

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

Timothy M. Kaine
Governor

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**GOVERNOR KAINE RECOGNIZES NATIONAL FOSTER
CARE MONTH**

*~ Encourages Virginians to serve as “resource families” for youths in
foster care system ~*

RICHMOND– Governor Timothy M. Kaine today recognized May as National Foster Care Month, and encouraged Virginians to serve as resource families for foster children. Resource families can be biological relatives, or caring adults in the community, who are willing to provide a child with a safe, nurturing and potentially permanent family connection. Virginia has recently made significant progress in improving its foster care permanency rates through First Lady Anne Holton’s “For Keeps” initiative, and the Children’s Services System Transformation, an initiative supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation to strengthen partnerships among the Commonwealth’s entire child serving agencies

“Individuals and families who have stepped forward to help us transform and improve our foster care system are having a positive impact on the children whose lives they touch and on our communities,” Governor Kaine said. “Families who open their hearts and homes to children in need of foster care play a critical role in the Commonwealth’s overall efforts to better serve at-risk kids.”

Virginia is always seeking effective ways to support families and children in need of health and human services, especially children currently in foster care. According to national statistics from the Pew Charitable Trusts, 25% of children who age out of care without a permanent family connection will be incarcerated within the first two years after leaving the system, over 20% will become homeless at some time, and only about 60% will have a high school diploma at age 19 – compared to about 90% of non-foster youth.

“Success in school and in life is seriously influenced by stability in the home,” added Ray Ratke, who serves as Special Advisor to Secretary of Health and Human Services Marilyn B. Tavenner for Children’s Services. “Children can be vulnerable in a number of ways. Very often, the child who is at-risk for dropping out of school, or entering the juvenile justice system, is the same child whose home situation is so volatile

or fragile that it's necessary for her or him to live elsewhere – at least for awhile,” said Ratke.

The Children's Services System Transformation aims to improve outcomes by coordinating the delivery of services by all stakeholders, including state agencies such as the Departments of Social Services, Education, Juvenile Justice, Mental Health, and the Office of Comprehensive Services, along with local government and community groups. In a number of Virginia communities, this collaborative model is increasing the number of children who exit foster care with a permanent family.

These “permanency rates” are rising as much as 20 percent in localities such as Dinwiddie and Roanoke, two of the 13 localities which comprise the Council on Reform (CORE), created in 2007. The CORE localities have reached the national average of 18 percent in the number of children in foster care who are in group placements. CORE best practices, presented statewide in a series of Transformation Kick-Off meetings, are helping other localities implement effective permanency strategies.

“Virginia has approximately 7,000 children in need of a permanent home,” said Virginia Department of Social Services Commissioner Anthony Conyers Jr. “Resource families are, first and foremost, critically important for our children, but the entire community benefits from their service.”

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