

## Senator Houck Reports From Richmond

January 21, 2008

Greetings from Richmond! As we enter the second full week of the session, this week's report will be devoted to upcoming meetings concerning the 2008-2010 biennial budget.

Senator Charles Colgan (D-Manassas), the newly installed Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, selected me to serve as Chairman of its Health and Human Resources Subcommittee. This selection is in addition to my duties as the Senate Education and Health Chairman. My selection was not only because of my seniority as the third ranking member in the Senate, but also for my service in the health care sector. Currently, I am the Director of Community Programs at Mary Washington Hospital in Fredericksburg.

Over the next several weeks, the subcommittee will meet to review the Governor's introduced budget and amendments made by fellow senators. The public is invited and encouraged to provide feedback. Issues to be discussed pertain to, but are not limited to, mental health, public health care, mental retardation and health professions.

In the wake of the tragic event at Virginia Tech on April 16<sup>th</sup>, Governor Kaine created an independent panel to review our mental health services. In response, Governor Kaine has proposed the following funding initiatives:

- Initiation of bonds to renovate state mental health facilities
- Expanded funds to improve emergency mental health services
- Additional dollars to expand community service board case managers
- Increase in the number of clinicians and therapists who are available on an outpatient basis, with funding to support 40 new clinicians recommended over the biennium.

Without question, the Virginia Tech panel proves a need for additional resources to aid individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses. Studies show that six percent of Virginians have a serious mental illness, and one of every four citizens has a diagnosable mental illness. Despite many citizens needing community support, it is not easily available. For example, over 90 percent of community services board case managers in Virginia have caseloads that exceed the nationally recommended caseload of 25 patients.

As this report is being finalized, my colleagues and I are submitting our proposed changes to the Governor's budget. In the upcoming weeks, this report will highlight those key initiatives. As always, my office is available for your comments. It can be reached via telephone at (804) 698-7517, via e-mail at [district17@sov.state.va.us](mailto:district17@sov.state.va.us), and via snail mail at P.O. Box 396, Richmond, VA 23218. I look forward to hearing from you.