

From Washington Post's Roz Helderman Blog on Virginia Politics

New coalition has AG's support for mental health reforms



A new coalition of advocates for children in Virginia [has launched a campaign](#) urging reform of mental health treatment for kids in the Commonwealth.

The group cites research showing 1 in 5 of Virginia's children have mental health needs but only 1 in 5 gets the treatment he or she needs. The coalition, which has partnered with 16 different state organizations from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry to the Virginia Poverty Law Center, is calling for reform of a fragmented system that results in care of varying quality across localities. They note that at the state level, responsibility for public children's mental health is divided among three cabinet secretaries and four agencies.

In the immediate term, the group also wants to ensure that mental health services for kids don't face cuts in these difficult budget times. The anticipated shortfall in the state budget and revenues that continue to fall make this a tough time to launching a new initiative on just about any topic in Virginia, but particularly in the public health arena.

But the new coalition has some powerful friends. Leaders note that Gov.-elect Bob McDonnell endorsed reforming the system during his recently concluded campaign.

And the group released a letter today from Attorney Gen. Bill Mims, a close ally of McDonnell, expressing his support.

"It is not acceptable that only one in five children receive the mental health services they need," he writes, indicating that if not for an out-of-town obligation, he would have attended the group's Richmond press conference today. "For the most part we know what needs to be done--numerous studies have illuminated the path. Our challenge today is to develop the strategies, muster the will, and dedicate the funding to ensure that more children are able to obtain needed services."

By Rosalind Helderman | December 1, 2009; 12:05 PM ET
