



PRESS RELEASE

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Virginia Promise in Action Announces 2023 Child Care Champions of the Year

RICHMOND – Virginia Promise in Action (VPiA) today named a bipartisan group of six Virginia legislators—Senator George Barker, Senator Mamie Locke, Senator Frank Ruff, Delegate Terry Austin, Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker, and Delegate Terry Kilgore—as 2023 Child Care Champions of the Year.

Child care plays a vital role in the well-being of our families, communities, and economy. Regrettably, families across Virginia struggle to find affordable child care options that fit their needs while child care providers face a business with challenging cost structures. Because of these widespread child care challenges, Virginia’s businesses struggle to hire and retain employees, resulting in lost earnings, productivity, and revenue. The award honors legislators who recognize the importance of addressing this issue and show an exceptional commitment to strengthening and expanding access to Virginia’s early education and care system.

“We are excited to announce our six 2023 Child Care Champions of the Year and recognize them for their outstanding work to expand access to quality, affordable child care for all Virginians,” said **VPiA Board Chair Jim Dyke**. “This year’s honorees have been critical to advancing our mission and helping Virginia families access child care that meets their needs and preferences.”

“There’s no question that a strong early education system is essential to supporting a thriving workforce and enabling long-term economic development and growth,” said **VPiA Board Treasurer Gary Thomson**. “As board members of VPiA, we are proud to recognize these dedicated leaders in the General Assembly and look forward to continuing our work to ensure Virginia’s youngest learners receive a strong start.”

- **Senator George Barker (D-Clifton)** has been a vigorous supporter of strengthening and investing in our early care and education system this year. He was the chief patron of SB 1404 in 2023, which establishes a new Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education. The Commission will support accountability as well as long-term fiscal planning and investments to expand access to and the quality of Virginia’s public-private childcare system.
- **Senator Mamie Locke (D-Hampton)** has been a long-standing advocate for early care and education throughout her career. During the 2023 legislative session, she sponsored a budget amendment allocating funding to support mixed delivery programs offered in partnership with Virginia Peninsula Community College's Center for Excellence in Early Childhood Learning.

- **Senator Frank Ruff (R-Clarksville)** is a longtime supporter of early learning. Through his leadership, in 2009 the Virginia Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission became one of the first investors in Virginia’s early care and education systems-building work. Additionally, he has taken steps to mitigate ongoing challenges faced by early education providers across Virginia. In an effort to tackle severe staffing shortages in the child care sector, Senator Ruff has worked to highlight and address delays in the background check process that are hindering staff hiring and onboarding.
- **Delegate Terry Austin (R-Buchanan)** has championed efforts to increase investment in Virginia’s early education system and strengthen the voice of child care professionals. He co-patroned HB 994 in 2022, which directs the Board of Education to assess the feasibility of expanding Child Care Subsidy Program eligibility to all active duty members of the Armed Services. Additionally, he co-patroned HB 879 in 2022, which requires the Virginia Board of Education to include at least one representative each with experience or expertise in early education, local government, and career and technical education.
- **Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker (D-Alexandria)** is a fierce champion for Virginia’s early care and education system. She was the co-patron of HB 1423 in 2023—companion legislation to SB 1404—establishing a new Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education. Additionally, Delegate Bennett-Parker sponsored a budget amendment in 2023 that would allocate \$75 million in FY24 to serve additional preschool children in mixed delivery preschool programs.
- **Delegate Terry Kilgore (R-Gate City)** is committed to supporting and building out Southwest Virginia’s early care and education system. He sponsored a budget amendment in 2022 allocating funding under the American Rescue Plan Act to increase childcare capacity in Southwest Virginia. Additionally, Delegate Kilgore co-patroned HB 994 in 2022 directing the Board of Education to study the feasibility of expanding Child Care Subsidy Program eligibility to all active duty members of the Armed Services.

Virginia Promise in Action is working to build the leadership of Child Care Champions to advance effective policy improvements and increase investments that will benefit Virginia children, families, businesses, and communities more broadly.

About Virginia Promise in Action

Virginia Promise in Action is a bipartisan 501(c)(4) organization focused on advancing effective policy improvements and increasing investment in Virginia’s child care system.

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