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**Legal Aid Justice Center Urges General Assembly to Invest in Student Supports to Increase School Safety**

**Richmond, Virginia (July 6, 2018)** – In advance of the July 11 meeting of the Virginia House Select Committee on School Safety, the Legal Aid Justice Center and 23 advocacy organizations are calling upon the General Assembly and Governor Northam to address the Commonwealth’s school safety concerns by investing in supports and services to meet the needs and improve the health and welfare of students well before behavior reaches a point of violence. Rather than looking toward “hardening” our schools, Virginia policymakers must prioritize supporting and strengthening our students.

In a [letter](#) today to the House Select Committee on School Safety, which was also delivered to members of the House Appropriations Committee and Governor Northam, LAJC and its partner organizations offered detailed recommendations around four main school safety policies:

- Increasing school support staff, such as school counselors and nurses;
- Improving school policing accountability through tailored, mandated training for school resource officers on working with children and youth;
- Investing in positive school discipline and school climate programs and methods, such as restorative practices; and
- Broadening the accessibility of supports and services under relevant funding streams, such as the Children’s Services Act.

“Rather than focusing solely on what makes school buildings more secure, policymakers should be asking what makes our students safer, healthier, and more connected to their education, and we already know many of the answers,” said Rachael Deane, Legal Director of the JustChildren Program of the Legal Aid Justice Center. “School counselors, nurses, psychologists, and other support staff play an irreplaceable role in students’ overall well-being. It’s time to lift the state’s funding cap on these positions and to invest in prevention, positive intervention, mental health, and trauma-informed supports. These approaches dramatically improve safety not just for students, but also for teachers, staff, and communities as a whole.”

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The Legal Aid Justice Center (LAJC) fights injustice in the lives of individual Virginians while rooting out exploitative policies and practices that keep people in poverty. LAJC uses impact litigation, community organizing, and policy advocacy to solve urgent problems in areas such as housing, education, civil rights, immigration, healthcare and consumer finance.

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