

**VACSB REMARKS
NEWS CONFERENCE RE: MENTAL HEALTH FUNDING**

Contact: Jennifer Faison, Executive Director
Email: vacsb@vacsb.org
Website: www.vacsb.org
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Good morning. My name is Jennifer Faison and I am the Executive Director of the Virginia Association of Community Services Boards. I am here today on behalf of Virginia's 40 Community Services Boards which are the publicly funded organizations that make up the safety net for behavioral health and developmental disability services. I am in very fine company this morning with the wide variety of stakeholder partners gathered, all in support of the same goals.

The VACSB asks policymakers, including the Governor and the General Assembly, to put **ALL OF US FIRST**. What I mean by that is I am asking to put the entire public system first, which includes the CSBs as well as the state hospitals. This also means putting the needs of the individuals served in this system first.

Putting all of us first means that for every dollar the Governor and the General Assembly decides to invest in the state hospitals, an equal investment needs to be made in community-based care. We cannot continue with our cognitive bias toward zero-sum thinking where what one side of the system gains comes at the expense of the other side of the system. Mutual gain should be the goal if we want to benefit the individuals we serve.

We understand the pressures created by a lack of staff at state hospitals and we understand the risks associated with operating in that environment, many CSBs operate 24/7 residential programs serving individuals with significant behavioral health challenges just like our state hospitals do; however, closing state hospitals to admissions simply shifts those risks from the hospitals to the community, it does not solve the underlying problems.

We are in a position in Virginia where we have to sustain and keep safe the system that we have at the same time we are investing to build the system that we all want. It will be expensive, but people with behavioral health and developmental disability service needs deserve no less than our very best effort.

There is an unprecedented opportunity with the billions of dollars in federal funding that are coming to Virginia to assist the community with its significant workforce challenges using a similar strategy of investments as those currently being contemplated to assist state facilities with their workforce shortages. This includes recruitment and retention bonuses, scholarships and student loan repayment, among other things. Our private provider partners need support as well, but we are here to draw focus to the public safety net system.

Our full [proposal for the use of ARPA funds](#) is available on the VACSB website but we cannot stop there. **Our system is also in need of ONGOING and SUSTAINED investments using state general funds in order to fully realize the statewide goals that have been identified and begin to move to a system that works well for the people of Virginia and truly puts ALL OF US FIRST.**