

# The Washington Post

## Groups urge McDonnell to invest in children's mental health

*By Rosalind S. Helderman*  
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Children's health advocacy groups are urging Gov. Bob McDonnell (R) to make major new investments in mental health treatment for children in the two-year budget he is now working to prepare and will submit for consideration to the General Assembly in December.

"The children's mental health system in Virginia needs your leadership now more than ever," write leaders of the Campaign for Children's Mental Health and Voice's for Virginia's Children in a letter delivered Tuesday.

They are pushing McDonnell to earmark \$20 million for community-based public services for mentally ill children, including crisis intervention centers to help children experiencing an acute health issue, better case management, more in-home services and general psychiatric help.

They are also asking McDonnell to establish a commission to come up with recommendations for broad reform of Virginia's children services, now fragmented among different programs funded by Medicaid and through the Community Services Act. And they want policymakers to commit to surveying children and their families about how the state can provide better services to the mentally ill.

Approximately 1 in 5 Virginia children suffers from mental illness, according to the groups. Like much of state government, services for troubled children have been slashed in recent years as state revenues dried up during the economic downturn.

The groups will also deliver their agenda for the year to lawmakers, along with a petition of Virginians who agree with the cause; the group says 1,200 have signed the petition.

"We are issuing this agenda because government officials are beginning the conversation about budget priorities and we want to give Virginia's children with mental illness a voice in the discussion," said Margaret Nimmo Crowe, Coordinator of the Campaign for Children's Mental Health in a statement. "This is a road map to help lawmakers and administrators repair our fragmented children's mental health system and ensure that the one in five children with a mental health disorder can get the treatment they need to recover."