



**Business Executives Explore Connection
Between Early Childhood and Workforce Development**
*Event featured national expert on child development
and employer panel highlighting innovations to address employee childcare challenges*

Richmond, VA (Sept. 27, 2022) – The Virginia Chamber Foundation and the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) hosted an Executive Briefing on “The Economics of Early Childhood” for statewide business leaders on Sept. 27, 2022.

The 9th annual Executive Briefing, which drew more than 130 business, education, and legislative leaders from across the Commonwealth, provided an opportunity to reinforce that a strong educational start for children is linked to a stable, talented future workforce. This year’s event focused on the science behind why access to high quality early care and education is critical to a child’s health, development, and school readiness as well as to Virginia’s workforce and economic competitiveness.

The featured keynote speaker was **Jack P. Shonkoff, M.D.**, Director of the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University. He is the Julius B. Richmond FAMRI Professor of Child Health and Development at the Harvard T.H. Chen School of Public Health and the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In addition, he serves as Professor of Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and Boston Children’s Hospital.

Following Dr. Shonkoff’s address, a panel of statewide business executives explored innovative strategies that some companies have established to address the childcare challenges faced by employees with young children. The panel was moderated by **Richard Bynum**, Chief Corporate Responsibility Officer for The PNC Financial Services Group.

The panelists included:

- **Jason Aseniero**, Vice President of Manufacturing Excellence, Smithfield Foods
- **Melanie Protti-Lawrence**, President, Lawrence Brothers Inc.

Results of a statewide employer survey conducted in late August by the Virginia Chamber of Commerce Foundation, the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation, and the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond were shared during the event. Responses from several hundred employers across the state and across a range of industries and company sizes showed that child care issues continue to impact Virginia businesses:

- 50 percent of respondents indicated that child care issues experienced by their employees are negatively impacting their business.
- Nearly all employers reported difficulty in recruiting (94%) and retaining (87%) employees.
- 76 percent of employers reported that child care availability impacted recruitment and retention.

- Availability of child care was the top concern among respondents in rural areas, whereas affordability was the top concern for respondents in urban areas.
- 78 percent of employers reported that employees frequently or occasionally miss work due to child care issues.
- Nearly 40 percent reported that employees are leaving their positions due to child care issues.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents thought it was very important that the state make investments and enact child care policies to increase child care supply, quality, and affordability and support the child care workforce.

The sponsoring organizations are committed to advancing a strong start for all Virginia children:

- *Blueprint Virginia 2030*, a business-led initiative reflecting the voices of the business community and developed by the **Virginia Chamber of Commerce**, highlights the direct link between a strong start in the early years and a vibrant, productive workforce for the Commonwealth. This comprehensive strategic plan provides business leadership, direction, and long-range economic development planning for Virginia.
- The **Virginia Early Childhood Foundation** and its network of regional partners are focused on ensuring equitable opportunities for all families with young children to thrive. This includes commitment to the Virginia Promise Partnership goal that all Virginia families have access to quality, affordable child care by 2030.

“Virginia is ranked third as a 2022 Top State for Business-according to CNBC’s annual ranking, which gave the Commonwealth high marks for technology and innovation, among other categories,” said Barry DuVal, President & CEO of the Virginia Chamber of Commerce. “In order to compete on the world stage, we have to do all we can to ensure a strong childcare system that not only supports a robust, stable workforce now, but promotes a talented and vibrant future workforce.”

“Every child in the Commonwealth deserves the opportunity to succeed,” said Liberty University’s Robert Hurt, board chair of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation. “Business and community leaders throughout the state are working collaboratively to create a more accessible and sustainable early childhood education system that will benefit the families, children, and economy of Virginia.”

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About the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation: VECF is the non-partisan steward of Virginia’s promise for early childhood success, working in tandem with diverse stakeholders to ensure equitable opportunities for all families with young children to thrive. To learn more about VECF, visit www.vecf.org. To learn more about the Virginia Promise Partnership, visit www.vapromisepartnership.com.

About the Virginia Chamber Foundation: The Virginia Chamber Foundation tracks Virginia’s economic competitiveness, conducts research and analysis, and hosts programs, connected to the priorities of Blueprint Virginia. In December 2021, the Chamber released its new statewide

strategic economic development plan, Blueprint Virginia 2030, which has engaged over 7,000 business, economic development, workforce, education, housing, and other community leaders to lay out a plan to ensure Virginia remains at the top of national business climate rankings. Learn more at www.blueprintvirginia.org.

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