

Review of the Children's Services Act's Purpose, Spending, and Service Delivery

Approved by the JLARC Study Subcommittee on October 7, 2019

WHEREAS, the Children's Services Act (CSA) (§ 2.2-5200 et seq. of the Code of Virginia), originally known as the Comprehensive Services Act, was established in 1992 as a comprehensive system of services and funding through interagency planning and collaboration at the state and local levels in an effort to better meet the needs of at-risk youth and their families; and

WHEREAS, since its creation, the Children's Services Act has undergone numerous changes regarding its administration, covered services, and funding sources; and

WHEREAS, most participants are children in foster care or special education and are federally mandated to receive services; and

WHEREAS, program spending on private school special education services represents the largest use of CSA funds, and the average annual cost per student placed in a private school for special education services has increased sharply to more than \$40,000; and

WHEREAS, localities are primarily responsible for administering the program, creating the potential for variation in policies and procedures for determining program eligibility, service provision, and oversight of outcomes and spending; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission that staff be directed to study the administration of the Children's Services Act.

In conducting its study, staff shall (i) assess the extent to which there are any gaps in the availability of services for youth and their families under the CSA program, including children's residential services, private school special education services, and community-based services; (ii) evaluate the costs of those services and the CSA program's reimbursement for them, especially for private school special education services; (iii) evaluate whether children are receiving the most cost-effective services based on their needs, including how decisions are made regarding the placement of children in private school special education services; (iv) determine what has driven changes in the cost of services through CSA and the number of children being served; (v) evaluate state oversight and administration of the program; (vi) evaluate the local oversight and administration of the program, specifically with regard to delivering cost-effective services, evaluating service delivery outcomes, and managing individual cases; and (vii) determine whether any fundamental changes are needed to the program to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of serving youth and their families.

JLARC shall make recommendations as necessary and review other issues as warranted.

All agencies of the Commonwealth, including the Office of Children's Services, the Virginia Department of Education, the Virginia Department of Social Services, the Virginia Department of

Medical Assistance Services, the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, local school divisions and school boards, local departments of social services and boards, and Community Services Boards shall provide assistance, information, and data to JLARC for this study, upon request. JLARC staff shall have access to all information in the possession of state agencies pursuant to § 30-59 and § 30-69 of the Code of Virginia. No provision of the Code of Virginia shall be interpreted as limiting or restricting the access of JLARC staff to information pursuant to its statutory authority.