



VOICES & VISIONS

A VOICE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES: A PROMISING VISION FOR TOMORROW

New Voices II: Making Them Heard

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As the state's Developmental Disabilities Council, the Board is responsible for funding initiatives that support self-advocacy in Virginia. The latest of these, led by the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University, concluded in March 2007. *New Voices II: Making Them Heard* promoted greater involvement of self-advocates statewide, enhanced local and state coalition building and networking among self-advocates, and disseminated information on critical disability issues to policymakers, service providers, and other stakeholders.

Workshops organized by New Voices self-advocates focused on "solutions that work" for housing, transportation, education, employment, and personal assistance services.

New Voices II built on the success of *New Voices: Our Lives, Our Voices*, a statewide conference held in October 2005, that drew 173 participants, including people with disabilities, family members, service providers, agency representatives, and other concerned citizens. Workshops organized by New Voices self-advocates focused on "solutions that work" for housing, transportation, education, employment, and personal assistance services. In each session, participants had the opportunity to make recommendations for service system improvements. A report on the conference proceedings, published in February 2006, is still available from the Partnership.

Following the conference, statewide focus groups further refined the issues and recommendations. Using that feedback, the New Voices Planning Committee developed regional events where self-advocates could directly identify the tools and resources

needed to build effective advocacy networks. A core team of eight self-advocates, in collaboration with the Partnership, held Community Education and Awareness Events in Norfolk, Richmond, Winchester, Manassas, and Martinsville. This team also made presentations to policymakers and other stakeholders, including The Advisory Council on Intellectual Disabilities, the Systems Transformation Grant Team, and

the Person-Centered-Planning Leadership Team. Through December 2006, seventy-five representatives from state and local agencies and service providers as well as ten from Virginia's

universities had heard from New Voices through these presentations.

The presentations included a video featuring the New Voices team in which they provide powerful testimony on their desire to be truly a part of their communities and on the changes needed to fully support self-determination and independence. DVDs of this video were also distributed to Virginia's Centers for Independent Living and are still available from the Partnership for a nominal fee.

Response to the video has been strong and an unexpected opportunity arose for a screening at the Sprout Touring Film Festival sponsored by Prince William County Community Services on March 31. Additional information on this festival, featuring films on issues related to developmental disabilities, can be found at www.gosprout.org/touring.

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Message from the Executive Director

Heidi Lawyer



As a DD Council, we focus predominantly on the critical issues facing people with developmental and other disabilities in our Commonwealth, and in collaboration with our many community partners, seek to effect long-term changes to our system. In doing so, we sometimes lose sight of important legislative and budgetary activities at the federal level that affect programs and services here in Virginia.

In March, I joined approximately 600 self-advocates, family members, other advocates, providers, and professionals in attending the 2007 Disability Policy Seminar in Washington, DC. This annual conference was sponsored by the ARC of the United States, American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Association of University Centers on Disabilities, United Cerebral Palsy, and National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities, our own member organization. Valuable, comprehensive information was provided by national experts and senior congressional staff.

It is worthwhile to note some, but certainly not all, of the key priorities and their related legislative initiatives that state and national disability advocates are addressing during the current Congressional session. Detailed fact sheets developed for the conference on the following issues are posted at www.nacdd.org/pages/public_policy.htm#fact.

- Adopt a FY 2008 budget that expands human services entitlement and discretionary programs, protects Medicaid and other entitlements from further cuts, and rejects further tax cuts.
- Restore cuts made in FYs 2006 & 2007 to Department of Labor Work Incentive Grants and to key disability programs such as Supported Employment State Grants and Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Programs.
- Increase funding for federal enforcement of disability rights.
- Fully fund the Family Support, Lifespan Respite, and Combat Autism Acts.
- Ensure administrative funding for the Social Security Administration at a level that will begin to reduce the extremely long delays in making decisions on claims for disability benefits.
- Address problems and limitations in the Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Option created under the Deficit Reduction Act that have resulted in the lack of use of this option. These include the ability of states to cap services and keep waiting lists, coverage limited to persons

with incomes below 150% of the poverty level, lack of coverage for all services allowed in HCBS waivers, and allowing states to restrict coverage to limited geographic areas.

- Support the Community Choice Act (S 799, formerly known as MiCASSA) mandating Medicaid community-based attendant services and supports, including supervision cueing or hands-on assistance for daily activities.
- Pass the Protecting Children's Health in Schools Act of 2007 (S 758 and HR 1017) clarifying which transportation services are reimbursable under Medicaid and related administrative claiming and reporting requirements.
- Reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) expiring on 9/30/07. Additional funds are needed to cover both currently enrolled children and those seeking enrollment, making this a top health priority for Congress.
- Support legislation modeled on the Direct Support Professionals Fairness and Security Act introduced in the last Congress which will deal with the crisis in worker availability, low wages, and turnover.
- Support the soon to be introduced Community Living Services and Supports (CLASS) Act establishing national long-term care insurance with premiums through a voluntary payroll tax, cash benefits for maximum flexibility, and consumer control. CLASS Act coverage will not be means tested and can relieve pressure on Medicaid.
- Reauthorize the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Act authorizing state DD Councils, University Centers on Excellence in DD, and protection & advocacy systems, as well as projects of national significance and family support.
- Restore the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 to ensure adherence to the Congressional intent for this Act and undo the effects of court decisions in the areas of employment, definition of disability, and other areas.
- Support voting rights reform bills addressing issues of accessibility of polling places and locations, accuracy of information provided prior to election day, and reports of voter intimidation and deception that remain despite the passage of the Help America Vote Act.

(continued on page 3)

2007 General Assembly Update

Heidi Lawyer

This issue's "Director's Message" focuses on federal legislative activities. During its 2007 session, the Virginia General Assembly similarly addressed numerous statutory and fiscal matters of importance to individuals with disabilities. Throughout the session, the Board and its partners tracked legislation and made routine updates available to their constituencies. Detailed information about state legislation can also be accessed directly at <http://leg1.state.va.us/lis.htm>.

Below is an abbreviated list of disability-related measures approved during the 2007 General Assembly session. Unless otherwise indicated, all bills listed have been signed by the Governor and take effect on July 1, 2007.

- HB 2498/SB 791 renamed the "disabled tax credit" as the Livable Home Tax Credit, expanded it to new construction as well as retrofitting, and transferred administration and eligibility determinations from the Department of Taxation to the Department of Housing & Community Development. This Disability Commission bill was crafted by the Board, Virginia Housing & Development Authority, and Northern Virginia Network for the Aging. Expanded provisions of the tax credit are applicable for tax years beginning after January 1, 2008.
- HB 2032 expanded long-term services that must be provided by the Department for the Aging to include transportation, educational, and housing services and opportunities for self-care and independent living.
- HB 2033/SB 1024 established the Secretary of Health & Human Resources as the lead coordinator of the Commonwealth's long-term care policy.
- HB 2051 extended the legislative Disability Commission, scheduled to "sunset" in June 2007, to 2012.
- HB 2269 authorized the Statewide Independent Living Council to apply for and accept grants, gifts, donations, and requests on its own behalf for deposit into the Statewide Independent Living Fund.
- SB 790 added legal guardians as caregivers eligible to receive a grant under the Virginia Caregivers Grant program and raised the Virginia adjusted gross income limit under the program from \$50,000 to \$75,000 for a married caregiver.

- SB 955/HB 2010 allowed certain incentives for localities that adopt a program of bonus density in exchange for affordable housing. Specific exceptions and qualifications apply to these programs which may include establishment of a local housing fund to help achieve affordable housing goals.
- SB 968 allowed for condominium conversion tenants who have disabilities or are elderly to assign their rights to purchase to a government agency, housing authority, or certified tax exempt non-profit housing corporation.
- SB 1117 created a Senior Alert program for local, regional, or statewide notification of missing adults over age 60 with cognitive impairments which renders them unable to care for themselves without assistance and whose disappearance poses a credible threat to health and safety.

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Message from the Executive Director

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- Support the Genetic Information Non-Discrimination Act (GINA, HR 493 and S 358) which would prohibit employers from requiring genetic testing and using genetic information to make hiring, promotion, or training decisions. GINA would also prohibit insurers from using these measures to determine eligibility or establish premiums.

In addition to these and other critical issues being addressed legislatively, work is being done to address budgetary concerns about Section 811 housing needs, a national Housing Trust Fund, vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services, Social Security staffing, IDEA provisions, and autism funding.

Advocates, lobbyists, staff of national organizations, and friends in the legislature are working hard on behalf of citizens with disabilities. It is important that we all do our part as well. In addition to work you do at the state or local level, please contact your Senators and House

Representatives and ask them to co-sponsor or support legislation in which you are interested. Decisions made in Washington, DO affect your life. **WV**

Next Board Meeting

June 7, 2007
Wyndham Richmond
Airport Hotel
4700 S. Laburnum Ave.
Richmond, VA

Upcoming Meetings:
September 21, 2007
December 14, 2007

Partners in Policymaking, Tools and Testimony

Jennifer Peers



Each September, for over a decade, a new class of Partners has begun their training unclear how the program will affect them. Many ask, "how will I use this training in my day to day life?" In the following months, they receive the tools to find answers and advocate effectively to improve the service system. Every session is full of information. Each answer inspires even more questions. By graduation in May, their toolboxes are pretty heavy!

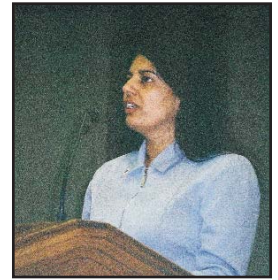
The most powerful tool Partners acquire is the gut level understanding of the importance and value of public testimony. Partners practice this skill during a mock committee hearing with legislators in the General Assembly Building. They overcome public speaking anxieties and learn first hand how to influence legislation and change the system.



Katie Wallace

In March, a panel including Delegate Samuel A. Nixon, Jr. and Senator John Watkins from Chesterfield County heard testimony from the Partners Class of 2007 and provided valuable feedback and helpful hints for their future testimony. Powerful presentations covered topics such as "Project Life Saver" and "Inclusive Education." Others addressed the personal challenges people with disabilities and their families face. One Partner discussed how her son's needs impact their family and how, as number 632 on the MR Waiver waiting list, his chance of receiving support in the foreseeable future is unlikely. Another testified on the need for a coordinated transportation system and the struggle to be independent without this basic community resource.

For more information, including how to become a Partner and start filling your own advocacy toolbox, visit www.vaboard.org/policymaking.htm. ♡



Chitra Sharathcantra

YLF Update

Teri Barker-Morgan



U.S. Justice Official to Speak at Mentoring Luncheon

Many of our country's greatest leaders have acknowledged a mentor and networking skills as important factors in their success. The Networking and Mentorship Luncheon at the Youth Leadership Forum offers student Delegates an opportunity to learn about the importance of developing mentorship relations and to practice their networking skills.

This summer's luncheon features one of Washington's most effective networkers as its keynote speaker. Attorney Olegario (Ollie) D. Cantos VII recently completed a year of service as Associate Director for Domestic Policy in the White House. Mr. Cantos has now returned to his previous position of Special Assistant to the Assistant Attorney General in the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice and is one of the highest ranking officials with a disability in the federal government.

Blind since birth, Mr. Cantos' responsibilities include fostering closer ties between the Justice Department

and disability rights leaders at all levels. He has an impressive record for establishing and cultivating e-mail, phone, and in-person networks that share information and further the cause of inclusion for people with disabilities. Mr. Cantos is certain to have a positive impact on the YLF Delegates and other participants at this year's Networking and Mentorship Luncheon. ♡

The Youth Leadership Forum welcomes Kara White as its new Program Assistant. Kara brings impressive experience, energy, and enthusiasm to YLF. A recent graduate with the Partners In Policymaking Class of 2007, she will have ample opportunities to share the knowledge and skills she has acquired. Kara can be reached at 804-786-3441 and by e-mail at kara.white@vbpd.virginia.gov.



Secretary Tavenner Presents 2006 Community Service Awards

Tom Driscoll



On March 26, the Board had the pleasure of hosting a reception at the Library of Virginia recognizing the recipients of its 2006

Community Service Awards. Secretary of Health & Human Resources Marilyn Tavenner presented the Jackie Crews Excellence in Leadership Award to self-advocate and 2006 Governor's Policy Fellow Jack Brandt and the Outstanding Achievement Award to Debra Ruh, founder of TecAccess LLC, for its work in information technology accessibility, training, and employment for people with disabilities.

Invited guests included Board members, state and local officials, service providers, support and advocacy group representatives, as well as family and friends of the award recipients. The reception featured a display about the Board, the awards, and



their recipients' accomplishments, accented by samples of Mr. Brandt's artwork. An accessible on-line version of the display produced by TecAccess was also demonstrated. Following the reception, the display moved to the lobby of the state's Ninth Street Office Building for public viewing until April 16. The on-line version can still be seen at www.brandtstudios.com/jc.

Ed Turner, 2005 Jackie Crews Award recipient and Special Advisor to the Governor for Disability Issues, assisted the Secretary with the presentations. The Positive Vibe Café, 2005 Outstanding Achievement Award recipient, catered the reception, and a cappella singer Solomon Miles, a graduate of the Cafe's training

program, provided entertainment. ♡♡

Guests enjoy the Community Service Awards Ceremony



Last Call for Public Comment on 2008 Biennial Assessment

Since its release in April 2006, the *Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia* (www.vaboard.org/biennial.htm) has become an essential reference and resource guide for the many individuals and organizations working to improve the state's service system. Over the past two months, Board staff have held forums throughout the state to collect feedback from individuals with disabilities, family members, advocates, providers, policymakers, and others in preparation for the 2008 edition. If you did not have an opportunity to attend one of our Roundtables or Forums, you can still share your input.

Public comment may be submitted by mail to:

Attention: Biennial Assessment
Virginia Board for People with Disabilities
202 North 9th Street, 9th Floor
Richmond, VA 23219

by e-mail: VBPD@vbpd.virginia.gov,
by fax: 804-786-1118, by telephone: 804-786-0016
(Voice & TTY) or 1-800-846-4464
(Toll-Free, Voice & TTY)

To ensure consideration by the Board, public comment must be received no later than **June 1, 2007**. ♡♡

2007 General Assembly Update

(continued from page 3)

- SB 1332 expanded the recipient pool for state Comprehensive Services Act funds to include children requiring mental health services who meet certain criteria. Those criteria include, but are not limited to, being ineligible for Medicaid at the time of evaluation, lacking private insurance coverage for mental health services, and requiring those services to prevent placement in foster care pursuant to parental agreement and as determined by mental health professionals. The Governor returned this bill to the General Assembly unsigned because it contained a provision that it would not become effective unless reenacted during the 2008 session but it will still become law without his signature on July 1, 2007.

The budget approved by the General Assembly included several additional items of crucial importance. Among these were 100 new DD Waiver slots and 330 new MR Waiver slots, as well as a Northern Virginia Provider Rate Increase of 15% for DD and MR Waiver Services. The Board extends its congratulations to the ARC of Northern Virginia for its successful campaign to educate legislators on the need for this differential. ♡♡

Synergy: Accessible Employment & Information Technology

Tom Driscoll

The February 2007 *Voices & Visions* reported a new Board grant to Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research & Training Center (VCU-RRTC) to increase employment opportunities in state government for people with disabilities. Since that announcement, the Governor's Office has become actively involved in publicizing and supporting the project. The Board has also learned of two additional initiatives that present an opportunity, as a senior advisor to the Governor described it, for synergy in the areas of employment and information technology (IT) accessibility.

On March 2, Board staff attended the kick-off event for a new project by TecAccess LLC, the Board's 2006 Outstanding Achievement Award recipient. Over the next year, using Governor's Discretionary Funds under the Workforce Investment Act, the *Disabled Veterans Training Program (DVETs)* will recruit at

least fifteen veterans with disabilities, train them in IT and its accessibility, and guarantee them employment after their graduation. As it does routinely, TecAccess will make extensive use of assistive technology, remote learning, and "telework" opportunities to customize training and employment supports to the needs of each participant.

The Virginia Employment Commission, state Departments of Rehabilitative and Veterans Services, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, and others will refer candidates to DVETs. Any veteran with a disability is eligible, but recruitment will especially target those injured in the recent Persian Gulf and related conflicts. Initially, TecAccess anticipated hiring many of DVETs' graduates to meet its own growing need for skilled IT professionals. However, as news of DVETs has spread, interest by other employers will ensure a much wider range of employment opportunities, and TecAccess looks forward to exceeding the project's training and placement goals.

Through its involvement with VCU-RRTC and TecAccess, the Board was invited to join the Governor's Office, Virginia Information Technology Agency, and DRS in a project to improve the accessibility of state agency websites. With the internet rapidly becoming a fundamental means of providing information and services to Virginia's citizens, this effort builds on new website standards established by the previous Governor and the current Governor's emphasis on greater governmental transparency and responsiveness.

At each of its recent statewide public comment opportunities for the 2008 *Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia*, the Board asked constituents about their internet usage, information accessibility via state websites, and priorities for improvements. The answers had impact even before the public forums were concluded. Changes have already been made to the Board's and other disability agencies' websites. Recommendations and technical assistance are being distributed to all state agency webmasters, and changes to state IT guidelines are being considered.

As the state moves forward with accessibility improvements to all agency websites, and sets an example for others, demand will grow for both publicly and privately employed IT professionals. Some of those professionals may very well be graduates of DVETs who find greater opportunities for employment as a result of the VCU-RRTC initiative. ♣♣



Business & Employment Resources

Lynne Talley

In many areas of Virginia, low unemployment rates have created labor shortages, and businesses are seeking new, under-utilized labor resources. From July 2005 through March 2007, the Board funded a project by the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, *Business Awareness: Chamber and Small Business Outreach*, that focused on the advantages for small businesses of hiring and supporting qualified employees with disabilities, a significant untapped source of skilled, productive, and dedicated workers.

The Hampton Chamber, in partnership with the Department of Rehabilitative Services, Eggleston Services, Goodwill Industries, and the Virginia Assistive Technology System, developed and conducted a statewide training program to dispel popular myths about the employment of people with disabilities and educate small businesses on how to recruit, train, and support them on the job. Although this grant project has now ended, Michelle Carrera, Ph.D., the project director and President & CEO of Thomas-Carrera Consulting, has created two very useful products which can greatly extend the project's impact. Both the *Resource Guide* developed for the HRCC trainings and a *Tax Credit and Incentive Guide* for small (and all!) businesses are now available and can be downloaded from the Board's website at www.vaboard.org/grants.htm under Grant Highlights. ♣♣

Board Welcomes New Members

Nan Pemberton

Governor Tim Kaine has appointed two new members to fill recently vacated positions.

The Board's new transportation representative, **Jim Congable** of Chesterfield County, brings extensive experience from the public and private sectors.

Formerly president of the U-Haul Company of Metro New York and a Richmond Metropolitan Authority supervisor, Mr. Congable founded the Designated Drivers Association. This non-profit dedicated to preventing drunk and impaired driving added SmartRide service in 1999

to provide reliable transportation for persons who are elderly or vision-impaired. Mr. Congable is



currently working with Senior Connections, the Capitol Area Agency on Aging, to develop Ride Connection, a partnership involving service agencies, ride-providers, and clients throughout the Richmond region.

Michael J. Carrasco, parent of a person with a developmental disability, joins the Board's Education Committee. Mr. Carrasco serves on the Board of Directors of the Parent Educational Advocacy Center, a statewide resource that provides special education and advocacy training for families. He previously served on the Alexandria

Community Service Board, on the Virginia Commission on National and Community Service, and as Chairman of the Alexandria Public Schools' Special Education Advisory Committee where he worked to secure funding for an Autism Resource Specialist and raise awareness of the needs of students with autism. Mr. Carrasco, his wife, and three children reside in Alexandria. ♡

Board Hosts VCU Disability Policy Intern

In collaboration with the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Special Education Leadership and Disability Policy, the Board had the good fortune earlier this year to host an eight-week internship for Ph.D. candidate Dawn Hendricks. An experienced special education teacher and former Program Coordinator for the Faison School, Ms. Hendricks engaged in a variety of activities to broaden her knowledge of disability issues and public policy. These included monitoring hearings and key legislation during the 2007 General Assembly session, attending interagency work-groups such as the Community Integration Implementation and Systems Transformation Grant Teams, and completing a research study on six states with a designated agency for developmental disability services.

In addition to completing her doctoral studies, Ms. Hendricks is helping develop a proposal for a certificate program on autism spectrum disorders at the VCU School of Education where she has taught related courses as a member of the adjunct faculty. She also has recently accepted a staff position with the Virginia Autism Council. The Board thanks her for her excellent contributions toward its mission and wishes her continued success in her future endeavors. ♡

New Voices II: Making Them Heard

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To conclude New Voices II, a pilot Self-Advocacy Leadership Training was held on March 8 & 9 in Virginia Beach. Julie Petty, president of Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered, and Reena Wagle of the Human Services Research Institute's Self-Advocacy Leadership Network taught attendees about self- and team advocacy and how to identify an issue, gather information, develop recommendations, and present to policymakers. Support for future, similar "train the trainer" events is being sought. A related Community Education Planning Guide developed by New Voices II includes a companion guidebook for self-advocates and provides step-by-step information on organizing community education events featuring the New Voices video.

For additional information on New Voices or to obtain a copy of the video or planning guide, visit www.vcu.edu/partnership/newvoices. ♡



Meetings & Events of Interest



Statewide Rehabilitation Council for the Blind, Department for the Blind & Vision Impaired
 06/09/2007 10:00am
 Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Department for the Blind & Vision Impaired Administrative Headquarters, Room 1 & 2, 397 Azalea Avenue Richmond, VA 23227

Mental Health Planning Council
 06/20/2007 10:00am
 Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, Henrico CSB, 10299 Woodman Road, Richmond, VA 23060, (804) 727-8581

Virginia Public Guardianship & Conservator Advisory Board
 06/28/2007 10:00am
 Department for the Aging, Virginia Department for the Aging, 1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100, Richmond, VA 23229

Board Meeting
 07/11/2007 9:00am
 Board for Hearing Aid Specialists, Department of Professional and Occupational Regulation, 3600 West Broad Street, 4th Floor, Richmond, VA

Board of Directors
 07/24/2007 9:00am
 Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, VOPA Office, 1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5, Richmond, VA 23230

Virginia Brain Injury Council Quarterly Meeting
 07/27/2007 1:00pm
 Department of Rehabilitative Services, 8004 Franklin Farms Drive, Conference Rooms 101/103/105 Richmond, VA 23229

Virginia Early Hearing Detection & Intervention Program Advisory Committee
 08/10/2007 10:00am
 Department of Health, Children's Hospital, 2924 Brook Road, Richmond, VA

Disability Advisory Council (DAC)
 09/05/2007 10:00am
 Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, 1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5, Richmond, VA 23230

Virginia Public Guardianship & Conservator Advisory Board
 09/20/2007 10:00am
 Department for the Aging, Virginia Department for the Aging, 1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100, Richmond, VA 23229

Board of Directors
 09/25/2007 9:00am
 Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, VOPA Office, 1910 Byrd Avenue, Suite 5, Richmond, VA 23230

For more Meetings & Events of Interest, visit our website at www.vaboard.org/meetings.htm

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Richmond, VA 23219

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