

Delegate Mark D. Sickles
General Assembly Building
201 North 9th Street
Richmond, VA 23219



January 25, 2024

Good Morning, Del. Sickles and Staff,

I'm reaching out to you today as the Executive Director of Safe Harbor Child Advocacy Center in the City of Fredericksburg. Our Center, located within Senate District 1, provides direct services to child victims of physical and sexual abuse in the greater Fredericksburg area encompassing six jurisdictions. Sadly, sexual abuse of children is a far larger issue than most people realize. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1 in 4 girls and 1 in 20 boys in the U.S. experience child sexual abuse, and the total lifetime economic burden of child sexual abuse in the U.S. in 2015 was estimated to be at \$9.3 billion—meaning this is an issue that impacts us all.

In your role as Chair of the House Appropriations Health & Human Resources Sub-Committee, I'm asking for your commitment to support all victims of crime in the 2024 General Assembly session, especially children! **Specifically, I'm asking for your support of SB30.**

Why is an amendment to SB30 needed?

Child advocacy centers (CACs) like Safe Harbor **need secure funding to sustain existing services.** Currently nearly all the funding received by CACs from the Commonwealth of Virginia comes from TANF and Victim of Crime Act (VOCA) funds. It is widely reported that TANF funding will be substantially reduced in SFY 2025; VOCA funding dollars have already been slashed and may eventually cease altogether.

- FY 2025 - VOCA funding reduced by \$1,564,902.
- FY 2026 - VOCA funding reduced by \$3,912,256 to -0-.

CACs need to extend coverage to 100% of Virginia's Children - nearly 20% of Virginia children and families do not have access to a CAC within an hour's drive.

Legislation has been introduced—SB 12 and HB 1128—in the 2024 General Assembly session to direct children who are victims of human trafficking to CACs for forensic interviews. Although this will likely not be mandatory but advised, it is difficult to gauge the impact regarding the number of children which could be

directed to our centers, however, we can expect substantial increases in the number of children and families served.

Children and Families Served

In 2023, CACs provided services for 7,000+ children who were referred for forensic interviews. If trends continue, those figures will rise to 8,700+ in 2024 and 9,800+ in 2025. These numbers are estimated with the current, existing centers. If funding permits the establishment of new CACs, those numbers will certainly escalate. In addition, if the human trafficking legislation should pass, that would add an undetermined number of referrals.

It is certainly a conservative estimate to predict that by 2025, CACs will be providing services to more than 10,000 Virginia children and their families.

Cost of Services Per Child

The current average cost to serve a child is estimated at \$2,160 which means in 2025 the cost to CACs could rise to more than \$21,000,000/yr. To serve all of Virginia's children and families, 8 new centers would be optimal. With a start-up cost estimated to approach \$225,000/center, this would mean at least an additional \$1,800,000 would need to be generated.

A Good Deal for the Commonwealth of Virginia

A 2005 National Children's Advocacy Center cost-benefit study showed that on a per case basis, traditional investigations were 36% more expensive than CAC-supported investigations. The study projected a \$1,000 per case cost saving when the child is served by a CAC. Currently this would result in more than \$7.0 million per year for local governments and the Commonwealth of Virginia and that number escalates each year as more children are referred. If the study were to be replicated today, there is no doubt the savings would be more substantial.

Budget History

The General Assembly designated funding for CACs in 2005 with funding to start in July 2006.

- Initial CAC Funding in 2006
 - \$1,000,000: General Funds
 - Total number of CACs funded: 9
 - Total number of children served: 2,000

- Funding for Currently Established CACs
 - Current: \$2,542,000 (\$405,500 in General Funds; \$2,136,500 in TANF funds)
 - Total number of CACs: 19 centers + 9 satellites for a total of 28 locations
 - Total number of children served: 7,000+

I'm happy to answer any questions you might have ahead of tomorrow's subcommittee meeting and can be reached at 540-891-6280 or elizabethmcnally@safeharborva.org.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Elizabeth".

Elizabeth McNally, MSW
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