



POLICY AGENDA *for*
VULNERABLE CHILDREN
***and* FAMILIES**



Our nation is only as strong as our states. Our states are only as strong as our local communities. Our local communities are only as strong as our families.

In the midst of the wealth of Prince William and Fauquier Counties, we sometimes lose track of vulnerable children and families that live in our communities. In order to enjoy a more prosperous Virginia, we cannot leave behind any families or children. My four-year term on the Virginia State Board of Social Services gave me tremendous insight into how our state government helps those in need. If elected, I will work hard to ensure that our state protects the vulnerable and provides pathways to upward mobility and self-sufficiency for those living in poverty. Virginians deserve a state government that doesn't just manage poverty, but helps lift families out of it so they can thrive and succeed. Investing time and resources in vulnerable children and families isn't just the right thing to do, it's also fiscally wise. Breaking cycles of poverty and strengthening families can lead to generational change that will also save taxpayer money.

As a former foster and adoptive parent, I have great appreciation for child protective services and improving the lives of children in foster care. Virginia ranks among the [worst in the nation](#) (47th) for foster youth who age out of foster care without a permanent family situation. Children in foster care are vulnerable to falling prey to human trafficking – [about 60 percent of child sex trafficking victims](#) have a history in the child welfare system. Foster teens that emancipate, or 'age out', of the system are more likely to be abused, become pregnant, drop out of school, or be homeless [before the age of 21 years old](#).

D.J. Jordan





Foster Care Reform

- **Make It Easier to Foster** – While maintaining strong standards for safety through extensive background checks, Virginia should **make the process to become a foster parent less burdensome**, including streamlined training and reduced paperwork, both for social workers and potential foster parents.
- **Expand Kinship Care** – In Virginia, [six percent of foster children](#) are placed with a relative, much lower than the 32 percent nationwide average. When a child is placed with a relative through kinship care, their opportunities for success increase. Although kinship care is a key strategy in keeping kids out of foster care in the Commonwealth, Virginia has one of the weakest kinship care programs in the country. We must do better. In order to improve outcomes for children, **we should support kinship families** beyond our current resources.
- **Enact Safe Families Program** – Safe Families is a program allowing trained and equipped families to provide wrap-around support to vulnerable families and their children who are at risk of entering foster care. A “Safe Family” is the first go-to temporary foster home if foster placement is necessary while a biological parent battles opioid addiction, mental illness, or anything else to get back on their feet. The General Assembly expanded this program across the Commonwealth this year, which is the first step. Now, leaders and elected officials in our communities should use their influence to ensure this program is trauma-informed, and succeeds beyond the legislative approval process.



Anti-Human Trafficking

- Increase Penalties For Buyer – Virginia should crack down on human traffickers by **increasing penalties for sex buyers and traffickers**. The problem will improve when buyers face stiff penalties and demand decreases.
- Reduce Group Homes – Virginia should **increase efforts to transition foster and at-risk children** from group homes and institutional care into family settings, where they are much less vulnerable to traffickers.

Homelessness

- Closer Partnership With Charities – There is no easy fix to solving homelessness, as each situation is complicated and unique. Virginia has just [under 6,000 homeless persons](#). A variety of factors fuel homelessness, including drug addiction, mental illness, lack of education, domestic abuse, and access to affordable housing. When possible, Virginia should use federal assistance funding (like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, or TANF) for homeless intervention, mental health, and job training programs **led by local charities**. Local nonprofits that invest in direct long-term relational counseling often have better results than government programs micromanaged by politicians in Richmond and Washington DC.



Responsible Fatherhood

- A child without an engaged father is [four times more likely](#) to live in poverty. The Commonwealth of Virginia should prioritize funding for **responsible fatherhood** Social Services programming throughout the state, and in prison. This investment will pay for itself in decreased spending on family assistance welfare programs long-term.

Criminal Justice Reform

- Keeping Families Safe – The primary goals of any **criminal justice reform** must be to ensure strong public safety, reduce recidivism, and provide a fair justice process. Virginia’s criminal justice system should follow the reforms of the federal First Step Act by transitioning from a more punitive system to a more rehabilitative system for non-violent offenses.
- Prisoner Reentry Support – Roughly five million children, or seven percent of all U.S. children, have [had a parent in prison](#). Virginia should prioritize public-private partnerships and programs that help incarcerated parents maintain a relationship with their children and prepare for society – while in prison – and reenter society ready to work and provide for their families, including driver’s license preparation and job skills training.



- **Increase Felony Threshold – A life-long felony record can be a barrier to employment** or other opportunities, and can impact an entire family if a parent has the felony record. Virginia has one of the lowest felony larceny thresholds in the country at \$500. For example, by comparison, the state of Texas has a larceny [threshold of \\$2,500](#). Virginia should raise the threshold to \$1,000, while ensuring that those who commit this crime make full restitution to their victims as part of their rehabilitation.
- **Non-Violent Diversion Programs –** For non-violent offenses, Virginia should allow judges to avoid prison sentences and instead require participation in diversion programs and community service. The average cost of prison per inmate is [approximately \\$28,000](#); successful diversion programs for minor non-violent offenses would save taxpayer money and reduce recidivism.
- **Civil Asset Forfeiture Reform –** Virginia should **strengthen personal property rights** and ensure due process of law by prohibiting the government from taking property suspected to be in connection with a crime without a conviction of any kind.