

February 2, 2011

Governor Bob McDonnell
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Governor McDonnell:

As the President and CEO of Volunteers of America Chesapeake, an organization 114-years strong that provides high-quality services to individuals with intellectual disabilities, I am writing to ask that you please reconsider employment supports for Virginians with disabilities and to thank you for your proposed funding of Intellectual Disability Waivers and Family Development Disability Support (IFDDS) in the current state budget.

In Virginia, Volunteers of America Chesapeake currently cares for nearly 50 individuals through our Northern Virginia Community Living Centers – a collection of seven group homes providing support to 35 adults with intellectual disabilities, many with co-occurring or dual diagnosis disorders – and Baker House; a supportive housing program in Virginia Beach serving 12. Through following national best practices, our goal is to ensure that anyone being served in our program reaches for their absolute highest potential in all areas of their life.

We believe each individual – no matter their age, race, disability or life skills status deserves to live their life free of discrimination – and that includes in the workforce. Yet, currently, where are Virginians with disabilities in your “Opportunity at Work” budget?

Instead Long Term Employment Support Services (LTESS) funds are being cut by \$498,720 – another to add to the \$1.682M in cuts since FY2008. That is a total of \$2.331M in unacceptable cuts. Yet according to research, such as a 10-year-study in October 2010 by University of Richmond economist David Dean, Virginians with disabilities are a great investment – every \$1 invested in LTESS returns \$3.50 in earned wages. During this time of economic downturn as questions are raised regarding cuts – wouldn’t the best answer be the one with the profitable return on investment?

The financial realities make this investment not only critical – but vital to Virginia’s economic success. Funding for programs to aid individuals with disabilities needs to be readdressed.

However we want to thank you for your proposed improvements to community-based services to add 275 new Intellectual Disability Waivers to aid individuals on the waiting list and in state institutions. A total of 1,100 new ID Waivers are required annually to meet the Commonwealth’s stated goal of eliminating the ID/IFDDS Waiver waiting lists by the 1018-2020 biennium (§ 32.1-323.2.). We also ask for your support to fund an additional 900 Intellectual Disability Waivers and 275 new Individual and Family Developmental Disability Support (IFDDS) Waivers to aid individuals/families on the IFDDS Waiver waiting list. This 25% reduction of the IFDDS



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Waiver waiting list is directly proportional to the ID Waiver waiting list reduction proposed for the 2010-2012 budget.

We encourage you to read Hattie's story from our Annual Report to see how our impact is helping make the lives better for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Thank you in advance for supporting the important legislative and budget issues outlined in this letter. Should you have any questions, please contact me at the phone number or e-mail below.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Russell Snyder".

Russell K. Snyder, President/CEO
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Happiness Happens for Hattie!

Thirty-six-year-old Hattie is full of hope. Seven years ago she decided to move past a rough childhood that left her with severed family ties. Instead of giving in to troubling circumstances she decided to take control of her own future and make positive life changes. Her first step: moving into one of Volunteers of America Chesapeake's Northern Virginia Community Living Centers group homes.

Living in the group home gave Hattie the confidence she needed to become self-reliant. She was able to get a job at a local thrift store and has kept it for nearly eight years. "My favorite part is when I get to accept donations in the back room and give customers a receipt," she said. "It's a big responsibility."

Volunteers of America Chesapeake Program Director Vanessa Hill said Hattie embraces responsibility not only at work but at home. She is a role model for other women in the program and watches out for her roommates. "I cook the meanest spaghetti on earth," Hattie explained, "Everyone has second and third helpings!"

But Hattie's talents reach beyond the kitchen and the thrift store. Several years ago she was invited to be on the board for the local Human Rights Committee in Manassas, VA. "I'm a team member and an individual advocate," Hattie said, "I review restrictive behavioral support plans and speak up on behalf of people who can't."

Volunteers of America Chesapeake's programs helped provide Hattie with the hope that not only empowers her today but also inspires her to look toward the future Hill says Hattie's greatest success is her happiness and enjoyment of life. "It is very rewarding to see Hattie benefit from the Volunteers of America Chesapeake programs," Ms. Hill said. "I think she has made a drastic change. Her life is happier...and she enjoys life now."

"Over the past year we have had the opportunity to hear the voices of the individuals we support through their stories about how they feel about their life now and in the past. We have heard the applause from families who have been able to thank us for the work we are doing."

- Belinda Tiller, Volunteers of America Chesapeake Vice President, Intellectual Disabilities Services



Intellectual Disability Services Locations

Baker House – Virginia Beach, VA

District of Columbia Community Living Centers – Washington, D.C.

Northern Virginia Community Living Centers –

Arlington, VA

Falls Church, VA

Manassas, VA

Woodbridge, VA

Intellectual Disability Services

Program Highlights

- Volunteers of America Chesapeake operates 7 homes in Northern Virginia, 4 homes in D.C. and a 12-person facility in Virginia Beach; providing homes for 57 intellectually disabled people in all. Currently Volunteers of America Chesapeake is working to open a home in D.C. for individuals who are medically fragile.
- Residents participate in life skills training and human growth and development classes geared toward individual skill levels and development potential.
- Many residents are employed and work full-time jobs.
- Volunteers of America Chesapeake is moving to a person-centered approach of services and supports, where individuals have a choice and voice in their lives.

To help Hattie and other families please visit www.voaches.org/donate

2009 Annual Report
* Excerpt from Volunteers of America Chesapeake's 2009 Annual Report

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