

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEWS FROM: Families Forward  
8100 Three Chopt Road, Suite 212, Richmond, VA 23229  
MEDIA CONTACT: Laura O'Brien, [lauraobrienpr@gmail.com](mailto:lauraobrienpr@gmail.com), 804.840.6220

### **Merger of Three Statewide Nonprofits Seeks to Disrupt the Cycle of Child Abuse, Neglect and Poverty in Virginia**

Richmond, VA -- Families Forward, a new 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, is now Virginia's leading organization dedicated to disrupting the cycle of child abuse, neglect and poverty. Families Forward is the result of the merger of: Prevent Child Abuse Virginia, CHIP of Virginia and Early Impact Virginia.

Supported by both public and private funding, Families Forward provides statewide leadership for and unifies support for a multitude of Virginia programs through evidence-based and multi-generational prevention strategies. Working with parents and their children, the new statewide nonprofit provides home visiting, positive parenting education, child sexual abuse prevention programs, advocacy and public education.

"Many Virginia families struggle with access to food, shelter, childcare and employment and have unmet physical and mental health needs," said Elizabeth Buono, Families Forward board co-chair. "Frequently, these same parents and children endure the burden of violent living environments. By combining our three powerful statewide organizations, we amplify our core messages and services, and streamline our operations so we can maximize every dollar and build capacity to expand."

"The root of child abuse and neglect is often related to a lack of role models, limited education and not having reliable support systems. All parents want their children to be successful in school, life and work. Yet, parenting is not instinctive. Parents learn by the way they were parented. Education and a continuum of support is the key to delivering measurable results including the disruption of the cycle of abuse and neglect in Virginia," said Johanna Schuchert, long-time executive director for Prevent Child Abuse Virginia. ...more

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Voluntary home visiting programs, which have a long track record of positive outcomes, involve professionally trained parent educators and family support workers who regularly visit the homes of at-risk families to provide education, support and linkages to community services.

“Grounded in robust research demonstrating years of measurable results, the long term net savings of voluntary home visiting is evidenced by fewer founded cases of child abuse and neglect, a decrease in pre-term births and fewer neonatal intensive care days, improvements in parent employment status and more,” said Lisa Specter-Dunaway, chief executive officer of Families Forward.

“Our goal is to vastly expand our reach since of the more than 100,000 families in need, home visiting currently impacts fewer than one in 10,” said Rudy Garcia, board co-chair of Families Forward. “And of the half million children in grades K-5 in Virginia schools, only 40,000 children are currently reached through Families Forward’s child sexual abuse prevention program, *Hugs & Kisses*. We have more work to do knowing that nationwide one in four girls and one in six boys are victims of sexual abuse.”

Employing a team of 20 professionals and supported by hundreds of volunteers, Families Forward is headquartered in Richmond, Virginia. The new nonprofit provides annual training and support for more than 1,000 Virginia parenting professionals and volunteers, and tracks service provision and actual outcomes for multiple services across the Commonwealth.

Lisa Specter-Dunaway serves as the chief executive officer for Families Forward. She was previously the chief executive officer of CHIP of Virginia for 11 years. Ms. Specter-Dunaway holds a Bachelor of Arts in psychology from the University of Virginia and a Masters of Public Administration, with a concentration in nonprofit management, from L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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