services

Kimberly Pollard
Legislative Associate
Virginia Municipal League

Bob Ruthazer, CFLE
First Things First Richmond
www.Celebrate-Marriage.org

Christopher J. Spanos
Government and Public Affairs Counselor
VA League of Social Services Executives
Spanos Consulting Group LLC

Terry R. Tinsley, M.A., LPC, LMFT, NCC
Director of Clinical Services
Youth for Tomorrow

Gina Bevins Wilburn, LPC, LMFT
Director
Child & Family Services
Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare

Virginia Commission on Youth

STUDY OF STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

ADVISORY GROUP

Muriel Azria-Evans
Virginia Department of Education
Richmond

Jane Brown
Virginia Department of Social Services
Richmond

Victoria Cobb
Director of Legislative Affairs
The Family Foundation of Virginia
Richmond

Alison Galway, Ph.D., LMFT, LPC
President
Virginia Association for Marriage and Family
Therapy
Blacksburg

Edward H. Holmes
Field Operations Manager for Community
Programs
Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice
Richmond

Jean Kelly
Executive Secretary
Supreme Court of Virginia
Richmond

Jack Knapp
Executive Director
Virginia Assembly of Independent Baptists
Sandston

Dean Lynch
Virginia Association of Counties
Richmond

Kimberly Pollard
Legislative Associate
Virginia Municipal League
Richmond

Shirley Ricks
Director, Office of Child and Family Services
*Karen Durst, Technical Assistance Consultant,
Part C Infant & Toddler Connection*
Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental
Retardation and Substance Abuse Services
Richmond

Bob Ruthazer, CFLE
Executive Director
Marriage Builders Alliance of Richmond
Richmond

Alan G. Saunders
The Office of Comprehensive Services
Richmond

David Suttle, M.D.
Director, Office of Family Health Services
Virginia Department of Health
Richmond

Appendix B

STUDY OF STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

Tidewater Regional Workgroup August 16, 2004 Virginia Beach

A.L. Aswad
Children of the Sun
Norfolk

Delegate Mamye E. BaCote
Virginia House of Delegates
Newport News

Bob and Alicia-Ferdandez Bobulinski
Making a Difference Foundation
Virginia Beach

Barbara Brinson
Coordinator
Virginia Beach Youth Opportunities Office

Linda Cherry, M.S. Ed.
Former Teacher, Probation Officer
Norfolk

Toni Concace-Beshears
CEO
Places and Programs for Children, Inc.
Portsmouth

Cecilia Wingfield Cornelius
Christ and St. Luke's Church Advisory Director
Norfolk

Shelia Cross, MPA
Probation Officer
Youth Matters, Inc.
Portsmouth

Reginald Haynes, Jr.
Director of Operations
Lutheran Family Services
Hampton

The Rev. Linnard McCoy
Pastor
Norfolk

Terri Jenkins
Director
Dept. of Human Services
Virginia Beach

Wilhemina Long
Executive Director
Family Presentation Services, Inc.
Hampton

Katie Kitchin
Program Manager
Norfolk Dept. of Human Services

Senator Yvonne B. Miller
Senate of Virginia
Norfolk

Clifton Russell, Senior Recreation Supervisor
Neighborhood & Leisure Services
Youth Development Division
Norfolk

Paul Scott
The Institute for Family Centered Services
Chesapeake

Ruth Swann, Ph.D.
Norfolk

Sandy Swanson, PHN
Virginia Beach Dept. of Public Health

Minnie C. Thomas
Retired
Catholic Charities
Norfolk

Gay Thomas
Supervisor Of Visiting Teachers
Larkin Annex
Virginia Beach

Kaye Tice
Education Coordinator
Portsmouth Juvenile Court Service Unit

Michelle Whitmire
Family Resources Coordinator
Chesapeake Family Services
Chesapeake

**Northern Virginia Regional Workgroup
September 17, 2004
Bristow**

Lynne Asmuth, Ed.D
Prince William County School Age Care (SAC)
Office on School Age Care
Prince William

Amy Boles
Young Life
Fairfax

Renee Bolton
Case Manager for At-risk Students
Manassas City Public Schools

Deborah Carter
Extension Agent, 4-H Youth Development
Cooperative Extension
Manassas

Mickey Creed, Pastor
Colonial Baptist Church
Stafford

Barbara DeChene, Regional Director
Nina Managanaris, LCSW, Clinical Supervisor
Northern Virginia Family Service
Woodbridge

Brenda Knowles
Housing/Community Partnerships Manager
City of Manassas Park
Manassas Park

Jacqueline Lucas, Esq.
Cheryl Walton, Esq.
Prince William County Attorney's Office
Manassas

Eric E. McCollum, Ph.D., LCSW, LMFT
Center for Family Services
Virginia Technical University
Falls Church

Mary Neis
Social Worker
Manassas City Dept. of Social Services

The Rev. Fred L. Parish, Pastor
Bethel United Methodist Church
Woodbridge

Mary Lynn Pitts
Probation Officer
31st District Court Service Unit
Manassas

Kathy Roberts
Legislative Assistant
Speaker of the House
The Honorable William J. Howell
Fredericksburg

Mike Rolen
Director of Special Programs
Manassas Park City Schools

Keith Sykes
Manassas City Schools

Terry Tinsley
Youth For Tomorrow
Bristow

Femi Vance
Program Coordinator
Arlington Community Action Program, Inc.

Patty Walker
Rainbow Christian Services

Laurie Wilson
Child & Family Services Division Chief
Prince William County Dept. of Social Services

Anne Yeck
Asst to Superintendent
Manassas City School Board

**Southwest Virginia Regional Workgroup
October 21, 2004
Roanoke**

Deborah Coker
Parent Trainer
Roanoke County Prevention Council

Rita Evans
Botetourt County Public Schools
Roanoke

Jackie Grant, Associate Director
YMCA of Roanoke Valley
Roanoke

Stuart Harris
President
Valley Character
Greater Roanoke Valley Character Coalition
Roanoke

Cherri W. Hartman, Ph. D.
Director, Youth Development
Family Services of Roanoke Valley
Roanoke

Ron Herring, Chief Executive Officer
Lutheran Family Services of Roanoke Valley
Roanoke

Vickie Haynie
In-home Counseling Program Supervisor
Family Services of Roanoke Valley
Roanoke

Mark Hurley
Roanoke County Prevention Council

Pamela Kestner-Chappelear, President
Council of Community Services
Roanoke

Lissy Merenda
Supervisor, School/Community Relations Marketing
& Partnerships
Roanoke City Public Schools

Beth Pline
Service Area Director
Girl Scouts VA Skyline Council
Roanoke

Frank Rogon
President & CEO
United Way of Roanoke Valley

Thayer Walker
Presbyterian Community Center
Pathways After School Program
Roanoke

Sterling A. Wilder
Executive Director
Jubilee Family Development Center
Lynchburg



VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

Assessment of Programs that Strengthen the Family

The Commission on Youth is completing preliminary work on a two-year study initiative on strengthening families. Current activities include assessing and identifying elements that strengthen families; analyzing measures other states are taking, as well as various federal initiatives to strengthen families; and determining strategies to strengthen family service systems. More intense study activities will occur during the second year (2004) including analysis of preliminary findings and the formulation of recommendations for the Commission on specific policy options that strengthen families.

All issues will be evaluated by systemic and economic impacts. Issues identified to date as central to the study include:

- Marriage/Divorce
- Non-Marital births
- Single parent families
- Fatherless families
- Incarcerated parents
- Welfare reform and impact upon the family
- Child support enforcement
- Increase of high-risk behaviors by youth

In recent surveys, the family emerges as the central element in the lives of most Americans. Preliminary findings indicate that one of the best ways to help individuals, children and adults is to focus on their families. Families carry out a variety of functions critically important to society. They share resources, economically support their members, and care for the elderly, the sick, and the disabled in ways that no other institution can do or do as well.

***Please help us by answering these questions as they pertain to your organization and region.
Please write legibly so we can include your information.***

Name

Title

Organization

Address

E-mail

Phone

1. What are the localities your organization serves?

2. What is the focus of your involvement with children and families?

3A . Please check all the service(s) you provide specifically to children and families.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage/Divorce | <input type="checkbox"/> Welfare reform and impact upon the family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Marital births | <input type="checkbox"/> Child support enforcement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single parent families | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase of high-risk behaviors by youth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatherless families | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (<i>Please specify.</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Incarcerated parents | |

3B. Briefly describe these services.

4. Discuss how you interact with other child and family serving organizations in your region.

5. How would you rate your locality's/ies' responses to serving the needs of children and families pertaining to strengthening family ties? (*Please check, with "1" as "poor" and "5" as "excellent."*)

1 2 3 4 5

6. Are there services or programs that could be offered that would be of interest to you?

YES NO

If YES, please describe the program and how it would interest you.

7. Do you feel that there are needs which are not addressed by existing services/programs?

YES NO

If YES, please discuss.

8. What service setting do you think is the most effective in reaching children and families.
Please discuss.

9. How would you rate your clients' experiences with receiving assistance (*Please check, with "1" as "poor" and "5" as "excellent."*)

___1

___2

___3

___4

___5

Thank you for your input.

Please use the following space to provide additional information or comments.

Please return to

**Leah Hamaker, Legislative Analyst
Virginia Commission on Youth
517 B General Assembly Building
Richmond, Virginia 23219**

**lhamaker@leg.state.va.us
Phone 804-371-2481 • Fax 804-371-0574**

VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH Study on Strengthening Families

Issues Identified by Virginia Beach, Northern Virginia, and Roanoke Regional Workgroups and the Advisory Group

BARRIERS TO STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

VIRGINIA BEACH	NORTHERN VIRGINIA	ROANOKE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable Housing • Welfare-lose connection to services • Credit Issues • Homelessness • Education System • Immigrants-Access to Education • Overcrowding in Schools • Funding Streams • Case Management • Lack of after-school programs • Poverty • Transitional services out of a correctional institution • Lack of Transportation • Conflicting policy w/n state government • Amount of paperwork required to provide services • Dual working parents with children • Lack of commitment of human services • Lack of commitment of children services • Lack sufficient data to make decisions • Lack of mental health services, non-mandated • Parents vs. Schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of financial support for prevention programs • Language barriers lead to lack of trust • Lack of programs for workers to learn languages • Cultural barriers • Lack of translators • Lack of parental involvement in residential treatment • Lack of parental involvement in education • Availability of affordable childcare • Access to prenatal care • Lack of affordable housing • Lack of substance abuse services • Transportation • Funding for after-school activities • CSA funds-budget is too small • Relinquishment of custody • Guardians ad litem may place children in higher level of service than needed • Resources are not available to solve problems, where others believe they are • Hard to define prevention programs and hard to measure • Churches are underutilized because difficulty linking to government/resistance to using • Lack of vocational education at high schools and middle schools • Lack of trust between government and churches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relinquishment of Custody for children to receive services • Not enough community service (Home-based) • Broad range of services, but lacking in depth • Workers are so busy there is no time for prevention efforts • Historical paradigm that does not support preventive services of any kind • City and professional planning does not deal with Human Resource Issues • No after-school services available once children reach middle school • Lack of after-school services for at-risk children • Lack of parental involvement in schools • Disconnect in culture • Hard to get faith-based organizations started • Parents do not believe they are in need of support • Not enough child psychiatrists • Lack of mental health and substance abuse programs • No collaborated advocacy strategy for children's services • Staff underpaid • Case loads too high

Solutions to Strengthening Families

VIRGINIA BEACH	NORTHERN VIRGINIA	ROANOKE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing House of services • Program to help purchase cars • Look to faith-based programs • Educators need to be at the table • Streamline paperwork • Better knowledge of funding streams and how to use them • Coordination of services- too many players • Increase Medicaid eligibility • Parenting classes • Classes in relationships • Explore media • More community awareness • Regional workshops with adults and children, “young people” • Need better data • Federal resources, seek funding, “magic moment” • Family-community-based programs • Need youth input • Money for cultural diversity • Fatherhood program-diversity with program • Investigate covenant marriage • Private providers need to be at the table (military, healthcare) • Need federal recognition of H.S. provided to military • Support Kinship Care • Training Educators and correctional officers/Staff/JCC-MH in mental health, sexual abuse, and cultural diversity • Agencies need to maximize Title IV • Transitional Services – job project • Medical community (MH)- too much medication • Governor’s Summer Youth Institute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize issues earlier (prevention)- working with families early on, specialized programs in communities • Comprehensive Child Study-Prince William County Schools, schools identify child with possible issues, come together with family to identify the child’s needs early, program works with elementary school children, community agencies are involved • Car programs- donated to families in need, but in small amount and vehicles only last 6 months to a year cause of the original poor condition (Explore FRED model) • Resources for transportation for the disabled • Local businesses to support after school programs- ex. Boys and Girls club • Training regarding placement of children services • Change culture within the community by getting parents involved, implement family group decision making and change the initial message to the family • Use faith-based organizations, promote them as an option • Healthy Families/ reduce NMB and build relationships • Must do better listening to kids • Support school systems • Look for support with volunteer organizations • Funding for shots, underwear, glasses, dental, etc. • Create diploma options for kids who are not “cutting it” in high school, or are not college bound • Vocational high schools- on a regional level • Communication between churches and localities, churches work with communities • Establish a common release of information that is shared across the board 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giles- Pre-FAPT, pre-referral 11-12 years • Involvement for School Home-Based programs • Address culture’s thinking regarding preventive resources • Promote the Statewide Information Referral System- 211 • Integrate- pull pieces together so they can work effectively • Statewide IRN network tracks all children services. • Apply professional planning to Human Resource issues • Family friendly workplaces could solve some of the disconnect in the culture • Corporate organizations need to join with social services • Need parent perspectives on how to get parental involvement • Change how we deliver services (faith-based programs, neighborhood-based programs) • Bring families to the schools • Increase minimum wage • Tax credits for parenting programs • Change grant cycles (1,3,5 years) • Investigate Social Capital Systems Issue • Need for Statewide goals • Continued communication with the General Assembly • Talk to kids about what parenting involves • More money for prevention programs • Strengthening resources for children’s mental health services • More Creative Arts programs for youth • Utilize the Family Group Decision Making Model • Home-based service model needs to be expanded • Develop a continuum of care for community • Develop an office of Ombudsman for children and families



VIRGINIA COMMISSION ON YOUTH

Assessment of Programs that Strengthen the Family

As follow-up to a two-year legislative study on strengthening families, the Commission on Youth is reviewing state and national policies to help people sustain their families. In conducting the study, the Commission will investigate programs in Virginia which support children's connections to their family unit and identify initiatives known to strengthen parent-child relationships which other localities might want to replicate.

Please help us by answering the following questions as they pertain to your locality/region. Please complete this questionnaire as completely as possible. Thank you for your assistance.

NOTE: This questionnaire will be submitted to organizations across the state, so please do not forward this to your local child-serving agency.

Please print.

Name of Person Completing Survey _____

Title _____

Locality _____

Email _____ Phone _____

1. Please check all the categories of service(s) your locality/region provides specifically to children and families for the purpose of strengthening the family. These services may be provided in a public, private, or nonprofit setting.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marriage/Divorce
(counseling, mediation or
other pertinent services) | <input type="checkbox"/> Welfare reform and impact upon the family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-marital births | <input type="checkbox"/> Child support enforcement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single parent families | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase of high-risk behaviors by youth |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fatherless families | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (<i>Please specify.</i>) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Incarcerated parents | |

2. Under each category, please list specific programs in your locality/region which you believe are successful in strengthening the family, i.e., adequately meet the mission or the goals of the program. You may list the same program under several categories.

	Category	Successful Programs	Contact Person
a.	Marriage/divorce		
b.	Non-marital births		
c.	Single-parent families		
d.	Fatherless families		
e.	Incarcerated parents		
f.	Welfare reform and impact upon the family		
g.	Non-marital births		
h.	Increase of high risk behaviors by youth		
i.	Other (<i>Please specify.</i>)		

3. If there are programs in your locality/region that do an outstanding job of strengthening families, i.e., which use innovative approaches or consistently achieve successful outcomes, please explain why you believe this is the case, e.g., strong leadership, adequate funding, and commitment to the goals of the program.

4. If there are programs in your locality/region that consistently fall short of meeting specified goals or consistently miss the mark in serving families, please explain why you think that is the case, e.g., lack of resources, lack of oversight, lack of connections or communication in the community.

5. Please use the following space to provide additional information or comments.

Thank you for your help!
PLEASE RETURN BY _____ VIA FAX OR EMAIL.

**Leah Hamaker
Legislative Analyst
Virginia Commission on Youth
517B General Assembly Building
Richmond, Virginia 23219
804-371-2481
Fax 804-371-0574
Email: lhamaker@leg.state.va.us**

STATES' MARRIAGE & FAMILY INITIATIVES

Arizona

In April 2000, Arizona passed a Marriage Initiative that allocates one million TANF dollars for marriage skills courses provided by community-based organizations. The legislation also establishes a Marriage and Communication Skills Commission to implement the objectives of the law, which include the production and distribution of a "healthy marriage" handbook to all couples applying for a marriage license, as well as funding for vouchers to low-income couples for a marriage skills course. The state has a \$3.5 million abstinence-until-marriage program and passed Covenant Marriage legislation in 1998, under which couples promise to stay married for life and renounce their legal right to a no-fault divorce. As of September 2001, the Arizona Department of Economic Security has awarded \$786,600 of the one million TANF dollars to contractors offering marriage and communications skills workshops.

Arkansas

Governor Mike Huckabee is driving a high-profile effort to reduce divorce in Arkansas and educate its citizens on marriage. The Community Marriage Policy is modeled after Marriage Saver's Community Marriage Covenants initiative that urges ministers to adopt reforms aimed at lowering divorce rates. In his 2001 legislative agenda, Huckabee recommends the choice of covenant marriages as a way to reduce divorce rates.

Florida

In 1998, Florida became the first state to mandate high school seniors to take a marriage and relationship skills course before graduation through the Florida Marriage Preparation and Preservation Act. The law also encourages premarital preparation by reducing the marriage license fee by 50% for couples who can show that they have taken a marriage preparation course before obtaining the license. There is an additional three-day waiting period for couples that have not taken the course.

Michigan

In July 2001, Governor John Engler signed the appropriation bill for the Michigan Family Independence Agency (FIA), which included \$250,000 in TANF dollars for a marriage initiative, which includes marital counseling, family counseling, effective communication, and anger management. Furthermore, an additional one million TANF funding was earmarked to launch a Michigan fatherhood initiative. The goal is to help fathers "acquire skills that will enable them to increase their responsible behavior toward their children and the mothers of their children."

Oklahoma

In June 1999, Governor Frank Keating convened the Governor and First Lady's Conference on Marriage. The event brought together leaders from seven sectors (business, religion, government, education, media, legal and service providers) to forge a Marriage Initiative Steering Committee. In March 2000, Governor Keating announced a \$10 million plan to encourage marriage and reduce divorce. Ten percent of the state's TANF surplus funds will be earmarked to fund the Oklahoma Marriage initiative, which includes: 1) establishing a marriage resource center 2) public education campaign, 3) youth outreach on the virtues of marriage, 4) encouragement of pre-marital counseling and 5) integration of pro-marriage activities into existing social service

delivery systems. The Marriage Initiative includes a specific "religious track" under which state's religious leaders sign a marriage covenant, committing themselves to encourage pre-marital counseling for couples in their churches and other house of worship.

Utah

In late February 2001, Utah earmarked \$600,000 of its TANF surplus funds for the promotion of marriage education over the next two years. They include the development of an informational video for couples anticipating marriage and vouchers for counseling and mediation services for married couples. The legislature formed a Marriage Commission and raised the minimum marriage age from 14 to 16. In addition, Utah promotes marriage education through high school civic classes and conducts teacher education in marriage issues. Governor Mike Leavitt presides over an annual Marriage Week each February.

West Virginia

West Virginia's state TANF plan adds a \$100 marriage incentive to a family's benefits if there is a legal marriage in a household where both individuals receive welfare assistance payment.

Wisconsin

Wisconsin's State TANF Plan includes the creation of a "Community Marriage Policy" under which TANF dollars will fund a coordinator to work with local clergy across the state to assist in the development of community-wide standards for marriage solemnized by members of the clergy.

Source: <http://www.legalmomentum.org/issues/wel/statemarriage.html>

**Virginia Department of Social Services
Healthy Marriage and Stable Families Project
November 2005**

Organization Name	Location	Project Focus	Project Summary
Mental Health Assn - New River Valley	Blacksburg	Healthy Relationships	The Mental Health Association of the New River Valley proposes an expanded divorce education program. "One child, two homes". This program builds upon the successful "children of divorce seminar" program developed by the agency in 1996. The program is designed to stabilize one-parent families by teaching collaborative problem solving skills. (Floyd; Giles; Montgomery; and Pulaski)
Northern Virginia PREP Programs	Fairfax	Training	Fifty linguistically and culturally competent facilitators receive training in the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP), a research-based, educational approach to teaching couples (premarital/martial) skills to enhance and preserve their relationship. Northern Virginia facilitators will adapt and deliver PREP to 65 couples within their communities to support stable relationships. (Arlington; Loudon; Prince William; and Alexandria)
Henrico DSS	Henrico	Youth & Healthy Relationships	Workshops will be provided in Henrico County to approximately 588 of the students, youth and adults served by HDSS and staff of HDSS. The focus will be on specific communications skills, strategies for resolving conflicts and other interpersonal behaviors considered to be important for the success of intimate relationships.
MotherNet/Healthy Families Loudoun	Loudoun	Training & Healthy Relationships & Parenting	The Hispanic family strengthening and support project will provide center-based, Spanish-language education and support services to help approximately 150 Loudoun County parents and families build self-esteem and develop communication, conflict resolution and relationship building skills in order to make healthy relationship choices, develop stable families and establish constructive parent-child bonds.
Radford City Dept of Social Services PLANNING GRANT	Radford	Healthy Relationships	A family enrichment worker will serve "fragile families" in the City of Radford, who are identified through DSS and other agencies. The family enrichment worker will provide collaborative case management and direct services. A partnership with Radford University will create greater access to services for the 12-15 families who will participate in the program.
Boaz & Ruth Inc	Richmond	Parenting	Health and stable families are made up of healthy and stable individuals who are secure enough to be independent but who both recognize the importance of and have the skills to be "intradependent". The 50 hrs a week, year long Boaz & Ruth training program is designed to develop healthy, self sufficient, and stable individuals who take responsibility for maintaining healthy and stable family and community relationships. (Henrico & Chesterfield)

Organization Name	Location	Project Focus	Project Summary
VCU-Carver Promise Coop Parenting	Richmond	Training & Parenting	This program is eight workshops for (60-150) parent/caregivers of children's in the Carver Promise or who attend Carver Elementary. The caregivers will learn the vital skills needed to share parenting responsibilities. Together they will learn how to establish a supportive, cooperative and interdependent relationship aimed at optimal child development.
Marriage Builders Alliance of Richmond PLANNING GRANT	Richmond	Community Marriage Initiative	Develop and implement a "Community Marriage Initiative" for the Richmond Metropolitan Area to: Increase public awareness of benefits of healthy marriage. Identify resources to educate youth, singles and couples in skills needed to form and maintain healthy marriages and stable families. Increase Regional Capacity tom provide Healthy Marriage skills Education. (Chesterfield & Henrico)
Richmond Partners in Prevention Coalition	Richmond	Community Marriage Initiative	The Partners in Prevention Coalition-Richmond City Department of Public Health will offer a two-day conference to 380 participants to 1) explore barriers, unique to African American male/female relationship, that hinder healthy relationship development; and 2) provide skill building workshops to the community to strengthen capacity to form relationships/healthy marriages.
Nia Inc PLANNING GRANT	Richmond	Marriage & Healthy Relationships	"Married for a Lifetime" is a series based educational intervention designed to help couples improve upon skills necessary to sustain health marriages. Developed by a coalition of staff and volunteers at St. Paul's Baptist Church, "Married for a Lifetimes" is implemented as a series of workshops designed to assist couples with addressing the issues of marriage mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and sexually.
Freedom Fellowship Ministries	VA Beach	Community Marriage Initiative	Freedom Fellowship will be providing free workshops and special activities in the Tidewater community to encourage and support healthy marriages and families. Workshops are based on the PREP curriculum which teaches relationship skills including conflict management. These services will be focused on, but not limited to engaged and married couples. (Tidewater area)
The Alliance for Families and Children	VA Beach	Training	First, collaborating with the Marriage Before the Carriage coalition, 90 high school youth will receive curriculum based education to prepare them for healthy dating relationships and marriage. Second, in collaboration with the Pastoral Counseling Association, the Great Start premarital counseling curriculum will be offered to 10 couples planning to marry.