

Brain Injury Association of Virginia

Virginia Alliance of Brain Injury Service Providers

2021 Legislative Needs Statement

WHAT:

\$1,400,000 for increase to base brain injury funding to address significant workforce retention issues experienced by providers.

PATRONS AND ITEM NUMBERS:

- Del David Bulova
- Sen Frank Ruff

WHY:

Since 2014, appropriations for brain injury funding have required the establishment of new programs or new service areas, rather than provided room for raises for dedicated staff. As a result, starting salaries are below regional markets; in northern Virginia, they have fallen under the 25% percentile, and in Charlottesville, the brain injury program has been forced to make the decision to forgo benefits in order to maintain salaries.

Employee turnover rates are rising among all providers, as staff across all programs are leaving for more financially sustainable positions. Salaries are being named in exit interviews as the reason for seeking other employment, and attrition rates over the last few years have been as high as 50%.

Customer surveys reflect a growing dissatisfaction; employee turnover creates case manager “churn” and larger caseloads that leave the staff less time to serve their clients have been cited as the cause. The financial cost of replacing employees can total thousands of dollars a year, which only adds increasing demands on already under-resourced programs; this is in addition to the lost expertise that can take years to replace and the negative effects on the morale of the remaining employees who are committed to our organizations and the populations we serve.

In the original FY21-22 budget passed in the 2020 General Assembly session, this request was funded; it was subsequently removed in response to the economic impacts of COVID. However, the need for the funds and the services are challenging these brain injury programs like never before. In addition to the estimated 28,000 Virginians who sustain a traumatic brain injury (TBI) every year, and the nearly 300,000 who are disabled as a result of TBI and stroke in Virginia, complications from COVID-19 and the opioid epidemic will drive the need for these services to an all-time high.

HOW:

Through a DARS Appropriation and existing processes, contracts for community based brain injury service providers would be increased to raise overall staff salaries to levels at which the programs could fairly compete for qualified staff, and as needed, to increase staff hours to ensure adequate program staffing.