

VACAP NEWS

May 3, 2022

Dear VACAP Leadership and Partners:

Thank you for the warm welcome as your new President & CEO. I'm very grateful to Carolyn and Jim for the excellent onboarding process these past couple weeks. It was a true honor and joy to have two weeks of overlap with Jim who was so generous with his insights and wisdom. His passion and commitment to our work are contagious. I also appreciate VACAP's leadership, staff and partners for sharing insights and stories with me. In the weeks ahead I look forward to learning more and more about each of your agencies and all of our partners!

I plan to continue the practice of forwarding time sensitive updates and will also send periodic VACAP NEWS updates that will include news and policy updates. Please add me to your distribution lists and share any news or updates with me at ejohnston@vacap.org. I also welcome any feedback on news and updates you'd like us to track and share with the VACAP membership through email and the VACAP website.

Thank you for all you do to serve the Commonwealth!

Sincerely,

Erik

Erik Johnston
VACAP President & CEO
ejohnston@vacap.org

May is Community Action Month

Happy Community Action Month! There is so much amazing work that community action agencies are doing and May is a wonderful time to set aside some time to be intentional about sharing these stories. The National Community Action Partnership has some great resources available at the following link to help you spotlight your agency this month. <https://communityactionpartnership.com/community-action-month-may/>

General Assembly Completes Reconvened Session – No Budget Agreement Reached

The General Assembly returned to Richmond on April 27, 2022, to act on Governor Youngkin's vetoes and amendments to legislation that passed during the 2022 Regular Session. The House of Delegates and the Senate voted to sustain all the Governor's 26 vetoes, and they agreed to many of the Governor's legislative amendments. However, the House and Senate did not reach an agreement on the 2022-2024 biennial budget or the "Caboose" budget for FY 2022. Governor Youngkin called a Special Session that began April 4, but as of today, the two bodies have still not reached an agreement on the budget, though negotiators report that they are making progress.

Erik and the team at Kemper will remain actively engaged in the budget process during budget negotiations regarding VACAP's priority of advocating for \$2 million in additional TANF funds for community action agencies in the FY23 and FY24 budgets. Thank you for all you have done to tell your state delegates and state senators about the importance of this funding to your agency and service area. **Please let Erik know the most recent feedback you have received from your state legislative delegation about this VACAP priority (ejohnston@vacap.org).**

Congratulations to Matt Fitzgerald for "Think Bigger: Innovative Spirit" Commissioner's Award

DSS Commissioner Danny Avula presented Matt Fitzgerald, DSS Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) with the Innovative Spirit Award on May 2, 2022 as part of the celebration of Public Service week in the Commonwealth. Matt is humble and so Carolyn and I were fortunate to see Matt right after he won the award. The first thing he did was give credit to his amazing OEO team and his partners. The award singled out five recent innovative projects that Matt was involved in: 1) Rebranding his unit into an Office of Economic Opportunity 2) the Whole Family pilot 3) Improved Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC) processes are changing the way low-income persons access tax services 4) Implementing the Moving to Opportunity pilot that will assist individuals who have experienced substance use disorders to find better housing and employment and 5) Interagency workgroup on Whole Family Diversion.

These innovative projects are just some examples of the innovative work by OEO and VACAP members to focus on impact and outcomes for the individuals and families we all collectively serve. We are so fortunate in the Commonwealth that Matt is such an innovative leader who is known nationally for his commitment to collaboration and a focus on outcomes. Please join me in reaching out to Matt to

congratulate him and the whole OEO team for being recognized for their innovative spirit! (matt.fitzgerald@dss.virginia.gov)

Weatherization Update

DHCD held a WAP Policy Advisory Council Meeting on April 19. Several updates were shared on the state plan and future federal Infrastructure funds (BIL) that will flow to weatherization assistance.

Regarding the state plan, it was reported that client eligibility is expanded to include any of HUD's programs (up to 80% Area Median Income or AMI). This has the potential to make many more households eligible for weatherization assistance.

DHCD reported that the new federal Infrastructure law (BIL) includes \$65,591,635 for Virginia, of which \$54,119,682 are program funds and \$11,471,953 are for training and technical assistance (T/TA). The state must submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) by July 1. This is a significant increase in funding that is anticipated to be released in a five-year cycle. In the future DHCD will provide more details such as updates on funding amounts per agency and any new rules that apply to this significant new fund source for weatherization.

Virginia Rent Relief Program Closing to New Applications May 15

DHCD announced more than \$713 million in rent relief has been dispersed as of March 31, 2022 and that no new applications will be accepted after 11:59 p.m. on May 15. VACAP members have been critical partners to DHCD since the program's inception in ensuring tenants struggling to make rental payments are assisted. Please share widely in advance of this rapidly approaching deadline and help households in your service area get caught up and even to pay forward rent due in the future. See below for link to more details from DHCD:

<https://dhcd.virginia.gov/virginia-rent-relief-program-portal-closing-new-applications-may-15>

A major policy issue moving forward as federal rent relief funds dry up is the challenge of housing affordability and how to prevent evictions. The Commonwealth's Housing Trust Fund managed by DHCD is one key solution that creates and preserves more affordable housing through construction loans and homeless reduction grants. In addition, a newer initiative is the Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot. VACAP members can access more details about this pilot effort in several regions that is focused on a systems approach to partnering with all stakeholders to prevent evictions.

<https://www.dhcd.virginia.gov/verp>

Virginia Mortgage Relief Program is still accepting applications

While rent relief funding is set to run out, mortgage relief came in a separate funding vehicle through the American Rescue Plan and was launched by Virginia Housing after it was made available by U.S. Treasury. Virginia Housing has a call center and in person offices in Arlington, Richmond, Wytheville and Newport News. Households can apply for up to \$40,000 and there is no cap on the number of months past due.

<https://www.virginiamortgagerelief.com/>

NCAP partners with Coalition on Human Needs on Build Back Better: Requesting stories from households that would benefit from the legislation

The Coalition on Human Needs is advocating for Build Back Better legislation and is looking for video testimonials from Virginians who have benefited from programs or services that would be strengthened by the Build Back Better Legislation (e.g., Child Tax Credit Expansion; lower costs for home care, prescription drugs, child care, housing assistance, and school/summer meal programs). Stories are submitted by doing a short interview with project staff, or by filling-out a short online form if that's more convenient. Some stories will be selected to be featured in op-eds and public videos. For each story that is selected and used for media outreach, the project will pay \$150 to the person or family who is the subject of the story to compensate for the time spent.

Those interested can fill out the [form here](#) with your name, contact information, best times to reach you and a brief synopsis of your own personal connection. The Coalition on Human Needs is a national alliance of organizations representing people of faith, human service providers, policy experts, civil rights, labor and other advocates working to meet the needs of people with low incomes through effective federal policy and funding decisions.