



## Governor Glenn Youngkin and VDSS Celebrate Successful First Year of Modernized Foster Parent Onboarding Process

**RICHMOND, VA (May 12, 2023)** – Governor Glenn Youngkin and the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) proudly celebrate the successful first year rollout of its Faster Families Highway, a new digital resource launched in April 2022 to strengthen statewide partnerships and streamline the pathway to becoming a foster parent.

"During National Foster Care Month, we recognize Virginia's foster parents and the remarkable support they provide children in need of a stable home," said Governor Glenn Youngkin. "I'm pleased that Faster Families Highway has streamlined the foster process and aided foster parents across the Commonwealth."

"This transformational work by DSS has resulted in better and quicker identification of homes for foster youth in Virginia" said John Littel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources. "This process simplifies the steps in order for individuals to become foster parents and is a primary goal of Virginia's Safe and Sound Task Force, providing qualified foster families for Virginia's children and teens."

Through the new Faster Families Highway, more than 1,000 prospective foster parents have been directly connected to their local department of social services (LDSS) and become registered to receive resources and information to begin the journey of supporting children and families in their community. The Highway modernizes what was historically a paper-only application, sometimes entailing long waiting periods to process the paperwork and make contact with a prospective family before they could begin their orientation and foster parent training. With the streamlined assessment process afforded by the online portal, local departments are now quickly identifying and connecting the right families to the more than 4,000 children and teens in foster care. In doing so, foster parents are being supported and trained to step into their critical roles of keeping children connected to their families and home communities, reducing the impact of separation-related trauma, and bolstering primary families as they work towards the ultimate goal of reunifying with their children.

"At VDSS, we work continually to strengthen Virginia's children and families, and to provide increased support and resources to improve their mental, physical, emotional and social well-being," said Virginia Department of Social Services Commissioner Danny Avula. "Over the past year, the Faster Family Highway has provided a more streamlined process for potential foster parents to determine their readiness to serve in their local community, and has enabled us to improve access to stable, nurturing environments for children in foster care."

Virginia has the greatest need for foster parents willing to welcome teens and sibling groups into their homes. In just the first year of its Virginia launch, the Highway is already helping to bridge the gap for those children. According to fourth-quarter data, the Department has seen 45 percent of new applicants express interest in fostering children 12 years of age and older, and 50 percent of applicants are open to sibling groups.

While the month of May is annually recognized as National Foster Care Month and serves as a time to celebrate the crucial role foster parents play in communities across the Commonwealth and beyond, everyday individuals can provide wraparound support to foster parents or answer the call to become one, themselves.

To learn more about how foster parents support reunification through preserving family connections, view the video below. For more information about the Faster Families Highway, visit [FosterVA.com](https://www.fosterVA.com).



To access this release in additional languages (Chinese (Simplified), Filipino, French, Spanish, and Vietnamese) click [here](#).

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#### **About the Virginia Department of Social Services**

The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), one of the Commonwealth's largest government agencies, is comprised of approximately 2,000 state staff who proudly serve alongside more than 10,000 employees of 120 local departments of social services and community action agencies to deliver critical social services to Virginia's most vulnerable citizens. VDSS is committed to ensuring Virginians have access to the high-quality human services and resources needed to enhance their individual and collective well-being, and shape strong futures for themselves, their families and communities. The agency provides a wide range of services and resources in the areas of food and energy assistance, foster care and adoption, child support, and abuse and neglect prevention, among others. For more information, visit [dss.virginia.gov](https://dss.virginia.gov).