



# VOICES & VISIONS

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

## Creating, Supporting & Sustaining High Expectations

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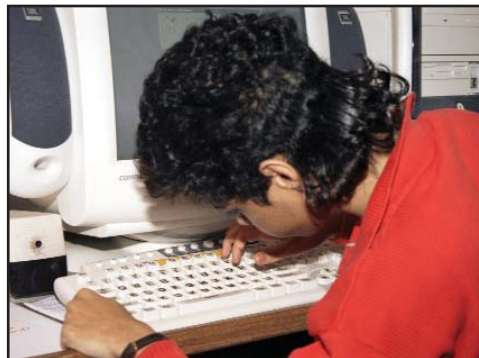
Cecily Rodriguez

September's start of the new school year coincided with the completion of a highly successful two-year Board grant initiative to engage the interest, awareness, and knowledge of students with disabilities, their families, and educators in the resources, opportunities, and strategies available for secondary education. Led by Dr. Susan Asselin of Virginia Tech's Department of Teaching & Learning and Maureen Weyer of the Virginia Assistive Technology System's Southwest Virginia Regional Site (SW-VATS), "**Creating High Expectations: Facilitating Transition to College**" focused on students and educators in middle and high schools in largely rural, underserved Virginia communities west from Danville and south from Alleghany County.

To meet the first objective of the project, numerous curriculum modules were developed and piloted. They addressed three transition areas—Assistive Technology, Careers, and Leadership—for both middle and high school needs. Each lesson was based on Virginia's Standards of Learning and included assessment tools, activities, and resources. Designed to serve as "best practices" for transition awareness and planning, each curriculum module has multiple applications for classroom instruction as well as personal, Individualized Education Plan, and program development. The modules were extensively distributed at regional Creating High Expectations events and

statewide conferences such as the Virginia Transition Forum.

Creating five regional Creating High Expectations events fulfilled the second objective of the project. At each event, the transition curriculum modules were presented along with other information necessary for successful career and college planning. Event exhibition halls showcased community service agencies, colleges, assistive technology vendors, and other transition support resources. Dr. Asselin noted that greater awareness by all participants, including teachers, of the array of available assistive technology supports was an important outcome of these events.



Between October 2006 and June 2007, over 400 students with disabilities attended the Creating High Expectations events. They were joined by 43 parents or other family members and 154 educators, transition coordinators, vocational

counselors, and administrators. Feedback was very positive. One student wrote, "Career Day was awesome! The community agencies and assistive technology were helpful. Can we do it more than once a year?"

The regional collaboration achieved by Virginia Tech, SW-VATS, and multiple local agencies was central to the project's success. Participants included Radford University, the University of Virginia at Wise, New River and Virginia Western

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## Message from the Executive Director: A Busy & Challenging Season!

Heidi Lawyer

This autumn is an especially busy and challenging season for families, advocates, service agencies, and others seeking funding for new or expanded programs. With a shortfall in projected revenues, it is anticipated that available state funds will be targeted to sustain critical programs and possibly to implement mental health reforms identified as a result of the tragedy at Virginia Tech.

Among the anticipated policy and funding decisions affecting persons with developmental disabilities and their families, the Governor's Health Reform Task Force recently made numerous policy and budgetary recommendations for improving access to health and long-term care in Virginia. The Joint Commission on Health Care will soon make its recommendation for Virginia's creation of a state agency "home" for autism services, either alone or in combination with other developmental disabilities. In the coming months, the Board (VBPD) will be closely monitoring and developing positions on legislation and funding related to these recommendations and others that support community living for persons with disabilities. In particular, we look forward to working with our advocacy partners on measures affecting Home & Community Based Waiver waiting lists, the Commonwealth's Money Follows the Person Initiative, and other Systems Transformation efforts.

On the regulatory front, the **Virginia Coalition for Students with Disabilities**, is now engaged in the process of developing comment on the draft **Regulations Governing Special Education in Virginia**. The Coalition, a flexible collaboration of organizations and individuals that includes VBPD, addresses legislative, funding, regulatory, and programmatic issues, on an as needed basis, that effect student services received under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Last February, the Coalition provided public comment in response to a Notice of Intended Regulatory Action (NOIRA) regarding the redrafting of Virginia's special education regulations in light of new IDEA regulations. In its comment, the Coalition urged that Virginia maintain its historical record of exceeding federal protections for students and their families in such areas as parental consent, age of transition, short term objectives in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), certain evaluation procedures, and other areas.

On September 25, 2007, the Virginia Department of Education presented revised draft regulations to the

state Board of Education which agreed to move forward with the next steps in the review process. The Coalition is studying that draft and will submit comprehensive recommendations during the required sixty-day public comment period. In their initial review, members of the Coalition, including VBPD, were disappointed to find the removal of key provisions and changes to others that appear to be detrimental to students with disabilities. At the Board of Education's meeting, Emily Dreyfus of JustChildren presented testimony expressing these concerns:



*"The Virginia Coalition of Students with Disabilities is disappointed with the proposed revisions to the Regulations Governing Special Education Services for Students with Disabilities in Virginia. Our initial assessment of the proposed revisions reveals that few of the changes would provide benefit to students with disabilities or their families. In fact, the proposed revisions significantly reduce critical protections and rights of many students.*

*"In particular, we are dismayed by the proposed deletion of several critical elements of Virginia's long-standing provisions for parental consent. Family involvement, particularly for students with disabilities, is a critical component for maximizing independence and achieving the educational goals that Virginia has set forth for every student."*

The draft regulations do include some positive provisions. For example, they maintain the age of transition at fourteen, despite the federal rise to age sixteen, and they maintain local advisory councils, not mandated by federal law. Additional careful analysis will be important to understanding the impact of both positive and negative provisions, and it will be up to families and advocates to make their feelings known to the Board of Education throughout the review process.

VBPD and other advocacy organizations will post announcements of public comment timeframes, public hearings, and other meetings on their websites. Links to the Coalition's February and September 2007 public comments, the draft regulations, the review process, and related resources can currently be found at [www.vaboard.org/vapolicy.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/vapolicy.htm).

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## DD Network Update: Including Young Children with Disabilities

Fred P. Orelove, Executive Director, Partnership for People with Disabilities

The federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, which authorizes Virginia's DD Network, promotes five broad outcomes: self-determination, independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion in all facets of community life. It seems intuitive that the earlier individuals with disabilities are included, the better for everyone. Children with disabilities who are included in their preschool years have models that allow them to learn new adaptive skills and are provided with realistic life experiences that prepare them to live in their community.

Moreover, preschool children who do not have a disability are given opportunities to develop positive attitudes toward others who think, move, and operate differently from themselves. They are also given models of peers who successfully achieve despite challenges. Communities and families benefit, as well. Despite these and other well-established benefits, and despite a stated commitment to inclusion at the federal level, many challenges remain to ensuring that young children with disabilities have access to high quality



inclusive settings staffed by high quality personnel. In 2006, Pamela Winton, at the University of North Carolina's Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, offered three factors contributing to this problem. First, the overall quality of child care centers in the United States is "low to mediocre." Low levels of quality clearly have a negative impact on child outcomes. Second, although we have a great deal of research-based information on effective inclusion practices, it appears that those practices are not being implemented consistently and effectively. Finally, efforts by state and federal entities to provide technical assistance, training, and resources to support and prepare early childhood personnel who serve preschoolers with disabilities have been fragmented and disconnected.

The good news is that staff serving young children can be and want to be trained to include and support children with disabilities. In 2006, the Partnership for People with Disabilities conducted a needs assessment of all child day centers and



family care homes in the Richmond metropolitan area. Thirty-eight percent of the centers reported that they did not serve any children with disabilities. Forty-four centers (30%) had never served children with disabilities. However,

of those 44 centers, 27 of them said that, if their staff had more training, they would serve children with disabilities. Overwhelmingly, the centers said that they want to receive training and information on teaching skills that work for all children.

Thus, the Partnership created "**Include Me**," an initiative designed to work directly with child care programs in the Richmond, Petersburg, and Hopewell areas. The program is providing training and on-site technical assistance to early childhood staff, teaching them specific techniques to support children with disabilities and developmental delays. For more information, please go to [www.vcu.edu/partnership/include\\_me](http://www.vcu.edu/partnership/include_me). ♡

### Return on Investment

The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy has released a new short documentary on the benefits of employing individuals with disabilities. "**How to Improve ROI (Return on Investment): Employment Solutions for Small Business**" was produced in cooperation with Virginia Commonwealth University and is being promoted nationwide.

The documentary features speakers and businesses very familiar to Virginia's disability community, including Dr. Roy Grizzard, former Commissioner of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired; Debra Ruh of TecAccess, recipient of the Board's 2006 Outstanding Achievement Award; 2005 award recipient Garth Larcen of Max's Positive Vibe Café; Brian Jones of GetLoaded.com; and moderator Amy Armstrong of the VCU Department of Rehabilitation Counseling.

To download the video or view it on-line, visit [www.dol.gov/odep/newfreedom/coc2007/videos.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/newfreedom/coc2007/videos.htm). ♡

## Partners in Policymaking Update: People Make a Difference!

Teri Barker-Morgan



**B**obby Silverstein, a featured speaker for the October Partners in Policymaking session, is a nationally recognized disability policy analyst with over thirty years experience negotiating and drafting bipartisan, consensus legislation. From

1987 through 1997, Mr. Silverstein served on Capitol Hill in Washington, including as staff director and Chief Counsel to the Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy. During this time, he was a behind-the-scenes architect of more than twenty bills enacted into law, including the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The theme of Mr. Silverstein's presentation was "The Need for Effective Disability Policy Change Agents." His eye-opening and highly constructive discussion

walked the Partners through the nuts & bolts of how to be an effective change agent, detailing the attitude, skills, and approaches needed to successfully alter policy.

Mr. Silverstein stressed that it takes people to bring about change. Every public policy has its advocates and champions. Everyone can have an impact on the process, each in his or her own way. Some may choose to share a problem with a policymaker, others may join an organization, and still others may conduct research, lobby, or run for office. Whatever the approach, in the end people acting individually and collectively can and do make a difference.

Quoting the inspirational words of groundbreaking American cultural anthropologist Margaret Meade, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." ♡♡

### YLF Update

Teri Barker-Morgan



### *Achieving Dreams & Changing the World!*

**A**t the September Board meeting, Parveen Kaur from Loudoun County and Chandler Pascale from Fredericksburg described their experiences as Delegates to the 2007 Youth Leadership Forum.



Parveen, born in India, shared her dream of returning there as a pediatrician to help sick children. About her experiences at YLF, she said, "I developed a leadership plan. This plan lists my dreams and steps I need to accomplish to reach my dreams. I have this plan posted in my room to give me encouragement. At YLF, we were taught to rely on our strengths and to challenge ourselves never, ever to give up. I am following these steps to achieve my dreams."

In his uplifting message, Chandler talked about rising above the prejudices of others and the importance of striving to be the best leader possible. He spoke about the camaraderie at YLF and the bonding that took place among the student delegates



learning and growing together. His closing proclaimed that "YLF Delegates can change the world!"

Recruitment of student Delegates for the ninth annual **Virginia Youth Leadership Forum**, from **July 14-18, 2008**, at **Christopher**

**Newport University** in Newport News, has begun. Application packets have been mailed to high schools, service providers, and other organizations across the state. They can also be downloaded and printed from the Board's website at [www.vaboard.org/y lf.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/y lf.htm) or obtained by contacting Kara White at **1-800-846-4464** (voice & TTY) or [kara.white@vbpd.virginia.gov](mailto:kara.white@vbpd.virginia.gov). The deadline for receipt of applications is 5pm, Monday, March 31, 2008.

Pass the word! YLF 2008 is just around the corner. Together, let's ensure that all Virginia high school students with disabilities and the desire to develop their leadership skills have the opportunity to join Parveen, Chandler, and their fellow YLF Delegates in achieving their dreams and changing the world! ♡♡

## Visitable, Livable Homes: Promoting Accessibility & Universal Design

Teri Barker-Morgan

As reported earlier, the 2007 Virginia General Assembly voted to expand the existing Home Modifications Tax Credit program to include new construction and to move its administration from the Department of Taxation to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). In preparation for its new responsibilities, DHCD held public comment forums across Virginia in September to inform their understanding of universal design and other accessibility features needed by individuals with both mobility and sensory disabilities. Based on this input, DHCD developed guidelines for the expanded tax credit, which will become effective on January 1, 2008, and posted them to its website at [www.dhcd.virginia.gov](http://www.dhcd.virginia.gov).

Virginia's expanded \$500 "visitation" tax credit, renamed the **Livable Home Tax Credit**, now applies to new homes that meet three key requirements. A step-free entrance must be no more than a half-inch higher than a driveway, sidewalk, or other firm route into a step-free living area. Passage space between rooms must be ample and doorways no less than thirty-two inches wide. The main floor must include no less than one bedroom, a kitchen, some entertainment area, and at least one full bathroom with sufficient maneuvering space. The tax credit also continues to apply to retrofitting of existing resi-



dential units to make them more accessible, regardless of whether an owner or resident has a disability requiring these visitability features.

Dovetailing nicely with the expansion of the Livable Home Tax Credit, the Board is excited to report significant progress toward the development of a **Virginia EasyLiving Home Coalition**. The EasyLiving Home Summit on October 3, 2007, hosted by the Board and the Virginia Housing Development Authority, brought together representatives from the homebuilding, aging, and disability communities, plus various service agencies and advocacy organizations with an interest in housing, to consider a paradigm shift in home design and construction reflecting changing demographics and related housing needs and choices for Virginians now and in the future.

A refreshing spirit of cooperation and synergy was apparent throughout the Summit, with those present viewing development of a Virginia EasyLiving Home Coalition as a win-win situation for all. Director of the Home Builders Association of Virginia, Mike Toalson, announced their financial support for Coalition start-up. Stephen Thomas Homes of Richmond challenged the group by pledging to build the first EasyLiving Home in Virginia. To learn more about the foundation for their building enthusiasm, visit [www.easylivinghome.org](http://www.easylivinghome.org). ♡

### Board Welcomes New and Returning Members

During July and August, Governor Kaine commissioned six new members to begin four year terms or complete unexpired terms on the Board. These appointments come at an exciting and busy time as the Board continues to increase its visibility and effectiveness as a policy resource and advocate within the executive branch and the community at large. Broadly representing the Commonwealth and the Board's constituencies, these new members are:

**Dorothy Clark**, Chair, Our Voices Committee, Virginia Beach, **Brian Clukey**, Library Page, Mary Riley Styles Public Library, Falls Church; **Sarah Ratner**, Associate Attorney, Labor & Employment Team, Hunton & Williams, Richmond; **Renita Ray**, Independent Living Specialist, Clinch Independent Living Services, Grundy; **Dr. Suzanne Ripley**, Project Director & Vice President, National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, Academy of Educational Development, Falls Church; **Martha Toomey**, Founding Director, Mary's Family, Orlean.

The Board is also privileged to welcome back four members reappointed by the Governor for second four year terms: John Burgess, Vienna; Joyce Knight, Mechanicsville; Kenley Mays, Lynchburg; and Jennifer Thornburg, Virginia Beach. Additional information about the Board, including brief biographies of its members, may be found at [www.vaboard.org/aboutvbpd.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/aboutvbpd.htm). ♡



L to R: Sarah Ratner, Dorothy Clark, Michael J. Carrasco, Renita Ray, Secretary of the Commonwealth Katherine K. Hanley, Martha Toomey, Suzanne Ripley & Brian Clukey

## A Home for Autism

Heidi Lawyer

The Joint Commission on Health Care, comprised of members from both the House and Senate, studies issues before the General Assembly and makes recommendations for legislative or other action. Over the past two years, its Behavioral Health Care Subcommittee has studied issues related to autism and proposed several actions to improve education and treatment options for individuals with autism. In 2007, with strong encouragement from Delegate Stephen Shannon and the Disability Commission, the Subcommittee voted to convene a workgroup to recommend a primary state agency for developing, coordinating, and overseeing autism services.

Significant increases in prevalence estimates for autism contributed to the Joint Commission's interest in this issue. In 2006, a Centers for Disease Control study approximated that one child in 150 in the United States may have an Autism Spectrum Disorder. Annual data collected through the Virginia Department of Education's December 1 child count shows that the number of students with an educational classification of autism increased by 63% from 2003 to 2006.

In its 2006 *Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia*, the Board pointed out challenges faced by Virginia due to its fragmented service system, lack of a lifespan perspective, and lack of a unified policy, planning, and service delivery "home" within state government for individuals with developmental disabilities (DD), including autism.

Under the leadership of the Joint Commission's Executive Director Kim Snead, a workgroup comprised of advocates, family members, and representatives of state agencies and other public and private organizations met three times during the summer. More than thirty individuals attended each meeting and quickly reached a consensus that their recommendations should not continue to fragment populations by disability diagnosis. Instead, they agreed that a home should be established for all developmental disabilities, not just autism. It was further agreed that specific expertise in autism would be needed to effectively meet the unique needs of this spectrum disability.

Considerable discussion followed on whether a new agency should be established or an existing agency should be utilized. Consensus was reached to recommend that the Department of Mental

Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) be redesigned to address the needs of individuals with all developmental disabilities versus just mental retardation (MR). The workgroup felt strongly that redesign was necessary to address families' concerns about current weaknesses in the administration, delivery, and oversight of MR services. One of the key concerns of autism and DD advocates was the need to assure that choice of case management providers be maintained. The workgroup made it clear that it did not support "business as usual" with no change in the current system structure.

Despite the initial consensus, strong opposition to the recommendations emerged and continued during and following the final meeting. A Northern Virginia-based autism organization strongly advocated establishment of a separate agency to serve persons with autism and low incidence developmental disabilities. Both the consensus and minority positions were presented to the Behavioral Subcommittee by Ms. Snead at their September 19, 2007 meeting. Following that meeting, another new

coalition of parents and organizations opposing the consensus recommendation emerged and submitted extensive public comment to the Joint Commission in favor of an agency other than DMHMRSAS as the home for developmental disabilities or for autism alone. On October 17, Ms. Snead presented a summary of the public comments received to the Joint Commission. In response, Commission members urged the stakeholders to reach agreement on the direction that Virginia should take, noting that, if significant conflict within that constituency continued, progress to resolve the current inadequacies of the system was unlikely.

On October 30, a fourth workgroup meeting was held, which included more diverse stakeholder representation. It was agreed to present Policy Option 7 as the consensus recommendation. This option requests the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to "develop an implementation plan to determine the State agency that should be responsible for serving individuals with autistic spectrum disorders (including whether the agency should serve individuals with any or all developmental disabilities)." On November 8, the Joint Commission will determine what, if any, action it will recommend. The Board will continue to participate in and report on these actions of critical concern. ♡♡

*In 2006, a Centers for Disease Control study approximated that one child in 150 in the United States may have an Autism Spectrum Disorder.*

## Investing in Change: News About Board Grants

Lynne Talley

### *Governor Kaine Directs State Agencies to Hire People with Disabilities*

Effective October 23, 2007, Governor Kaine has directed state agencies to tap into a qualified and productive but largely underutilized labor pool—people with disabilities.

Specifically, the Governor charges "all executive branch agencies, including institutions of higher education, boards, and commissions, to expand existing efforts for recruiting, accommodating, retaining, and advancing people with disabilities for positions available in state government."

This call for action is an outcome of the Board's State Government Employment Initiative grant to Virginia Commonwealth University's Research & Rehabilitation Training Center. The Governor's directive was strongly supported by Ed Turner, his Senior Advisor for Disability Issues, a member of the VCU-RRTC team, and recipient of the Board's 2005 Jackie Crews Award for Excellence in Leadership. The Board hopes that these and other advocacy efforts will make state agencies leaders in promoting and practicing true diversity in the workplace.

### *Competitive Grants*

In mid-December 2007, the Board will release a **Request for Proposals** for its **Public Awareness Campaign Part 2: Outreach and Public Relations**.

Part 1: Advocacy Message Development, led by Board grantee vaACCSES, is nearing completion, and its results will be presented to Board members at their December meeting. In Part 1, BrandSync, vaACCSES' collaborator, investigated public beliefs and attitudes of Virginians statewide about people with disabilities and disability issues, then developed potential outreach messages and communications strategies based on their research. Part 2 will utilize the findings and recommendations of Part 1 to implement the campaign itself. The Board anticipates investing up to \$300,000 in this project.

### *Innovative Grants*

On September 21, 2007, the Board discontinued its Innovative Grant Program in order to commit more of its limited resources to implementation of its 2007-2011 State Plan priorities. The Board will continue to seek and fund innovative ideas through its Competitive Grant Program as well as its many inter-organizational partnerships. The Board welcomes public comments on how it can best utilize its resources to address State Plan goals and advance the recommendations of its *Biennial Assessment of the Disability Services System in Virginia*.

For more information on the Board's grant-funding activities, visit [www.vaboard.org/grants.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/grants.htm). To learn more about providing public comment, visit [www.vaboard.org/aboutvbpd.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/aboutvbpd.htm). ♡♡

### **Creating, Supporting & Sustaining High Expectations** *(cont'd from page 1)*

Community Colleges, Virginia Department of Education regional Training & Technical Assistance Centers (T-TACs), the Virginia Interagency Transition Council, the Virginia Association for Higher Education and Disabilities, and others.

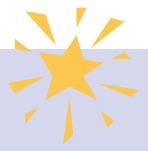
Board-funding of Creating High Expectations has ended, but its impact is growing and spreading. The curriculum modules are available for individuals, schools, and others in accessible formats through Virginia Tech's website at [www.create.org.vt.edu](http://www.create.org.vt.edu). The Virginia Departments of Rehabilitative Services and Education will fund continuing events in the southwest region by Radford University and expansion to other regions by James Madison University, Old Dominion University, and UVA-Wise. ♡♡

### **A Busy & Challenging Season!**

*(cont'd from page 2)*

Educational decisions made for and on behalf of students receiving special education services profoundly affect their futures and cannot be taken lightly. The Commonwealth has a long history of supporting family involvement, not just in the area of education but in all areas of parental decision-making. Together, we can make sure that commitment is maintained and our children are not left behind! ♡♡

**To receive timely information  
on special education issues  
join the  
Virginia Special Education Network  
at  
[www.vaboard.org/vsenform.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/vsenform.htm)**



# Meetings & Events of Interest

## Statewide Rehabilitation Council for the Blind and Vision Impaired

December 1, 2007 10:00am  
(Sponsor) Department for the Blind & Vision Impaired  
Board for the Blind and Vision Impaired, 397 Azalea Avenue,  
Richmond, VA 23227, Susan.Payne@dbvi.virginia.gov

## Mental Health Planning Council

December 5, 2007 10:00am  
Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance  
Abuse Services, DRS Office, 8004 Franklin Farms Drive,  
Richmond, VA 23229

## Virginia Public Guardianship and Conservator Advisory Board

December 6, 2007 10:00am  
Virginia Department for the Aging, 1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100,  
Richmond, VA 23229

## World of Possibilities Expo Virginia 2007

December 7-8 10:00 am  
(Sponsor) Caring Communities  
Richmond International Raceway, Richmond, VA  
<http://expo.caringcommunities.org/>

## Board of Medical Assistance Services

December 11, 2007 10:00am  
Department of Medical Assistance Services, 600 E. Broad Street,  
13th Floor Conference Room, Richmond, VA 23219

## Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorders Commission

December 12, 2007 10:00am  
Virginia Department for the Aging, 1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100,  
Richmond VA 23229

## Virginia Public Guardian & Conservator Advisory Board

December 13, 2007 10:00am  
Virginia Department for the Aging, 1610 Forest Avenue, Suite 100,  
Richmond VA 23229

## The Governing Board of the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy

January 29, 2008 9:00 am  
Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy, 1910 Byrd Avenue,  
Suite 5; Richmond, VA

**Next Board Meeting**  
**December 14, 2007**  
**Wyndham Richmond Airport Hotel**  
**4700 S. Laburnum Ave., Richmond, VA**

*For more Meetings & Events of Interest, visit our website at [www.vaboard.org/meetings.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/meetings.htm)*

### Staff

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VIRGINIA BOARD FOR  
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

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