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Statement by RISE for Youth on the Juvenile Correction Center Task Force’s Interim Report

RICHMOND, Va. – In response to the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice’s Juvenile Correction Center Task Force’s interim report calling for the construction of a \$40 million juvenile prison in Chesapeake, Va., the RISE for Youth Coalition issued the following statement:

“The Task Force’s interim report acknowledges the value of replacing cruel and outdated youth prisons with a range of care options that rehabilitate Virginia’s youth safely and effectively while keeping them closer to home. However, because the report is devoted to the near-term construction of a new youth prison in Chesapeake, significant components of what should be a comprehensive, statewide transformation plan for the Commonwealth’s juvenile justice system remain unaddressed.

The Task Force’s interim report paves the way for millions of dollars to be spent on the design of a new \$40 million youth prison in Chesapeake that will total 112 beds, including beds for a new juvenile detention center. This commitment comes at a steep cost: the state is now left with far fewer funds and far less flexibility to consider options that would better serve the needs of all youth around the state, most notably those in Northern and Southwest Virginia. As they consider plans for the remaining funds, we strongly encourage the Task Force to think seriously and creatively about small, close-to-home options for youth who—even with the new Chesapeake facility—will still be just as far away from families and community connections as they are now.

We urge Governor McAuliffe to refrain from releasing the planning money for the design of the Chesapeake prison until the Task Force has received meaningful input on the interim report and has proposed a comprehensive statewide solution that will bring all youth closer to home. The administration should also provide a formal, meaningful role on the Task Force for youth, families, and communities directly impacted by the juvenile justice system. These groups have a right to inform and shape any further plans to commit funds towards construction or renovation of additional juvenile correction centers. Discussion of any new facilities should also include updates to the public on the Department’s progress toward developing a strong, broad-based continuum of family- and community-based alternatives to youth prisons. A comprehensive, transparent, participatory process is critical to the success of this system transformation.

Reforming Virginia’s juvenile justice system in a way that keeps our kids safe, promotes successful rehabilitation, and protects public safety requires collaboration between the state and the communities involved. We can’t rely on outdated approaches that separate youth from their families and the resources that can help them the most, nor can we separate decisions from those most impacted by their consequences. We urge the Task Force to consider the specific needs of the communities they serve as we work toward improving juvenile justice outcomes across the state.”

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RISE for Youth is a statewide, nonpartisan campaign coalition whose central goal is to develop a continuum of community-based alternatives to incarceration that will keep juvenile justice system involved youth closer to their homes and support networks while making our communities safer. For more information on RISE for Youth, visit: www.riseforyouth.org and follow [@RISEforYouth](https://twitter.com/RISEforYouth).