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Date: 04/01/2022 02:56 PM
Subject: Fwd: Governor Youngkin Announces Safe and Sound Task Force to End Practice of Kids Sleeping in Local Government Offices

See below,

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From: "Reiner, Scott" <scott.reiner@csa.virginia.gov>
To: Scott Reiner <scott.reiner@csa.virginia.gov>
Date: Fri, 1 Apr 2022 14:30:37 -0400
Subject: Fwd: Governor Youngkin Announces Safe and Sound Task Force to End Practice of Kids Sleeping in Local Government Offices

FYI. I am a participant in this Task Force and will reach out for input as appropriate.

Scott

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----- Forwarded message -----

From: Press, Governor Youngkin <press@governor.virginia.gov>

Date: Fri, Apr 1, 2022 at 12:20 PM

Subject: Governor Youngkin Announces Safe and Sound Task Force to End Practice of Kids Sleeping in Local Government Offices

To: <scott.reiner@csa.virginia.gov>



Commonwealth of Virginia
Office of Governor Glenn Youngkin

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 1, 2022

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Governor Youngkin Announces Safe and Sound Task Force to End Practice of Kids Sleeping in Local Government Offices

RICHMOND, VA – Governor Youngkin announced today that he has launched an initiative aimed at creating safe housing placements for children in foster care. As today marks the start of Child Abuse Prevention month, the "Safe and Sound Task Force" will bring together government agencies, the Virginia League of Social Services Executives and other community partners to end the practice of children sleeping in local departments of social services, hotels and emergency rooms.

"It is unacceptable that last year over 150 children in foster care spent the night in places that just simply are not meant for kids. When this challenge came to our attention, my administration knew we had to act swiftly to ensure that every child has a safe place to belong," **stated Governor Youngkin.** "Beyond the immediate need, we hope Virginians from all walks of life will step up to help children in foster care."

Over a six-month period in 2021 (February 1-July 30, 2021), 163 children were displaced for at least one night in unsuitable sleeping arrangements. This phenomenon occurs because of a dire shortage of foster homes, kinship family placements, and beds in group homes and residential treatment centers.

These youth ranged in age from 7-17 years. Social workers or law enforcement personnel stay overnight with children who are displaced, creating an undue burden on already overworked staff. This greatly exacerbates the existing workforce shortages in the child welfare and criminal justice systems.

Janet Kelly will serve as the Special Advisor for Children's Issues and convene state and local government agencies, residential facilities and hospitals, and community partners to collaboratively seek immediate solutions to this crisis. The Task Force objectives include finding safe placements for kids who are currently displaced, ensuring a reservoir of safe placements for kids who may need them in the future, and eventually making recommendations that go upstream to address policy and systemic changes.

The Virginia Department of Social Services and the Virginia League of Social Services Executives raised this ongoing issue in July 2021, and since then Eric Reynolds, the Director of the Office of the Children's Ombudsman, and several state agencies have worked to identify some of the root causes.

"While there are a number of issues that created this untenable situation, it will require collaboration and creativity at both the local and state levels to solve it. We are grateful to every child welfare worker who has worked to the best of their ability to ensure these kids are safe and we look forward to working together with them to end this

practice," **stated Secretary of Health and Human Resources John Littel.** "I appreciate how swiftly Governor Youngkin reacted to this information and for providing the leadership necessary to end this practice."

"The current situation involves children in foster care who are often inappropriately placed in emergency departments and other non-licensed settings without mental health treatment or qualified professional support," **said Andrew Crawford, The Virginia League of Social Services Executives (VLSSE) President and Director, Bedford County Department of Social Services.** "The Virginia League of Social Services Executives is committed to addressing the continuing crisis associated with placement of children in foster care with behavioral and mental health needs. Local Departments of Social Services look forward to collaborating with the Governor, our state partners and our private sector professionals to find solutions for Virginia's most vulnerable children."

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