

Budget testimony January 4, 2024

Good morning. My name is Carol Bauer, I am a National Board Certified Teacher and have been an elementary teacher for 28 years. I currently serve as the Virginia Education Association Vice President. As you consider Virginia's future and the budget to support your vision, please consider the important role our children and their education plays in supporting Virginia's future economy and the well-being of all Virginians.

As a reminder, this budget proposal comes five months after a major report from JLARC, the state's research body, about how severely the state is underfunding public schools – by \$4 billion per year. That report recommended a number of critical short- and long-term fixes in state funding to help Virginia students reach their full potential. Unfortunately, instead of supporting public schools, the governor's budget hides a number of real cuts to the state funding for Virginia's public schools.

Looking at needs using the JLAR report, a report you asked to be conducted, schools will be facing **\$10 billion** in critical needs in the next 2 years which are not addressed in this budget. An artificial cap remains on support positions that is left over from the '08 recession and the budget cuts schools and children shouldered then. Cuts that still have not been restored. It will take **\$250 million** to fully lift the artificial cap on support positions, and about **\$650 million** to get Virginia's teacher pay to the national average to address our current educator shortage. Additionally, Gov Younkin's budget does not address a **\$25 billion** backlog in school infrastructure needs, and instead shifts the use of funds meant for school construction – the Literary Fund – to pay for teacher retirement, thereby allowing a reduction of regular state fund contributions for retirement (a \$300 million cut) while also reducing funding meant to make sure our students have warm, dry, places to learn.

What educators are seeing in schools is the increased need for mental health resources, and yet, the Governor's proposed budget does not address the **\$200 million** needed to provide more adequate staffing ratios for school counselors and mental health staff, and at least **\$120 million** to scale community schools, training, and classroom resources that the JLARC report outlined.

Rather than address any of these needs, **the governor has proposed nearly \$400 million in CUTS to state K-12** funding compared to current spending over the next two years.

This budget fails to address the one-time federal funds that were allocated to states to support public schools. The emergency funding is coming to an end which in effect reduces state funding for schools by almost \$400 million in the budget's upcoming two years. This change, which is a cut in substantive terms, is due to a quirk in the state's rebenchmarking formula that is meant to cover regular updates to enrollment, inflation, and technical changes. By not fixing this kink, the proposed budget reduces state support for schools and effectively supplants federal pandemic aid. In my own school division discussions are already being made about

potential cuts to positions and supports that have proven necessary to successfully meet the needs of our students as we address learning loss and instructional needs.

Using increased lottery revenue as an excuse to reduce state funding, means our students won't have as many resources as they need, and undermines trust in state government. People are told that they're benefiting schools by playing the lottery, but those benefits are meaningless if lottery money replaces other state funding rather than adding to it. In monetary terms, the lottery fund supplanting results in an **\$89.5 million reduction** in just one budget year budget year. Telling the public that lottery funds are used for education is not telling the whole story when education funds are reduced due to lottery fund supplanting.

Please amend the Governor's budget's shortfalls in public education by addressing the needs in the JLARC report and by real increases to state support for public schools instead of pushing it off on localities to make up for the inadequate funding. We are failing Virginia's future by failing to support public education. For an educational governor, this budget leaves out the very children he is suggesting he supports.

I thank you for your time, attention, and your recognition of the important role Virginia schools play in our future.