



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

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Contact: Necole Simmonds

(804) 726-7105

necole.simmonds@dss.virginia.gov

Virginia Selected to Participate in National Governors Association's Three Branch Institute

Provides Commonwealth with unique opportunity to improve child safety and prevent child fatalities across all three branches of government

Richmond, Va. (September 14, 2016) Virginia was selected as one of eight competitively-selected states to participate in the National Governors Association's (NGA) Three Branch Institute, which focuses on improving child safety and preventing child fatalities. The [Virginia Department of Social Services](#) (VDSS), which is leading the effort, will be working closely with the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, the Virginia Department of Health, the Virginia Supreme Court, the Virginia House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate to develop and implement integrated approaches to improve the safety of children throughout the state.

"In Virginia, the overwhelming majority of child deaths, most of which are preventable, occur in very young children. The prevention of child fatalities and the analysis of associated circumstances has been a major topic at the national level for the past couple of years as evidenced by the establishment of a federal [Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities](#)," said Margaret Ross Schultze, VDSS Commissioner. "Improving child welfare is one of the Department's most critical focus areas. I'm honored and excited that Virginia was selected to participate."

In SFY 2015, local departments of social services investigated 127 reports involving 131 child deaths suspected to be caused by child abuse or neglect. Following a comprehensive review of each case, it was determined that 52 children died as a result of maltreatment. Infants and toddlers are at high risk of maltreatment-related fatalities, with 81% percent of children under the age of four in SFY 2015. For those cases where child abuse and neglect was ruled out as a factor in the child's death, 64% were related to an unsafe sleep environment and 72% occurred under the age of one.

Through the end of 2017, Virginia will explore and implement various best practices and strategies in an effort to redesign how all systems, not just child welfare, approach the prevention of child fatalities. The Three Branch Institute will afford Virginia the opportunity to receive customized technical assistance in order to develop an integrated and comprehensive approach for improving the safety of children known to the child welfare system or at risk of child welfare involvement by aligning the work of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of state government. Support will be provided by NGA and its partners, including the National Conference of State Legislators, the National Center for State Courts, the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges and Casey Family Programs.

For additional information, please contact Necole Simmonds, (804) 726-7105

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