

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Virginia Understaffs Positions Critical to Student Safety While Student Enrollment Grows**

RICHMOND, VA -- Staffing in Virginia's K-12 schools falls far short of recommended benchmarks for school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses, according to a new report from The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis and the Legal Aid Justice Center. Decreases in staffing and a growing student population have left counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses with increased caseloads and administrative responsibilities and less time for direct student support.

The report notes that student enrollment in Virginia's schools has grown by more than 57,000 students since 2008, while overall school support staff positions decreased by 2,356 over the same decade. School counselor caseloads increased nearly 30 percent -- from 300 students in 2007-2008 to 385 students in 2015-2016. School counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses play essential roles in meeting student mental health needs, keeping all students safe and engaged, and helping students achieve academic and career success.

"These professionals provide vital services, including mental health care, and contribute to a positive school climate in which all members of the school community feel safe," said Rachael Deane, Legal Director of the JustChildren Program at the Legal Aid Justice Center. "But a lack of resources for these positions means we're asking them to do more with less. Investing in adequate staffing improves academic and health outcomes for all students."

The report details the specialized services provided by school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses, including their important role in cultivating student safety. These school professionals help to meet the mental health needs of students, connect students and

families with wraparound services, implement school-wide positive behavior support, reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, and assist students with academic and career development.

“School counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses have an important impact on student success. As their responsibilities increase that impact could increase as well,” says Chris Duncombe, senior policy analyst with The Commonwealth Institute. “But only if schools have sufficient staffing.”

The report recommends that Virginia lawmakers adopt proposals by the Virginia Board of Education to amend Virginia’s Standards of Quality and establish higher staffing standards for these positions. In 2017, the Virginia Board of Education recommended caseloads of one school counselor for every 250 students, one school social worker for every 1,000 students, one school psychologist for every 1,000 students, and one school nurse for every 550 students.

The full report, *Investing in Student Safety and Success*, is available online at [www.justice4all.org](http://www.justice4all.org) and [www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org](http://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org).

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### **About The Commonwealth Institute**

The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis provides credible, independent, and accessible information and analyses of fiscal and economic issues with particular attention to the impacts on low- and moderate-income persons. Our products inform fiscal and budget policy debates and contribute to sound decisions that improve the well-being of individuals, communities and Virginia as a whole. Visit [www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org](http://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org) for more information.

### **About the Legal Aid Justice Center**

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. LAJC’s primary service areas are Charlottesville, Northern Virginia, Richmond and Petersburg, but the effects of their work are felt statewide. Follow LAJC on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) or at [www.justice4all.org](http://www.justice4all.org).