



# Advocating for a Comprehensive Early Childhood Mental Health System in Virginia

Ashley Everette, Health Policy Analyst  
Voices for Virginia's Children  
November 26, 2018

# Voices for Virginia's Children

- **We champion public policies that improve the lives of VA's children**, especially in areas of:
  - Child welfare and foster care
  - Mental health and health
  - Early care and education
  - Family economic success
  - Childhood trauma and resilience
- Privately funded, nonprofit, nonpartisan
- Data and research on children's well-being:  
KIDS COUNT

# The Role of Voices for Virginia's Children

- Neutral convener- no public funds
- Recognize the continuum-- prenatal through adulthood-- and the comprehensive nature of early childhood
- Develop a unified voice and help shape message
- Build awareness through electoral advocacy



# How did we get started?

- Policy analyst with academic and professional background in early childhood mental health
- Voices long history of leading coalitions and developing unified policy agendas:
  - Campaign for Children's Mental Health
  - Early childhood unified policy agenda
  - CHIP Reauthorization

# How did we get started?

- Collaboration with Virginia Early Childhood Mental Health Coordinator: Bonnie Grifa
- Since 2011, Virginia has taken steps to build an early childhood mental health system
  - Established the Infant Mental Health Endorsement System in Virginia
  - Established Early Childhood Mental Health Virginia Advisory Board
  - Annual Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Institute

**\*But key players (Medicaid & Behavioral Health) were frequently missing from the table**

# Policy Opportunities that have helped move the needle

- NCCP's 50-state survey
- Zero to Three IECMH Financing Policy Project: Cohort 1 2016-2017
  - Allowed us to build a cross-agency state leadership team
  - Provided an opportunity for agency leaders to learn about ECMH concepts, best practices, barriers to services
  - Obtained data specific to mental health services and children 0-5 for the first time
  - Mapped out Medicaid reimbursable services available to young children in Virginia

# Identifying Medicaid Levers and Navigating Political Opportunities

- Medallion 4.0 carves in early intervention (Part C) services and community-based mental health services
  - ECMH language included in MCO RFP and model contract
- Behavioral health transformation of Medicaid services: redesigned continuum of services starting at the “beginning of life”
  - “early intervention” should include early childhood mental health/parent-child therapy
  - integration of primary and behavioral health services

# Navigating Political Challenges and Opportunities

- One term Governor: creates challenges and opportunities for advocates
- Priorities change with each new administration, requiring advocates to be nimble, patient and creative
- Building relationships with the Administration and Medicaid staff is key to change
- Know your audience: adjust your communication depending on the audience.





## Questions?

Ashley Everette, Policy Analyst, [ashley@vakids.org](mailto:ashley@vakids.org)  
804-649-0184