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Remarks to the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health and  
Human Resources  
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I'm Woodrow Harris, member of the Emporia city council and one of the local government members of the State Executive Council for At-Risk Youth. I'm also a past president of the Virginia Municipal League. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today.

- **Working for Children**

The Governor, General Assembly and local governments are united in the desire to improve the delivery of services to at risk children in Virginia and to contain the costs of providing those services. I hasten to point out that for every dollar spent in state funds to this end, \$.56 is spent in local dollars. Local governments have as much to gain as the state in controlling costs while delivering these services. And of course, as we're all aware state dollars and local dollars are all coming out of the same taxpayers' wallets.

We applaud the efforts of the Hanger Commission, the State Executive Council, the Governor, and the General Assembly, who are working to refine the state and local partnership that is CSA.

- **Positive changes**

A number of the proposals on the budget table make positive changes to this process. There is no disagreement that a child placed in an appropriate foster home is better off than in a more formal residential placement. No foster family takes in a child simply to get a monthly check. The introduced budget's proposed increase in funding for foster and adoptive family payments, which we have seen in past years from Senators Reynolds and Edwards, with the support of their local governments, would lessen the need for some residential placements and is a positive step.

Similarly, funding in the Governor's introduced budget to increase foster family recruitment and support would improve this option. Continuation of the mental health initiative funding for non mandated children originated by the Senate Finance Committee in 2000 provides early intervention efforts to prevent cases from worsening to a point where more costly interventions are needed. Maintaining competitive grants from the Office of Comprehensive Services to communities would also allow some communities to develop and implement community based services for children already in residential placements or at risk of entering them.

- **Lost Time**

All of these efforts would be farther along had it not been for the need to address the issue of state policies and local practices regarding custody relinquishment over the last year and a half. While this work had to be done, it took the focus off of promotion of

best practice models, creation of new community alternatives, and training of local CSA operations on how to better do what is now the central focus of CSA and much of the legislation proposed: Meeting the needs of our children in a more cost effective manner.

- **Partnership?**

Earlier, I referred to CSA as a partnership between the state and the localities. The state provides sizeable and significant funding for the services provided in this program. On the other hand, matching funds for services, along with oversight, monitoring, placement and administration of these services and development and implementation of new services are largely functions of the localities and private providers. Administrative funding from the state for CSA has not increased in more than 7 years. JLARC found in its recent CSA study that increasing administrative funding, such as proposed in Senator Norment's budget amendment, would enable more communities to employ a local coordinator without relying solely on local funding. The same study found the presence of a coordinator leads to lower CSA costs per child.

- **A Better Way**

While the change of the state reimbursement percentage for residential services proposed in the budget would save state dollars by shifting those costs to the localities, local government prefers an approach that would actually reduce the total costs of the program while offering positive outcomes to our children. This cannot realistically happen in the time frame proposed in the introduced budget. Viable alternatives simply do not exist in many rural parts of Virginia. While the private provider network in our state has proven time after time their ability to provide appropriate services and placements, this doesn't happen in low volume environments and it doesn't change overnight. To provide services in the community, localities need state investment and technical assistance, and time to develop plans to get players put into place. For that reason we hope you will consider the budget amendment introduced by Senator Houck that is before you to allow for a planned movement to a revised state and local cost split... AFTER time for planning how to better make that transition. This amendment also acknowledges that in some cases under CSA, localities (and the state for that matter) have no control over placements dictated by IEP's developed under federal rules, or those directed by courts. Neither do we have any true experience in responding to the recent changes for children placed in the mandatory CSA population under the custody relinquishment guidelines approved late last year.

- **Summary**

After careful planning and preparation, and with adequate funding for administrative structure, the proposals suggested in the budget could likely be carried out effectively. While we realize the state budget is under considerable stress, we hope you realize that local budgets share that stress. As a councilman from a city which has been in the top 5 on Virginia's most fiscally stressed localities all of my political life, I understand that dollars are scarce and priorities have to be put into place. The request from local government, respectfully put before you, is that you allow for this to be done right for our

children and our taxpayers and not from a more short term perspective, just for the sake of this biennium's budget.

Thank you again for the opportunity to speak before you this afternoon. If you wish, I'd be pleased to attempt to respond to any questions.