

Study Resolution

Foster care and adoption services in Virginia

Authorized by the Commission on September 9, 2017

WHEREAS, nearly 5,000 of Virginia's children and youth are in foster care placements; and

WHEREAS, Virginia's foster care caseloads have recently begun to increase after a 10-year decline, but for undetermined reasons; and

WHEREAS, caseload increases in other states have been tied to accelerating rates of opioid abuse, and opioid abuse has also risen quickly in Virginia; and

WHEREAS, Virginia ranks low (49th) in the proportion of foster care youth who are adopted, even though the number of adoptions has increased; and

WHEREAS, foster care youth who are never adopted face greater lifetime challenges, and the proportion of these youth in Virginia is higher than in many other states; and

WHEREAS, adoption and foster care programs are administered by the Virginia Department of Social Services and its 121 local departments of social services (LDSS); and

WHEREAS, youth in foster care are mandated recipients of services through the Children's Services Act (CSA), which is administered at the state level by the Office of Comprehensive Services and at the local level by LDSS; and

WHEREAS, concern has been expressed about the provision of services for those children and youth with the most complex needs, many of whom are likely recipients of CSA services; and

WHEREAS, the General Assembly appropriates more than \$200 million for "Child Welfare Services" and \$330 million for services provided under the CSA; and

WHEREAS, the Children's Services Transformation, a major initiative to reform the provision of child welfare services, was undertaken in 2007, but a follow-up evaluation has not occurred; and

WHEREAS, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission identified gaps in case management services and an inadequate number of foster families for children and youth in its 2007 report *Evaluation of Children's Residential Services Delivered through the Comprehensive Services Act*, preventing some children from receiving the most appropriate services to meet their needs; now, therefore be it

RESOLVED by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) that staff be directed to review the administration of the state's adoption and foster care programs and the provision of those programs' services to youth and their families. In conducting its study, staff shall (i) summarize changes and trends in foster care caseloads over time and identify the reasons for any recent increases, either statewide or regionally; (ii) examine the current and future capacity of local departments of

social services and other government agencies to provide foster care, foster care prevention, and adoption services, including effective case management services for children and families with the most complex needs, such as those served through the Children's Services Act; (iii) evaluate the effectiveness of state and local efforts to recruit and retain foster care and adoptive families and place foster youth in permanent homes through successful adoptions; (iv) evaluate how well government agencies are measuring the effectiveness of services provided to foster care youth; (v) determine whether agencies currently maximize the availability of federal funds and coordinate the various funding streams involved in foster care and adoption service delivery; (vi) propose options or make recommendations to improve the administration and delivery of foster care and adoption services to the state's youth and increase the rate of successful adoptions; and (vii) review other issues as appropriate.

All agencies of the Commonwealth, including the Virginia Department of Social Services and its local departments, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, and the state's 40 Comprehensive 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.

JLARC staff shall complete their work and submit a report of findings and recommendations to the Commission by December 15, 2018.