



The Honorable Robert F. McDonnell
Office of the Governor
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

June 14, 2011

Dear Gov. McDonnell:

Your history of public service to the Commonwealth has included a number of significant contributions in the area of mental health, including legislation you sponsored as a delegate, an opinion rendered as Attorney General, and investments in the adult system championed by your administration this past legislative session.

The children's mental health system in Virginia needs your leadership now more than ever. As you and your administration prepare your budget for the upcoming biennium, we hope that you will consider the voices of Virginia's 100,000 children who suffer from serious mental health disorders.

We at Voices for Virginia's Children – a nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy group – are recommending a common-sense, three-step plan:

1. **Invest** in children's mental health so that all young Virginians can get four basic mental health treatment services in their own communities: psychiatric services, case management, crisis response services and in-home services. Local crisis services for kids go a long way toward preventing costly hospitalizations and residential treatment stays.
2. **Develop** a comprehensive plan for our child mental health system that includes all Virginia kids who receive services through the public sector. Our fragmented system is confusing to families and costly to taxpayers.
3. **Listen** to children and families. All professionals working with children need to recognize that patients and their families need to be an integral part of the treatment team. Our state must put in place strategies that acknowledge that kids and families are experts on their own treatment needs.

We have attached a recent report that we released, using data from state agencies, which outlines the fragmented system that leads to unacceptably long waiting times for basic services and even to children ending up in the juvenile justice system for lack of mental health treatment.

Implementing this plan will take the leadership of your administration and your colleagues in the General Assembly, the cooperation of public and private providers, and the input of families and advocates. In less than a week, more than 1,200 Virginia residents have signed our petition in support of this three-step plan. We at Voices stand ready to assist.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

John R. Morgan, PhD
Executive Director
Voices for Virginia's Children

Margaret Nimmo Crowe
Senior Policy Analyst, Voices for Virginia's Children
Coordinator, Campaign for Children's Mental Health

Cc: Martin Kent, Chief of Staff