

2026 Early Childhood Policy Agenda for Southeastern Virginia



The early years of a child's life are crucial, laying the foundation for their future development, mental health, and overall well-being. The role of families and communities in providing access to quality healthcare, education, and stable, supportive environments is essential for ensuring lifelong success.

Investing in high-quality childcare not only nurtures our youngest generations but also empowers parents to engage fully in the workforce, enhancing economic stability in our region.

Minus 9 to 5, Virginia Health Sciences at Old Dominion University serves as the Ready Region Southeastern lead agency and is responsible for on-the-ground coordination and integration of essential early childhood care and education (ECCE) services and resources. With 150 multi sector partners committing to improving children's learning, health, and well-being, Minus 9 to 5 is leading the way in Southeastern Virginia by identifying policy priorities for regional investment and advocacy. These investments represent some of the most impactful choices we can make for the future of our community, fostering both individual growth and regional prosperity.



In 2024 & 2025, Virginia law makers demonstrated strong support for young children and their families, through historic investments in early care and education and supports for families.

BUT THERE IS STILL WORK TO BE DONE TO PROMOTE HEALTHY CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC PROSPERITY IN SOUTHEASTERN VIRGINIA



LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 2026 GENERAL ASSEMBLY:



Increase Child Care Subsidy Program funding to reduce waitlists and expand service to 50% of eligible children.



Establish a process in law that would provide policymakers with accurate, predictable, and transparent information on the level of funding needed for Virginia's child care system.

HB1208 (Sewell)
SB134 (Locke)



Incentivize private sector innovations that increase the overall supply and availability of child care services, for ex. Employee Child Care Assistance Program.

HB18 (McClure)
SB3 (Aird)



Collectively, we advocate for:

MATERNAL/CHILD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

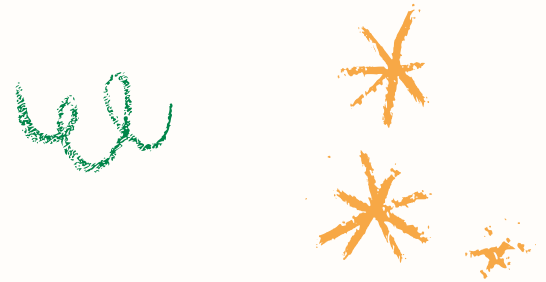
- Stabilize funding, increase awareness, and enhance local coordination for **maternal/child home visiting services** while leveraging Medicaid funding to expand the capacity of all evidence-informed models.
- Support capacity building for **bi-annual Medicaid eligibility** verification.
- Increase universal prenatal, at-birth, postpartum, and early childhood **screenings** to address barriers to optimal health and well-being for children and their caregivers.
- Ensure access to primary care services for children, inclusive of **timely pediatric well care visits and immunizations**, in alignment with the American Academy of Pediatrics' evidence-based immunization schedule.
- Expand statewide the **Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation Model** to support early childhood educators, including promotion of Medicaid reimbursement for infant and early childhood mental health services.

The percentage of kindergartners in Virginia with vaccine exemptions (both medical and non-medical reasons) quadrupled in the past 10 years. (CDC data).



STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE CHILD CARE SYSTEMS

- Prioritize solutions to address the **child care workforce** crisis including increased competitive child care provider wages and benefits that retain quality talent and keep classrooms open.
- **Increase payment rates** for publicly funded child care to reflect the full cost of quality care.
- Improve child care access and streamline administrative processes for **military service members**.



STABLE AND FINANCIALLY SECURE FAMILIES

- Prioritize **affordability** of basic needs for families.
- Protect and fill federal funding gaps for **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid benefits**.
- Establish a state-level refundable **Child Tax Credit** and increase the refundability of Virginia's **Earned Income Tax Credit**.
- Support **paid family medical leave** and **paid sick days** for all workers in Virginia.
- Support a **Phased Reduction Model** so that families do not experience a total loss in benefits as a result of an increase in family income.

Learn more at:

Minus9to5.org



MACON & JOAN BROCK VIRGINIA HEALTH SCIENCES
Minus 9 to 5
AT OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY



Visit our Policy & Advocacy LinkTree site to learn more about the various initiatives and policy highlighted here on our 2026 Policy Agenda.

<https://linktr.ee/PASoutheasternVA2026>

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