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One of the best times
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VACo visits our
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Supervisors Meetings
and recognizes counties
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work



Prince William County!



Stafford County!

Virginia Commission on Youth Seeks Public Comment on Improvements to Foster Care System and Process for Admission of Minors for Inpatient Mental Health Treatment



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
Commission on Youth



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The Virginia Commission on Youth met on September 19 to discuss two studies conducted by staff at the Commission's direction. The Commission is seeking public comment on the draft recommendations for both studies. Public comments are due by 5 p.m. on Monday, November 13, 2023, and should be sent via email to aatkinson@vcoy.virginia.gov.

Admission of minors to a mental health facility for inpatient treatment: This study was generated by legislation proposed during the 2023 session that was referred to the Commission by letter from the House Courts of Justice Committee. The bill would have increased from 14 to 16 the minimum age for a minor to consent to admission to a mental health facility for inpatient treatment and added addiction as a reason for a minor to be admitted to a mental health facility for inpatient treatment. The bill's patron, Delegate Anne Ferrell Tata, who also serves on the Commission on Youth, explained that she sought to address situations in which a minor who is 14 or 15 years of age refuses to consent to inpatient treatment that the parent feels is necessary, and to address issues of substance use disorder among youth.

Under current Virginia law, a minor younger than 14 may be admitted to a willing mental health facility for inpatient treatment with the consent of a parent; a minor 14 years of age or older may be admitted with the consent of the minor and the minor's parent. A minor 14 years of age or older who objects to admission or is incapable of making an informed decision may be admitted for up to 120 hours, pending an evaluation and court review. Issues reviewed during the study included the prevalence of mental health issues and substance use among youth in Virginia and the gaps in substance use disorder treatment services for youth; other provisions in Virginia law regarding minors' ability to consent to certain medical or emergency services; other states' laws on treatment consent; and accessibility of information regarding the admission process for minors.

Proposed recommendations include:

- Raising the age at which a minor may object to treatment from 14 to 16.
- Clarifying Code language regarding minors' consent to inpatient substance use disorder treatment to specify the age of consent as well as clarifying language regarding the admission of a minor to

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a facility under the application of a parent to state that in this case a temporary detention order is not required.

- Requesting the convening of a workgroup to consider options for the transportation of minors who are admitted through the court process outlined above.
- Requesting or requiring the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to provide information on its website regarding the psychiatric treatment of minors; requesting the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) to provide information to local departments regarding the process of admission of minors to inpatient treatment; and requesting DBHDS to provide educational materials to professional associations of psychiatrists and psychologists, as well as to Community Services Boards (CSBs), on the voluntary and involuntary admissions process for minors.
- Requesting DBHDS to work with CSBs to target available federal funds towards higher-intensity substance use services for minors.

The staff presentation on the admission of minors for inpatient mental health treatment may be found at [this link](#), and a full list of the recommendations may be found at [this link](#).

Improving Virginia's foster care system: This study seeks to update an earlier effort by the Commission and examines a series of topics, including workforce retention, liability insurance for foster care agencies, and foster family recruitment and retention.

Among the study's recommendations are the following proposals:

- Supporting the establishment of a centralized training academy model for child welfare in order to improve staff retention by ensuring staff are well-prepared.
- Enhancing the Child Welfare Stipend Program, which uses federal Title IV-E funds to support social work students who in turn commit to work at a local department of social services.
- Addressing the issue of liability insurance through several proposals: providing qualified immunity for acts of negligence to private foster care agencies that contract with localities; applying a monetary cap for negligence cases resulting from the placement of a child by a private foster care agency; requesting the formation of a workgroup by the State Corporation Commission to study the expansion of group self-insurance pools to permit private foster care agencies the ability to join a pool, with permission of a locality, to obtain liability insurance for foster care services; and requesting VDSS to form a workgroup to study these policy options.
- Continuing the Exceptional Circumstances Payment pilot program, which provides up to an additional \$3000 per month for foster families, for up to three months, to support emergency situations or additional supervision for a foster child, in order to support a safe and stable placement.
- Requesting DBHDS and VDSS to assess the barriers to availability of substance use disorder treatment services and make recommendations for establishing systems to address parental substance use and prevent the entry of children into foster care.
- Directing the Commission on Youth to review concerns regarding reports of increased use by parents of relief of custody to place challenging children or youth in foster care.

The staff presentation on the foster care study is available at [this link](#), and a full list of the proposed recommendations may be found at [this link](#).

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

State General Fund Revenues on Track in First Two Months of FY 2024

Secretary of Finance Stephen E. Cummings reported positive news on state General Fund revenue collections in the first two months of FY 2024 in his [presentation to the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee](#) on September 19, although he continued to advise caution in the face of ongoing economic uncertainty. General Fund revenues are up by 0.9 percent on a fiscal year-to-date basis, \$204.8 million ahead of the forecasted 5.5 percent decline, although almost half of that additional revenue is attributable to interest income that must be distributed to nongeneral fund accounts quarterly. Collections in the state's main General Fund revenue sources – individual income tax withholding and sales and use taxes -- were generally in line with the forecast or slightly ahead of the forecast. Withholding collections were flat on a fiscal year-to-date basis relative to the prior year, and \$23.5 million ahead of the forecast. Sales tax collections were 4.4 percent higher on a fiscal year-to-date basis, running ahead of the forecasted 6.7 percent decline. Secretary Cummings noted that although the average rate of employment growth in Virginia has slowed to 2 percent, unemployment is low (2.5 percent on a seasonally-adjusted basis, well below the national rate of 3.5 percent), and Virginia's labor force participation rate of 66.7 percent is higher than the nation's (which stands at 62.8 percent). A recent announcement from the Governor pointed out that Virginia's labor force participation rate is the highest since 2012.

Secretary Cummings noted that the forecast in the recently-approved budget revisions (enacted as Chapter 1) was "intentionally conservative," pointing to several areas of uncertainty that warrant caution: tightening in consumer credit, a softening labor market, concerns about the health of China's economy, and the possibility of a federal government shutdown, as well as continued high inflation, rising oil prices, and increases in health care costs. August is traditionally not a significant month for state revenue collections, while September collections include estimated payments for nonwithholding and corporate payments, helping to provide a clearer picture of state finances.

A similar approach of watchful waiting was on display later in the week at the September 19-20 meeting of the Federal Reserve's Federal Open Market Committee, which opted to maintain current interest rates. Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell explained at his post-meeting press conference that although inflation is still above the Federal Reserve's longer-run goal of 2 percent, the full effects of previous rate hikes have not been fully realized, and the Committee planned to proceed carefully to monitor the evolving economic outlook in determining its future course of action. Economic projections by Committee members indicate that the median projection for core PCE inflation (personal consumption expenditures excluding food and energy) is 3.7 percent this year (a decline from the 3.9 percent projected at the June meeting), reaching the 2 percent target in 2026. The median projection by Committee members is for interest rates to remain at higher levels for a longer duration than was projected in June.

Although the revisions to Virginia's current biennium budget were enacted last week with the Governor's approval of the budget bill on September 14, concluding a months-long negotiation, the process of developing the Governor's budget for the next biennium is already underway. State agencies must submit requests for consideration for inclusion in the Governor's proposal by September 29. The Joint Advisory Board of Economists will meet October 11; the Governor's Advisory Council on Revenue Estimates has already met once (on August 7) and will meet again on November 20 in advance of the Governor presenting his proposed budget to the "money committees" on December 20, which will include a revised forecast for FY 2024 and forecasts for FY 2025 and FY 2026.

Photo Credit: [courthouses.co](https://www.courthouses.co)



Visit Halifax County and the Halifax County Historic Courthouse

Location: 8 South Main Street / Mountain Road

Built: 1838 – 1839

Style: Classical Revival

Architect: Dabney Cosby and Son, Dabney Cosby, Jr.

Contractor: Dabney Cosby and Son, Dabney Cosby, Jr.

Description: The building faces east and is a two story red colored brick structure. The building is located on landscaped grounds in the center of Halifax. The east front has a large portico with four white colored columns rising to a pediment at the roof line. The roof is hipped. In the interior, the judge's chamber and jury rooms have original Greek Revival style mantels and symmetrically molded trim that surrounds the original paneled doors and windows. Twin stairs in the hall have paneled newel posts, turned balusters and molded handrails from 1904. The remodeled courtroom is located on the second story. The building houses the County Circuit Court, County General District Court and County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of the 10th Judicial Circuit. An addition was constructed in 1904 and the architect was B F Smith Fireproofing Company and the contractor was South Boston Lumber. In 1962 to 1964, the building was expanded on the west side forming a "T" shape. The building was renovated in 2018 to 2020 with construction of a new addition along the west side. The architect was CMJW Architecture and the contractor was Blair Construction Inc. of Gretna.

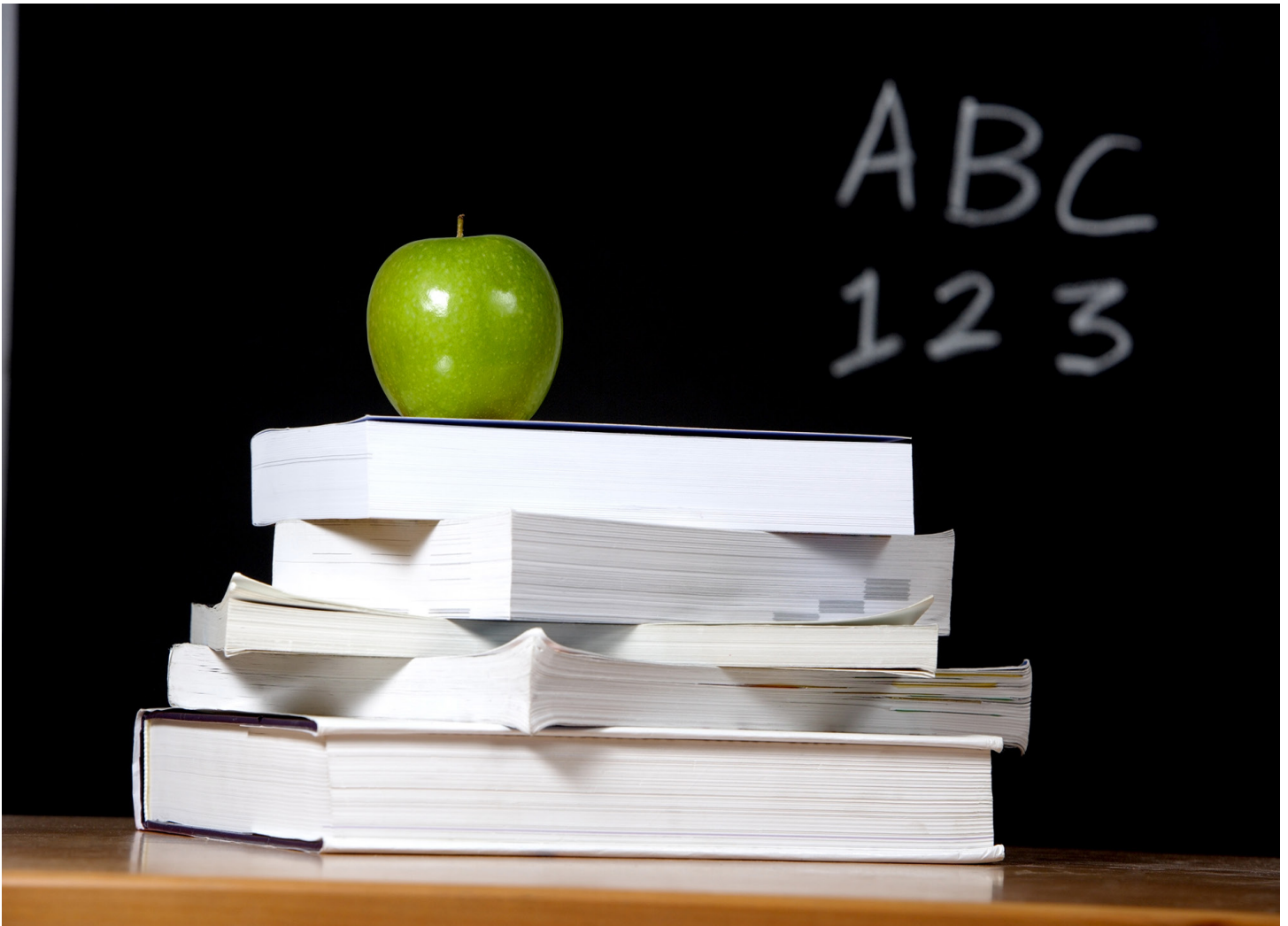
SOURCE: [American Courthouses](https://www.AmericanCourthouses.com) | [Courthouses.co](https://www.Courthouses.co)



**Check out our 89th Annual Conference logo!
See you on November 12-14 in beautiful Bath County!**

**VACo 89th Annual Conference
November 12 – 14, 2023
The Omni Homestead | Bath County
[VACo Annual Conference Website](https://www.vaco.org/conference)**

JLARC Publishes Report on Virginia's K-12 Teacher Pipeline



Virginia continues to suffer from a statewide teacher shortage. On September 12th, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission ([JLARC](#)) met to present several reports, one of which was a study of Virginia's K-12 Teacher Pipeline. The study resolution directed JLARC to identify K-12 teacher workforce trends, evaluate factors contributing to the decline in teacher preparation program enrollment, identify practices to increase enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs, and evaluate the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) teacher licensure process. The report found that 4.8 percent of teaching positions were vacant at the start of the 2023–24 school year, up from 3.9 percent in the prior school year (and less than 1 percent in years prior to the pandemic). 16 percent of Virginia's teachers were not fully licensed or not teaching “in field” in SY2022–23, up from 14 percent in the prior school year (and 6 percent a decade ago). The severity of these problems varies from locality to locality.

This trend follows a November 2022 [report](#) from JLARC which highlighted the additional challenges to the teaching profession stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in individuals entering the profession. Vacant teaching positions continue to be above the historical trend since the 2021–2022 school year. The latest available data shows a continued deficit of 5,482 teachers between newly

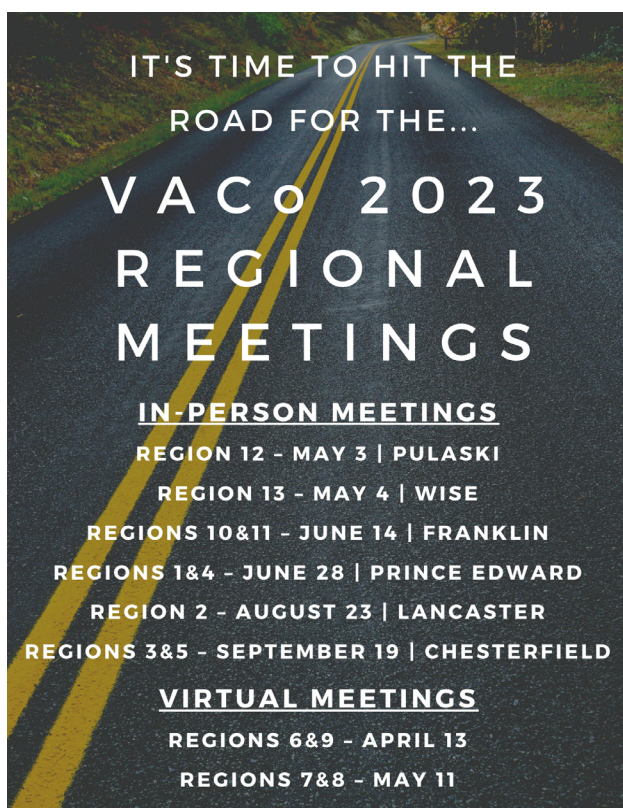
licensed teachers and those leaving. The main reasons reported by teachers for leaving the profession are personal reasons or inadequate support for teachers, too high of a workload, ineffective school leadership, and inadequate salary.

Recent JLARC reports have recommended ways to address issues related to teacher support and workload (e.g., more instructional assistants), and salary (e.g., changing the SOQ formula inputs to more accurately reflect actual teacher salaries). This report recommended legislative action to allow for a waiver for individuals who have not passed the Virginia Communication and Literacy Assessment (VCLA) as well as increasing funding to the Virginia Teaching Scholarship Loan Program, among other provisions.

VACo maintains the following legislative positions regarding K-12 staff shortages and retention: VACo urges the General Assembly to approve and fund strategies addressing the teacher shortage in the Commonwealth. VACo supports a targeted approach to teacher shortage by prioritizing areas in critical need, as recommended by the Virginia Department of Education. VACo supports using district-level data to determine how to best fill shortage gaps, especially in hard-to-staff divisions. VACo supports reducing burdens on the teacher workforce in the Commonwealth. VACo supports programs aimed at reducing student debt for teaching in public schools. VACo also supports programs that encourage teachers to stay in the profession including measures that provide mentorship, guidance and other forms of support for teachers in their first five years in the profession.

The full JLARC report and the slides from the JLARC staff presentation can be found [here](#) and [here](#), respectively.

VACo Contact: [Jeremy R. Bennett](#)



COMPLETED!

Thank you for a successful 2023 Regional Meetings Season. We enjoyed every visit and seeing all our friends from across the Commonwealth. Thank you for sharing your challenges and triumphs. We believe by sharing our stories - we can help each other better serve our communities.

We look forward to another outstanding Regional Meetings Season in 2024!



**COUNTY OF FAUQUIER
OFFICE OF THE COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR**

JANELLE J. DOWNES
County Administrator

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Warrenton, Virginia 20186
PHONE 540-422-8001
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E-mail: admin@fauquiercounty.gov

ERIN M. KOZANECKI
Deputy County Administrator

**PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 15, 2023**

Fauquier County Announces County Administrator and New Department Heads



Warrenton, Virginia – The Fauquier County Board of Supervisors announced the appointment of Janelle J. Downes as County Administrator effective August 10, 2023. Ms. Downes has been serving as the Interim County Administrator since May 15, 2023. At the Board's August 10 meeting, the Board determined that Ms. Downes is uniquely qualified for the position of County Administrator based on her extensive knowledge and experience with the Board of Supervisors and all other County Government departments, offices, and entities.

Ms. Downes will take the helm as the first female County Administrator since the position was established in 1978. Board of Supervisors' Chairman Christopher Butler stated, "the Board is excited to see the strong momentum Ms. Downes has created with the County leadership team and will continue in the future. She brings to the role a wide range of experience in both our organization and community."

In response to her appointment, Ms. Downes expressed "I am incredibly humbled and honored to continue to serve in this capacity and am deeply dedicated to continuing the momentum. An organization's greatest asset is its people and I look forward to all we can accomplish together."

Prior to the Interim County Administrator appointment, Ms. Downes served the County for 23 years with the past 18 years as Director of Human Resources for Fauquier County and Fauquier County Public Schools. Ms. Downes earned both her Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Public Administration from George Mason University. Ms. Downes holds a certificate in leadership coaching for organizational well-being also from George Mason University in addition to being a credentialed Senior Human Resources Professional and LEAD Program Graduate through the University of Virginia. She is a lifelong resident of Fauquier County.

During her tenure, Ms. Downes has hired several key personnel. These staff members will lead critical departments and functions of County Government. Mallory K. Stribling has been named Director of Management and Budget, Kalvyn W. Smith named the Fire Rescue Systems Chief, Jim E. Hilleary named Agricultural Development Officer, and Mary F. Wyckoff named Director of Human Resources.

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Mallory Stribling began her new position as Director of Management and Budget on June 5, 2023. She has served Fauquier County for over 10 years, with the most recent five years as the Budget Services Manager.



Ms. Stribling brings a strong multi-faceted background to the role, originally branching from project management consulting. Prior to Fauquier, she worked for Booz Allen Hamilton and supported defense clients in the areas of change management and strategic communications.

Ms. Stribling holds a Master of Public Administration from George Mason University, a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech, and a Bachelor of Arts in International Relations from Boston University, where she also played Division I soccer. She is a Project Management Professional and is a graduate of the 2018 Leadership Fauquier Class and 2019 GFOA Leadership Academy based out of the College of Charleston.

Ms. Stribling was named County Government Employee of the Year in 2018.

Outside of work, Ms. Stribling enjoys running and spin class with friends, chasing after her two boys and dog, and spending time at her husband's family farm in northern Fauquier, Stribling Orchard.



Chief Kalvyn Smith was hired as the Fire and Rescue Systems Chief effective June 2, 2023. He served as the Interim Fire Chief since April 1, 2023. Chief Smith has served the Fauquier County Fire and Rescue System since 1978 in a variety of roles including Hazardous Materials Coordinator, Fire Instructor, and Catlett Volunteer Fire Chief. He retired with 32 years of service for Prince William County Fire and Rescue System in 2016.

Chief Smith holds a Bachelor of Science in Occupational Health and Safety and an Associates of Applied Science, Fire Science and Technology. In addition, he has served as an Adjunct Instructor with the Virginia Department of Fire programs since 1995.

Vice Chair Rick Gerhardt, Cedar Run District, says, "we are thrilled to have someone with Kalvyn's expertise and experience in this role as we begin the new chapter of our Fire Rescue

System."

Chief Smith is a lifelong resident of the County. In his free time, you can find him working with family on his son's dairy farm.



Jim Hilleary became Director of Agricultural Development effective June 19, 2023. He most recently served as the Loudoun County Agriculture and Natural Resources (ANR) Extension Agent, where he was responsible for developing and producing education programs in collaboration with county government, economic-development staff, Virginia Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services staff, university faculty, and United States Department of Agriculture staff. Mr. Hilleary has eight years of experience as Director, Department of Extension Services, at Loudoun County Government, and 12 years of experience assisting beginning and diversifying farmers choosing sustainable enterprises.

Mr. Hilleary will be responsible for planning, developing and implementing programs and services to promote and enhance agricultural economic activities within Fauquier County. He is a small farm owner and producer in Fauquier County, raising beef cattle, goats, and poultry.

Mr. Hilleary retired from the United States Army having served as an enlisted infantryman and later a commissioned signal officer. He holds a Master of Military Art and Science from the United States Army Command & General Staff College, a Bachelor of Science degree in Education from Virginia Tech, a Master of Agriculture Extension Education from Colorado State University and an Associate of Science in Business Administration from Northern Virginia Community College. Mr. Hilleary's home of record has been Fauquier since 1977. After graduating from Virginia Tech, he joined the military where he spent the next 20 years serving our Country. Mr. Hilleary and his family moved back to Fauquier in 2002 upon his retirement from the Army. In his free time, he likes to read, spend time with family, and tend to his own family farm.



Mary Wyckoff assumed the role of Director of Human Resources for Fauquier County and Fauquier County Public School effective September 9, 2023. She served as the interim Director of Human Resources since May 15, 2023.

Ms. Wyckoff has served the County for the past 10 years with the most recent six years as Assistant Director of Human Resources. Prior to coming to Fauquier County, Mary worked for six years as the HR Culture Administrator for Colgan Air, Inc., a regional airline based in Manassas.

Mary holds a Master of Public Administration from George Mason University, a Graduate Certificate in Local Government Management from Virginia Tech, and a Bachelor of Science in Sports Management from West Virginia University. In addition, Mary is an International Public Management Association Certified Professional (IPMA-SCP), a graduate of the 2018 Leadership Fauquier Class, and a 2021 LEAD Program Graduate through the University of Virginia.

In her free time, Mary enjoys spending time with her husband and two children at sporting events and traveling. She is excited to serve the employees and community in this new capacity.

(ENDS)



COUNTY OF PATRICK

Board of Supervisors

September 11, 2023

PRESS RELEASE

For more information, contact:

Tim Hall
Interim County Administrator
(276) 732-4593
Beth Simms
(540) 238-7775

Patrick County Board of Supervisors Appoints New County Administrator

The Patrick County Board of Supervisors is pleased to announce the appointment of Ms. Beth Simms as its new County Administrator.

The Board announced the hiring at its meeting tonight after approving an employment agreement with Ms. Simms.

Ms. Simms is a native of Franklin County, Virginia and currently serves as its Director of Economic Development. She also has private sector experience in sales and as a small business owner and has taught in the public school system.

Ms. Simms will succeed Geri Hazelwood, who resigned from the position of County Administrator on March 1. Retired Henry County Administrator Tim Hall, an Executive Manager with the Berkley Group, has served as Interim County Administrator during the recruitment process for a new manager.

Board Chair Clayton Kendrick said, "We are pleased to have found someone with diverse experience and a familiarity with Patrick County to serve as our County Administrator. The Board was impressed with Beth's



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knowledge of local government, her experience in economic development and tourism, her enthusiasm for this new role, and her intention to continue to grow professionally to better serve the citizens of Patrick County. We look forward to working with Beth to build on the assets of the County and further improve its quality of life for all of its residents.”

The Board of Supervisors conducted a national search for the new County Administrator, assisted by The Berkley Group, of Bridgewater, Virginia. The Berkley Group received applications and conducted initial interviews with the most qualified candidates. It then assisted with selecting finalists for interviews with the Board.

Ms. Simms received a Bachelor’s degree from Ferrum College and has done post-graduate work in government, education, and accounting at Hollins University and the University of North Carolina/Greensboro. She is a graduate of the University of Oklahoma’s Economic Development Institute and the University of Virginia’s Local Government Equity Clinic.

Ms. Simms started her working career while still in college and was ultimately promoted to a management position in the restaurant industry. She served as a Social Studies teacher for two years in Henry County and was then the owner of a CrossFit business in Eden, N.C. Relocating to Rocky Mount, Virginia, where she currently resides, Ms. Simms worked in the beverage industry and became an active community volunteer. In 2020 she was appointed as the Cultural and Economic Development Director of the Town of Rocky Mount, responsible for business development, tourism, and the operations of the Harvester Performance Center. Ms. Simms became the Director of Economic Development for Franklin County in 2021.

Ms. Simms said “I am honored and excited to have this opportunity to continue my career in local government in a region that I and my family love. I look forward to moving to Patrick County and working with the Board of Supervisors to implement its vision for the community. I appreciate the confidence that the Board has shown in me, and I am anxious to get to work in service to the Board, the staff, and the citizens of Patrick County.”

Ms. Simms will assume her duties as Patrick County Administrator on October 12, 2023.

Christopher S. Lawrence Named Deputy County Administrator

Montgomery County, Va. – Christopher “Chris” S. Lawrence has been named Montgomery County’s Deputy County Administrator, effective October 16, 2023.

“While we had a very strong applicant pool for the Deputy County Administrator position, Chris definitely brings the leadership, experience and skills we were looking for in the role. He is an excellent addition to our leadership team and I look forward to working with him,” said Angie Hill, current Deputy County Administrator. Hill will assume the County Administrator role on November 1, 2023.

“His substantial experience in leadership roles in local government will help Montgomery County as we continue to address infrastructure needs and strategic planning throughout our community,” said Hill.

As Deputy County Administrator, Lawrence will assist the County Administrator with special projects and daily administration of Montgomery County. In addition, the position is responsible for leadership of assigned County department directors, as well as conducting fiscal, policy, management, operational, and organizational analysis for the County.

“As a Virginia Tech alum, this community is home for me and my family. This new role will allow me to continue to collaborate with local leaders, serve the citizens, and support and plan for the growth we are seeing throughout our region,” said Lawrence.

Prior to joining Montgomery County, Lawrence was the Deputy Town Manager for the Town of Blacksburg for the past seven years. Prior to joining Blacksburg, Lawrence served as Town Manager of Vinton, Va., from 2008 through 2016. Prior to his time at Vinton, he served in various roles at the Town of Blacksburg, including Assistant to the Town Manager; Senior Comprehensive Planner; and Development Administrator. Lawrence also serves as an adjunct instructor in the School of Public and International Affairs at Virginia Tech.

Lawrence is a member and credentialed manager of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA). He is also a member of the Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA) and the American Planning Association (APA).

Lawrence holds a master’s degree in public administration from Virginia Tech, as well as a bachelor’s degree in public and urban affairs from Virginia Tech. Lawrence attended the Senior Executive Institute at the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service at the University of Virginia. Lawrence lives in Blacksburg with his wife and three children who attend Montgomery County Public Schools and Virginia Tech.



Lancaster County, home to VACo President, hosts Region 2 Meeting



VACo staff traveled to the Northern Neck to conduct our seventh of eight regional meetings slated for 2023. VACo staff had the honor of traveling to Lancaster County, who graciously hosted the event, to meet with VACo Region 2 county leaders at the exciting Compass Entertainment Complex. VACo Region 2 encompasses the counties of Essex, Gloucester, James City County, King and Queen, King William, Lancaster, Mathews, Middlesex, Northumberland, Richmond, Westmoreland and York. These regional meetings allow us to hear directly from county staff and elected officials on the important issues facing localities across Virginia. They also help VACo staff craft the legislative program for the upcoming 2024 legislative session.

VACo President Jason Bellows opened the meeting by welcoming attendees to Lancaster County. Representatives from each county then outlined top issues or legislative priorities in their localities. Throughout the meeting, the region identified common areas of concern, which include education funding, transportation, and the cross section of the environment, rural affairs and economic development.

County leaders in VACo Region 2 agree that more resources need to be directed to localities to support school capital and broader education needs that are prevalent in the Region. Transportation and other infrastructure funding was cited in the discussion. Region 2 counties believe they are being left behind with current transportation and infrastructure funding programs and that this work will help with and support economic development in the Region. The cross section of the environment, rural affairs and economic development unfold in many ways as was outlined by the county leaders at the meeting.

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Many counties in the area depend on access to the Chesapeake Bay as an economic engine and urge the continuation of state support for flood mitigation and water quality projects. Agriculture and forestry are a major part of the economy in this Region and counties also encouraged support for farm and foreland preservation. On the same topic, counties agreed that we must look forward and invite investment in new generation farming technologies as well as embracing aquaculture and agritourism. This region of the Commonwealth is so unique and by protecting the environment, preserving farm and forestland while investing in new economic development strategies, counties in VACo Region 2 will continue to thrive and prosper.

After the discussion with county leaders, VACo was delighted to hear from several great speakers. Susan Cockrell, Town Manager of Kilmarnock, discussed the fantastic regional tourism initiative, [Virginia's River Realm](#). Tony McDowell, Executive Director of the Opioid Abatement Authority, shared important updates and information relating to the work of the Authority. VACo staff wants to first thank Lancaster County and the Compass Entertainment Complex staff for hosting us for a great meeting. We would like to give a special thanks to the county leaders and staff, VACo President Jason Bellows of Lancaster County, guest speakers, sponsors and others who attended and participated in the discussion.

VACo Contact: [James Hutzler](#)

Behavioral Health Commission Discusses Key System Metrics, Budget Investments, and School-Based Behavioral Health Pilot Programs



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Welcome to the BHC

The Behavioral Health Commission was established to improve Virginia's behavioral health services and system through research-based recommendations and oversight.

[Learn More](#)

Announcements

Virginia's Behavioral Health Commission

The Behavioral Health Commission (BHC) was established in 2021 as a new standing commission of the Virginia General Assembly to study and make recommendations for the improvement of behavioral health services and the behavioral health service system in the Commonwealth. The Commission is composed of 12 state legislators charged with encouraging the adoption of policies that will provide Virginians with access to a full continuum of high-quality and efficient behavioral health services. The BHC also provides ongoing oversight of behavioral health services and the behavioral health service system in the Commonwealth by monitoring and evaluating established programs, services, delivery and payment structures, and the implementation of new services and initiatives in the state. The Commission is charged with developing recommendations for improving such programs, services, structures, and implementation.

Behavioral Health Commission members took stock of several aspects of the state's behavioral health system at the Commission's September 19 meeting, including updates to a set of data points previously designated by the Commission as key indicators for the crisis system; a new dashboard developed by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to track progress toward the Department's goals; funding included in the recently-enacted state budget revisions; and the implementation of pilot school-based mental health programs in several school divisions.

Staff reported that 107 beds in the state hospital system have been reopened over the last year, with 104 remaining to be reopened to reach the state's full capacity of licensed beds. Six of the nine state hospitals are still operating at or above 100 percent capacity, and forensic patients continue to make up the majority of overall state facility patients, with particular concentrations in certain hospitals, notably Eastern State Hospital, where 95 percent of patients are forensic patients. The wait list for civil admissions has remained at 40 patients or fewer since the fall of 2022, but the average wait time as of

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the end of FY 2023 is 45 hours. Staff also presented information on loss of custody events (in which, for example, a patient is released because a TDO expires before a bed can be located), and incidents in which law enforcement drops a patient off at a state hospital outside of the formal process for admitting patients from the wait list.

Commission staff reported on the passage of several bills during the 2023 session that were introduced by Commission members, and Mike Tweedy, Senior Legislative Fiscal Analyst for the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee, briefed members on the behavioral health-related items in the budget revisions that were enacted earlier this month. Major spending items included \$58 million for crisis receiving centers and crisis stabilization units; \$30 million for permanent supportive housing; \$18 million in additional compensation for Community Services Board (CSB) staff; \$10 million for mobile crisis teams; \$7.5 million to expand school-based mental health pilot programs; and \$5.1 million to support overtime costs or additional funding for off-duty law enforcement officers maintaining custody or transporting individuals under temporary detention orders, among other provisions. Members involved in budget negotiations explained that several items introduced by Commission members (including a series of language amendments implementing recommendations from the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's December 2022 study of CSBs) enjoyed broad support but were not included due to the short timeframe for implementing legislative changes prior to the consideration of a new biennium budget.

DBHDS Commissioner Nelson Smith shared the agency's public dashboard, which tracks progress toward the goals contained in the agency's strategic plan. Goals include improving workforce recruitment and retention; increasing prevention, early intervention, and youth behavioral health services; and establishing a secure statewide data exchange for behavioral health and disability data. The Department's dashboard may be found at [this link](#).

DBHDS staffers Nina Marino and Bern'Nadette Knight provided an update on the implementation of school-based mental health services pilot projects that received funding in the 2022 Appropriation Act (as discussed above, an additional \$7.5 million was included in the budget revisions approved last week). Programs in Lunenburg County, Hanover County, Mecklenburg County, and the cities of Bristol, Hopewell, and Richmond received funding, which enabled partnerships with community-based providers (including CSBs) to provide services within the schools. DBHDS staff reported successes in delivering technical assistance to school divisions and providing services, although the full appropriation was not spent due to an accelerated timeline in establishing pilots in the first year and shortages of licensed personnel to be hired by providers. With the additional funding appropriated for FY 2024, the Department will be expanding the program to additional school divisions through an application process and will be expanding technical assistance to all school divisions.

The meeting slides are available at [this link](#). The Commission's next meeting is scheduled for October 17.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

JCOTS Receives Report on Best Practices for Addressing Ransomware



The Virginia Joint Commission on Technology and Science ([JCOTS](#)) met on September 20th to review several items, including a staff report on best practices for addressing ransomware. Though an ever-present threat, ransomware attacks on local governments have been increasing since at least 2019. Ransomware is a type of malicious software designed to block access to a computer system until a sum of money is paid to the attackers. When ransomware infiltrates a local government system, it can have devastating impacts such as occurred to the City of Baltimore in 2019. That attack was estimated to have cost the city \$18.2 million to restore systems and make up for lost or delayed revenue. Closer to home, a 2021 ransomware attack disrupted the Virginia Division of Legislative Services a month before the General Assembly was scheduled to meet for a legislative session.

Mindful of these threats, JCOTS directed commission staff to review and report on best practices for addressing ransomware. The Commission had asked staff in previous meetings to also examine the practicality and impact of recommending a ban for public entities on paying ransomware attackers to restore access to systems such as in place in North Carolina and Florida. VACo and several other local government stakeholders asked to be, and were included in, the study group examining this issue. Current federal [guidance](#) does not recommend paying ransoms and these payments may be in violation of Treasury Department Office of Foreign Assets Control [sanctions](#). However, a full ban on making payments ties the hands of public entities to respond quickly to attacks on mission critical assets such as healthcare systems or public utilities.

Commission staff reported that although the intent of banning payments of ransom is meant to discourage ransomware attacks, the evidence on whether this has been effective in reducing such attacks in North Carolina or Florida has been inconclusive. Staff reported that the workgroup recommended investing in frontline defenses that curtail ransomware attacks in the first place. VACo staff testified to the Commission expressing gratitude for being included in the study and urged the General Assembly to further invest in resources for local governments to bolster their own cybersecurity systems.

VACo Contact: [Jeremy R. Bennett](#)

Office of Children's Services Seeks Comment on Notices of Intent to Develop/Revise Policies



The State Executive Council approved the release of three Notices of Intent to Develop/Revise Policy at its September 14 meeting. This action is the first stage in the process and opens a period for public comment, which must be submitted by 5 p.m. on October 30. Comments may be submitted through the Public Policy Comment Form on the CSA website (www.csa.virginia.gov; the link for the Public Policy Comment Form is on the left of the screen under the “Applications” header), or via email to csa.office@csa.virginia.gov. Comment may also be provided via U.S. Mail to the Office of Children's Services, 1604 Santa Rosa Road, Suite 137, Richmond, VA 23229.

The notices of intent to develop policy pertain to proposed revisions and updates to three existing policies. These proposed revisions are part of an initiative to review SEC policies and align them with a standard policy format adopted in September 2022.

Should the State Executive Council decide to move forward with specific policy proposals, there will be an additional period for public comment.

The Notice of Intent to Develop/Revise Policy for Policy 2.4 (Public Participation in Policy-Making Actions) is available at [this link](#). The full text of the proposed revisions is available at [this link](#).

The Notice of Intent to Develop/Revise Policy for Policy 3.4 (Dispute Resolution Process) is available at [this link](#). The full text of the proposed revisions is available at [this link](#).

The Notice of Intent to Develop/Revise Policy for Policy 4.2 (Payment for Services and Change of Legal Residence) is available at [this link](#). The full text of the proposed revisions is available at [this link](#).

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

Joint Commission on Health Care Seeks Public Comment on Studies of Team-Based Care and Vertically Integrated Carriers and Providers



The Joint Commission on Health Care received briefings from its staff on two studies on September 20 and is seeking comments from the public. Comments must be submitted by close of business on Friday, October 6, and may be sent via email to jchcpubliccomments@jchc.virginia.gov or via U.S. Mail to 411 E. Franklin Street, Suite 505, Richmond, VA 23219.

Team-based care: This study directed staff to review evidence-based models of team-based care (the provision of health services by at least two professionals who work collaboratively with patients and caregivers to accomplish shared goals) and their effectiveness at improving outcomes; determine the extent to which team-based care is being used in Virginia and any obstacles to its implementation; and consider policy options for the state to promote effective models of team-based care. The study focused on the provision of primary care through teams and found that team-based care addresses social determinants of health and improves care for individuals with chronic conditions, such as depression, diabetes, or hypertension; care teams offer services such as preventive care, medication management, and behavioral health care. The study documented challenges limiting the use of team-based care,

including workforce shortages in key practice areas, such as nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and care coordinators; the need for additional administrative support for practices transitioning to team-based care; fee-for-service payment models that discourage team-based care; and limited reimbursements for integrated behavioral health and pharmacy services.

Among the policy options proposed for consideration are the following:

- Direct the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) to establish a reimbursement rate for Collaborative Care Model Services, which embed behavioral health providers into primary care, and for medication therapy management provided by pharmacists through telehealth.
- Direct the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to evaluate the value and impact of state-funded health care workforce scholarship and loan repayment programs.
- Provide support to primary care practices transitioning to team-based care through the Area Health Education Centers, which are managed by the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority.
- Direct DMAS to develop a plan to participate in the Medicaid health home program, which provides an enhanced federal match for team-based care for Medicaid beneficiaries with chronic conditions.

Staff's presentation on the study findings and policy options may be found at [this link](#) and the full draft report is available at [this link](#).

Vertically integrated carriers and providers: This study was directed to evaluate the scope of vertically-integrated carriers and providers in Virginia and nationwide and determine the effect of vertical integration on access to services, health care costs, and quality of care. The study focused on vertical integration (a joint ownership interest) between payers and acute care hospitals. This study did not include policy options, but public comments are being considered through the submission process detailed above.

Currently there are three vertically integrated systems in Virginia; in these systems, a hospital system fully or partially owns an insurance carrier. Staff found no harmful effects at this time on access to care in Virginia as a result of vertical integration, as vertically integrated carriers operate in markets where there is competition. The effect on costs is difficult to quantify; in theory, vertical integration could result in cost savings, but the report found that research is mixed on whether these cost savings are achieved or shared with plan members. Staff found that vertically integrated providers in Virginia had higher quality ratings from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services than other acute care hospitals, and that vertically integrated insurers spent more of their premium revenues on quality improvement, although their quality ratings did not differ significantly from those of other insurers. The staff briefing on this study is available at [this link](#) and the full report is available at [this link](#).

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

Emergency Management Virtual Workshop: The Essential Role of Local Elected and Appointed Officials Friday, October 20, 2023 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon

The coronavirus pandemic, catastrophic weather events, manmade disasters, and more have all posed significant threats to communities across the nation. In light of these and other events, The VCU L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs is spearheading an initiative to equip Virginia's elected and appointed officials at the local level with the necessary skills to effectively address the frequent and severe impacts of disasters.

The training and workshops will feature topics such as understanding the pivotal role of emergency managers, implementing measures to mitigate disaster impacts, collaborating with key partners, ensuring effective communication with the public and the press during emergencies, resource allocation, and more. By honing their expertise in emergency management, participants will assume a vital role in safeguarding lives, minimizing damages, and fostering resilient communities in the face of adversity.

Training and workshop opportunities will be held in person at the VCU Wilder School as well as virtually. The first virtual workshop will be held in conjunction with the Center for Homeland Defense and Security – Naval Postgraduate School, entitled, **“Emergency Management Workshop: The Essential Role of Local Elected and Appointed Officials.”** It will be held on Friday, October 20, 2023, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. This virtual training is free to all participants. You must pre-register at rampages.us/wildertraining to participate. For more information please contact Eric Campbell, Senior Practitioner in Residence within the VCU Wilder School's Master of Public Administration Program, at campbelle@vcu.edu or 804-828-3098.

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Weldon Cooper Center
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Local Government Equity Clinic: Applications Open

The Weldon Cooper Center shares that the Virginia Institute of Government is expanding its Local Government Equity Clinic nationwide this fall. The [Local Government Equity Clinic](#) is a collaboration between the Virginia Institute of Government and School of Data Science at the University of Virginia. The program leverages the expertise and resources of both organizations to further shared goals around data for the public good. The Clinic serves local government staff and leaders who are interested in better understanding and managing issues of equity and diversity in their workplaces and communities.

Ideal candidates who will get the most of this experience are local government practitioners:

- with an interest in equity who have not already had a significant amount of training in diversity, equity, and inclusion
- who want to leverage equity to better serve their communities and expand their personal/professional network of local government professionals similarly invested in building equitable communities
- who want to promote equity but do not yet have the competency or comfort level to operationalize equity in local government

This dynamic virtual program will run every other Friday from Sept. 29 to Dec. 15. Cost varies according to organizational size. More information and applications available at <https://vig.coopercenter.org/local-government-equity-clinic>.



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**Dean Lynch | Executive
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Guests

**Matt Hedley, CFP | Vice
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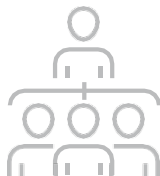
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Best Practices for Local Governments in the Allocation of Opioid Settlement Funding

Tony McDowell, Executive Director | Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority

Virginia has already received settlements worth more than \$500 million from prescription opioid manufacturers and distributors, and that number could double. Most of these funds will flow to Virginia's cities and counties for efforts to abate the opioid crisis. As Virginia's cities and counties develop local and regional plans for the use of these funds, some best practices are beginning to emerge.

The first of these is **establishing a local abatement committee** comprised of various stakeholders including prevention and treatment specialists, public health, behavioral health, law enforcement, and people with lived experience.

Some communities are holding **town hall style public meetings** or listening sessions so that local leaders can hear from residents who have been directly affected by the prescription opioid epidemic, as well as from service providers and community-based organizations. The OAA's Board of Directors has been following this approach, and has already conducted six public listening sessions around the state. The feedback from these sessions has been instrumental in informing the Board's strategy for allocating grants.

Local governments are encouraged to **engage with community partners**, especially those that have already been fighting the opioid epidemic for years. This certainly includes the local Community Services Board, but in addition there are many non-profits, grassroot organizations, treatment providers, and recovery support organizations that want to be involved. During its listening sessions the OAA Board has heard numerous examples of such organizations that have been barely surviving financially, working off of donations and volunteer effort. These organizations often know exactly how to reach the people who are sick and suffering, and have a track record of stretching dollars for maximum impact. The OAA is only able to provide funding to cities, counties and state agencies. This means the opioid settlement funds will not reach these non-government organizations unless there is a partnership with the local government.

The OAA is committed to providing assistance to cities and counties in developing their abatement plans. We offer **planning grants** and are in the process of launching a series of best-practice webinars and workshops. For more information please visit us at www.voaa.us.



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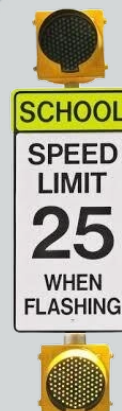


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