

## Advocates seek funding for children's mental health services

By Julian Walker

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A coalition of mental health groups are asking Gov. Bob McDonnell and the legislature to take action to provide access to treatment for the estimated 100,000 youths with serious emotional needs.

Namely, they want a \$20 million investment from the state to expand community-based care options to "assure a consistent base level of services for children and families statewide."

"We are issuing this agenda because government officials are beginning the conversation about budget priorities and we want to give Virginia's children with mental illness a voice in the discussion," said Margaret Nimmo Crowe of Voices for Virginia's Children, one of the organizations making the request.

"This is a road map to help lawmakers and administrators repair our fragmented children's mental health system and ensure that the one in five children with a mental health disorder can get the treatment they need to recover," she added.

Asked about the agenda, deputy health and human resources secretary Keith Hare said Virginia has many pressing needs, including those related to children's mental health, and will work with advocates to address them.

And another administration official noted that McDonnell, as a legislator, sponsored measures to restructure and move Virginia's behavioral health system to a community-based model of care.

The request from the Campaign for Children's Mental Health comes on the heels of reports of alleged abuse at the Pines Residential Treatment Center, which has facilities in Norfolk and Portsmouth, that provides treatment to youths with mental, emotional and behavioral problems.