

**Statement of Sarah C. Snead
Deputy County Administrator for Human Services, Chesterfield County
to the Senate Finance Health and Human Resources Subcommittee on
CSA - Special education wrap-around services
January 30, 2012**

Good afternoon. I am Sarah Snead, deputy county administrator for human services in Chesterfield County. I am here speaking on behalf of the Virginia Association of Counties, the Virginia Municipal League, the Virginia League of Social Services Executives, and the Virginia Association of Local Human Services Officials.

I am here to talk to you about the wrap-around services mandate within the Comprehensive Services Act for At-Risk Youth and Families program, known simply as the CSA program, and why local governments and their local agencies support the continuation of this mandate and its funding. These wrap-around services are for special education students, but they are not part of any IEP and are not programs under special education.

You heard me correctly – I am speaking favorably of a mandate. The wrap-around services mandate has been carried out with state and local funding since 1997. It is a mandate that gives localities access to CSA funds to help children with disabilities who are in special education, and their families. These disabilities could include autism spectrum disorders, or significant cognitive or developmental issues. This mandate pays for vital services and supports outside of the classroom and the school. The services focus on issues that threaten the child's ability to stay in the home, community, and school setting. These services include intensive in-home counseling, parent support and coaching, therapeutic after-school programs, respite services, and vocational support.

Wrap-around services may be used for a student who is placed in a public school setting, a private day school, or being transitioned back to the community from a more restrictive educational residential program or from a juvenile correction center.

Here is an example of how my community has used special education wrap-around services. We had a family whose 12-year old intellectually disabled son was in a special education private day school and lived at home. The family did not qualify for Medicaid. Their son would leave the house at any hour of the day or night to wander the neighborhood. Through the use of wrap-around funds, we were able to help the family place their child in a therapeutic after-school program to keep him safe and to help address his behavior issues. We also were able to provide intensive home counseling and parent coaching to help the family learn to effectively deal with the child's behavioral issues. It worked. The boy's behavior was modified so that he no longer strays, and the family did not have to resort to more drastic measures, such as a residential placement, to help their son.

Here is the problem we now face. The Governor's introduced budget for the new biennium reduces funding for CSA by more than \$20 million due to anticipated changes in CSA caseloads and expenses. On top of that reduction is an additional cut of \$12.2 million

that covers wrap-around services for special education students. This particular reduction was done as a purely cost-savings strategy, not because the wrap-around program was deemed ineffective or unnecessary.

The \$12.2 million reduction for wrap-around services was replaced with a fraction of funds, \$700,000 a year, which would be placed in a separate pool that some localities do not use because of the inordinate amount of red-tape and complexity involved with it.

To put the proposed reduction into perspective, last year local governments spent \$8.2 million on wrap-around services for special education students. The City of Hampton alone, which is known for its best-practices in the creation and use of cost-effective, community-based services, spent \$862,000 on these services for children in its community. My own county spent \$104,083. As you can see, \$700,000 would not last long.

We support the budget amendments introduced by Senator Hanger (Items 283 #4s and 283 #5s) as well as Senator Colgan (Item 283 #3s) that would halt the proposed suspension of the special education wrap-around program and restore the funding so that localities may continue to serve children and families in the community and prevent more costly and restrictive placements.

For the each of the last three fiscal years, CSA program expenditures have been decreasing, not increasing. This decrease came about because of a sustained effort and partnership by the state and local governments to focus more diligently on community-based services that keep more children in the community and bring more children home from residential placements. This focus on community-based services, which includes special education wrap-around services, is helping children, families, communities, and the state's bottom line.

Just as overall CSA costs have been decreasing, wrap-around service costs have been decreasing as well. From Fiscal Year 2009 to Fiscal Year 2011, expenditures in this category dropped by \$7.4 million. This is due to tightened standards from the state and a focus on training and guidance regarding the appropriate use of these funds.

Although expenditures have declined, there is still a very real need for funding for wrap-around services. We would like to see the \$12.2 million restored to the budget, and the mandate for wrap-around services continued, because we believe that Ben Franklin was right – an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Or in this case, \$59 is better than \$117. That is, the average per diem cost for wrap-around services is \$59. The average per diem cost for a private special education placement is \$117. If you remove the access to more cost-effective wrap-around services, you will likely see more dependence on the more expensive placements.

Working together, the state and localities have experienced a significant decrease in the number of children placed in foster care, as well as the number of children sent to placements outside of their homes and community schools. We have been given the support and flexibility from the state to address issues early on before a crisis ensues. Together we

have seen how this benefits everyone – children, families, communities, and the taxpayers. By catching and addressing issues early and applying the most appropriate, least restrictive, and least intensive community-based services, more children stay in their homes with their families, and in their community schools. For example, in my community, our schools have not made any new special education residential placements in more than two years.

What would happen to the children and families currently getting services paid for under the wrap-around mandate? Given the continued decline in local government revenues, it is unlikely local governments would be able to pick up the cost of services. As such, some services and supports would vanish. This would create greater risk for a crisis for these children and their families, and the possibility that more children would be placed in more restrictive private-day or residential placements or would not return home from such placements. We do not think this would be a good alternative for the children, their families, or taxpayers. Ben Franklin wouldn't agree with it, either.

I hope you will seriously consider restoring the special education wrap-around services funding for the coming biennium, and direct the State Executive Council for CSA to not suspend this mandate that helps children, families, communities, and the state.

Thank you for your time and attention.