



Sakina Jackson, Child Care Aware of Virginia
Testimony before the House Appropriations and Senate Finance Committees
January 5, 2022

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sakina Jackson, and I am the Deputy Director of Child Care Aware of Virginia. We are a statewide nonprofit network that supports both families to find child care and child care providers to offer high-quality care.

I've worked in child care for 20 years. And, over the years have worn many different hats. I've worked in a child care center, at the Hanover Department of Social Services assisting families seeking child care subsidy assistance and later with VDSS in the Division of Child Care and Early Childhood Education. Supporting families with children and strengthening the quality of child care is my passion.

Because I've had such broad experience, I can see policy issues through the lens of each. It is with that insight that I share with you today several of our policy priorities.

While the economy in Virginia is improving, there are families still struggling. The pandemic has lasted longer than anyone predicted. The most recent Census Bureau data, from December 1-13, 2021, shows that in Virginia,

- 260,536 families with children lost income in the last 4 four weeks. These families continue to struggle even as the statewide unemployment rate is improving.
- 29.4% of families with children are behind on rent compared to 11.1% of households without children. Those with income loss and also those who are behind on rent are greatest among families of color.
- An alarmingly large percentage of families continue to have difficulty paying their bills: 55.6% of families with less than \$25,000 in income, 62% of families with income between \$25,000-\$35,000, 49% of families with income above \$35,000 and below \$50,000; and 29.6% of families with income between \$50,000 and \$75,000.

As the new General Assembly session begins, we urge you to:

- Support an extension through calendar year 2022 of last year's HB 2206, legislation that expanded income eligibility for child care subsidy. Last year's bill was designed to support families with children under age 5 – and their older siblings, if they had them. We urge that you broaden the measure to also offer child care assistance to families of school-age children. Before & after care is also important to working families or parents who want to return to the workforce.
- Next, it's time to invest in the child care workforce. On average, child care workers earn \$11.30 per hour. Virginia has received over \$1 billion in supplemental federal funds for child care. Please consider using some of that funding to develop a wage ladder and wage supplement system to boost compensation for the child care workforce. I know there have been bonuses. But, while helpful, there is a fundamental problem with the child care wage structure. Child care workers should be compensated at a higher rate than parent fees can support. Their work is important and is a public good. With the supplemental federal funds for the next few years, we can do better.

Child Care Aware has a policy agenda with several more recommendations. I have submitted it for the record and request that you review it when you have a chance as the session begins. Thank you for your time.