



## Virginia Early Childhood Foundation Announces Board Elections

Richmond, Va. (March 27, 2026) –The Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF), the non-partisan steward of Virginia’s promise for early childhood success, elected two experienced executives to the organization’s board of directors at its quarterly meeting on March 18, 2026:

**Regina J. “Gina” Elbert** is Senior Vice President and Chief Legal and Human Resources Officer for Dominion Energy. She joined Dominion Energy in 2011 as senior counsel for employee benefits and held a number of senior-level positions before assuming her current role in 2025. Prior to Dominion, she worked in the Richmond office of McGuireWoods and had clerked for Chief Justice Leroy R. Hassell, Sr. of the Supreme Court of Virginia. Her nonprofit involvements have included board memberships with the Center for Energy Workforce Development, the Richmond YWCA, Bon Secours Richmond Health System and the Richmond Retirement System, among others. She is also a member of the Joint Advisory Board of Economists for the Commonwealth of Virginia and has served on the board of the Richmond Association of Business Economics. She earned a bachelor’s degree from the University of Virginia and a law degree from Harvard Law School.

**Dietra Trent, Ph.D.**, serves as Executive Director for the Virginia HBCU Alliance for Innovation and Community Impact. Her career in public service has included more than 25 years of leadership positions focused on advancing equity in education. She previously served in the Biden-Harris Administration as Executive Director of the White House initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Before her federal role, she held senior leadership positions at George Mason University. In 2016, she was appointed Virginia Secretary of Education by Governor Terry McAuliffe, after serving as Deputy Secretary of Education under Governors McAuliffe and Tim Kaine. She also served in roles for Governor Mark Warner and Congressman Bobby Scott. Dr. Trent earned a bachelor’s degree from Hampton University, a master’s and doctorate from VCU, and she has received five honorary doctorates. She is returning to VECF’s board after having previously served as an ex-officio member during her tenure as Secretary of Education.

In addition, VECF welcomed three members of Governor Spanberger’s Cabinet to the board in an ex-officio capacity:

**Carrie Chenery** is Secretary of Commerce and Trade for the Commonwealth of Virginia with two decades of experience in economic development, public policy, government relations and strategic communications through both public service and private business. Her career spans identifying business growth opportunities for clients, leading a regional economic development organization, managing economic development for Virginia’s largest private industries and shepherding legislative and budgetary priorities through the General Assembly. Before joining

the Governor's Office in her current role, she served as President of Valley Pike Partners, a business she founded in 2018 to help companies grow across Virginia with modern strategies in public affairs, business development and community engagement. Prior to that, she was Executive Director of the Shenandoah Valley Partnership, the region's economic development and marketing organization. In addition to previously serving the Virginia Office of the Governor as the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture & Forestry, she held positions at the Virginia Economic Development Partnership and the Williams Mullen law firm. She earned a bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech and is a graduate of the Political Leaders Program through the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia.

**Marvin Figueroa** serves as Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources, where he oversees healthcare, behavioral health, public health, and social services programs that support families across the Commonwealth. His work focuses on improving access to affordable care, strengthening core health and human services, and ensuring government delivers results people can feel in their daily lives. Across both public and private sectors, Figueroa has focused on expanding opportunity and improving how government works for communities. As a senior official at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, he worked closely with governors, state agencies, and local leaders to strengthen the delivery of essential services.

He served as a senior health policy advisor to U.S. Senator Mark Warner, where he helped craft and pass bipartisan healthcare legislation that was signed into law, and later served as Chief of Staff to United States Senator, Laphonza Butler. In Virginia, he served as both Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Resources and Legislative Director under Governor Ralph Northam, where he played a key role in advancing Medicaid expansion and helping more Virginians get and keep the care they need. Originally from La Ceiba, Honduras, Figueroa is a Posse Foundation Scholar and earned degrees from Vanderbilt University and Harvard University. He is also a graduate of the University of Virginia's Sorensen Political Leaders Program and Lead Virginia.

**Dr. Jeffery O. Smith**, Secretary of Education for the Commonwealth of Virginia, is an educator with more than 32 years of service in public school education. He spent 15 years as a superintendent, with eight years in Hampton City Schools and seven years in the Town of West Point. He served as assistant superintendent for instruction with Amelia County Public Schools and as assistant superintendent for academic services with Newport News Public Schools. He has served as a member of the adjunct faculty at Old Dominion University and the College of William and Mary. Under his leadership, Hampton City Schools reached historic milestones with all 29 schools earning full accreditation without conditions, graduation rates rose from 88% to nearly 98% and dropout rates declined from 5.1% to less than 1%. He co-chaired the nationally recognized Academies of Hampton, which expanded career pathways and positioned Hampton as Virginia's first Ford Next Generation Learning Community.

The VECF board also took action to elect current board member **Mike Chinn**, a partner with Endicott Capital, as Chair of the Virginia Business Roundtable for Early Education, an advisory committee of the board and to re-elect **Sonya Waddell** for a second term. She is vice president and economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond.

"We welcome these dynamic leaders to our dedicated team of board directors," said Gary Thomson, VECF board chair. "Their unique perspectives and insights from a wide variety of

expertise will contribute greatly to our mission ensuring that Virginia's young children are prepared for success in school, life, and the workforce.”

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**About the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation:** VECF creates results-oriented partnerships to ensure that young children are healthy and prepared for school, life and workforce success. To learn more about VECF, visit [www.vecf.org](http://www.vecf.org).

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