

## **Appendix A.**

### **Statewide Information and Advocacy Resources**

Virginia's disability information services and advocacy programs are diverse and multilayered. They may operate independently or as a part of a larger agency or organization. Some of these resources and initiatives have been described in the most appropriate chapters of this assessment, usually in their introductions or under evaluation and monitoring. Others with statewide reach are included in this appendix.

Most government agencies and nongovernmental organizations have sections on their websites labeled Links, Resources, or something similar that contain lists of helpful documents and internet connections to sources of further assistance. Many agencies and organizations will also provide printed copies of documents in response to written, telephone, or e-mail requests. Some, but not all, provide their materials in foreign languages. Organizations receiving state and federal funding are required to provide information in alternate formats for individuals with disabilities who require reasonable accommodations to access the material.

The information below is not all-inclusive. Only organizations that have a statewide office or presence are listed, and the focus is on organizations that work with or provide information to persons with developmental disabilities and their families. Specific contact information for each is limited to its current website address because office addresses, telephone numbers, and e-mail addresses change more often than can be tracked by this assessment. For further information on these agencies or organizations and their programs, readers are encouraged to contact them directly.

**2-1-1 VIRGINIA**, [www.211virginia.org](http://www.211virginia.org): 2-1-1 is a service of the Virginia Department of Social Services (DSS) in partnership with the Council of Community Services, the Family Resource and Referral Center, CrisisLink, The Planning Council, the United Way of Virginia, and the United Way of Greater Richmond and Petersburg. By dialing 211 or visiting the service's interactive website, individuals can receive free information on available community services. Trained professionals respond to calls and e-mail inquiries submitted via the website with suggested resources that may be of assistance from a large database of health and human services in Virginia. Referrals are confidential, and the website includes a link to information on eligibility for benefits available through DSS. Government agencies, nonprofit community-based organizations, and businesses that provide health and human services for the citizens of Virginia are encouraged to list their services. Virginia EasyAccess and SeniorNavigator, two interrelated and complementary resources, are also described in this listing.

**American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia (ACLU)**, [www.acluva.org](http://www.acluva.org): This private, nonprofit affiliate of the national ACLU promotes the civil liberties and civil rights of all residents through litigation, public education, and other activities. Its principal mission is "to protect constitutionally mandated freedoms that government tends to erode and to advance rights

clearly intended by the Constitution but never fully implemented in our society.” Issues relevant to individuals with disabilities that it addresses include, but are not limited to, free speech, religious rights, access to government, due process and criminal justice, privacy rights, and students’ rights.

**The Arc of Virginia**, [www.arcofva.org](http://www.arcofva.org): This nonprofit organization advocates with and on behalf of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families for changes in state policies. It promotes the creation of individualized, self-determined, community-based supports that enable people with disabilities to lead productive, fulfilling lives. The Arc of Virginia’s 24 chapters across the state each provide a variety of services and supports for individuals with disabilities and their families appropriate to their communities’ needs. Together with the statewide organization, they provide training and technical assistance to service providers on strategies that enhance family involvement and share families’ perspectives with Virginia’s policymakers.

**Autism Society of America (ASA) chapters**: While there is no state chapter, local Autism Society affiliates have a strong statewide presence. Chapters include the Autism Society of Central Virginia ([www.asacv.org](http://www.asacv.org)), the Northern Virginia Chapter ([www.asanv.org](http://www.asanv.org)), the Tidewater Chapter ([www.tidewaterasa.org](http://www.tidewaterasa.org)), and the Peninsula Autism Society ([www.peninsulautism.org](http://www.peninsulautism.org)). All of these chapters share information with individuals, families, and professionals on treatment, education, research, and advocacy. They hold support meetings, training, and other events and are active in legislative advocacy.

**Autistic Self-Advocacy Network**, [www.autisticadvocacy.org](http://www.autisticadvocacy.org): This nonprofit group seeks to advance the principles of the disability rights movement and change public perceptions about the capacity of individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). It works through public policy and community advocacy to encourage individuals to speak out for themselves on topics of interest to them.

**Brain Injury Association of Virginia (BIAV)**, [www.biav.net](http://www.biav.net): BIAV’s nonprofit mission is to improve the quality of life of both persons with brain injury and their families and to support efforts to prevent brain injuries in Virginia. Services that it provides to individuals with brain injury, their families, service providers, and advocates include outreach to those affected by brain injuries, maintenance of an extensive clearinghouse of brain injury information, referrals for additional information and services, a toll-free Family Help Line, support groups, and training and recreation programs for individuals with brain injury and their families.

**Center for Excellence in Autism Spectrum Disorders**, [www.vcuautismcenter.org](http://www.vcuautismcenter.org): This collaboration of the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Rehabilitation and Research Training Center (RRTC), VCU School of Education, and the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), brings together experts and practitioners from a variety of fields who have varying professional perspectives related to autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). One of its first major initiatives has been to assist VDOE’s work to improve the responsiveness and quality of

programming provided for students with ASD by selected local school divisions across the Commonwealth.

**Centers for Independent Living (CILs)**, [www.vadrs.org/cbs/cils.htm](http://www.vadrs.org/cbs/cils.htm): The federal *Rehabilitation Act* of 1973, as amended, authorizes CILs to provide services and advocacy that promote the leadership, independence, and productivity of people with significant disabilities. CILs are nonprofit, non-residential places of action and coalition where persons with disabilities become empowered and develop the skills necessary to make decisions and choices about their own lives. They work with individuals and local communities to remove barriers to independence and to ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities. All CILs provide the core services of advocacy for individuals and for system change, information and referrals, peer counseling, and training in independent living. Other services offered by CILs vary and may include, but are not limited to: disability awareness outreach, information on accessibility, educational advocacy, housing advocacy, and nursing home transition services, and general disability information and referrals. Additional information on CILs appears in the Community Supports chapter of this assessment.

The **Virginia Association of Centers for Independent Living (VACIL)**, [www.vacil.org](http://www.vacil.org)) provides guidance and policy support for the Commonwealth's CILs, represents them before the General Assembly on issues of importance, and has improved uniform practices among CILs in recent years through acquisition of grants. VACIL advocates for the inclusion and integration of individuals with disabilities in communities and promotes the professional development, improvement, and expansion of the community-based, consumer-controlled CILs.

**Cerebral Palsy of Virginia**, [www.cerebralpalsyofvirginia.org](http://www.cerebralpalsyofvirginia.org): This nonprofit organization serves children and adults with cerebral palsy and other developmental disabilities such as Downs Syndrome, autism, muscular dystrophy, intellectual disabilities, and learning disabilities, as well as those who have vision, hearing, or speech impairments. It advocates on behalf of them and their families and provides programs and services to help them attain maximum independence and inclusion in their communities. Guidance is provided on the availability of assistive technology, adaptive toys, computer software, books, and other resources that are available for loan, allowing individuals to test and use these items in their home and ensure their effectiveness before making an expensive purchase.

**Commonwealth Autism Service (CAS)**, [www.autismva.org](http://www.autismva.org): This organization provides leadership and a statewide system of services to maximize the quality of life and potential of Virginians with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) across their lifespans. CAS advocates for implementation of best practices for treatment and for state policy changes that improve service access and availability. In recent years, it has been partially funded by the Virginia General Assembly to provide ongoing support for families and professionals, develop regional service networks, provide technical assistance and training, and conduct conferences. It has developed and implemented a successful model of instructional support for students with ASD in classrooms across the state.

**Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) of Virginia**, [www.phonehome.org](http://www.phonehome.org): Located in Richmond, HOME is certified by both the Virginia Real Estate Board and the Virginia Fair Housing Board to provide fair housing classes covering topics such as money management, tenant's rights, purchasing a home, fair housing reasonable accommodations, and home modifications. Courses are offered to the general public periodically throughout the year and can also be arranged for a company or other group upon request. HOME also helps income-eligible Virginians afford a home purchase by providing financial assistance to cover closing costs and down payments.

**Human Rights Council of Virginia**, <http://chr.vipnet.org/index.html>: Formerly called the Council on Human Rights, the Council safeguards individuals from discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, gender, age, disability, or pregnancy/childbirth related medical conditions. In addition to promoting public awareness of human rights for all citizens of the Commonwealth, it is empowered under Chapter 39 of the *Virginia Human Rights Act* (2.2-3900A, *et seq.*) to investigate complaints under that statute as well as Title VII of the federal *Human Rights Act* of 1964, as amended; the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (ADA); and the *Age Discrimination in Employment Act*. It has jurisdiction in specified matters relating to public accommodations, including educational institutions, real estate transactions, and employment. The Council receives and reviews discrimination complaints in these areas of its jurisdiction, attempts mediation, conducts investigations, and renders determinations.

**Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program**, [www.elderrightsva.org](http://www.elderrightsva.org): The national *Older Americans Act* requires all states to provide advocacy services for older persons receiving long-term care. The Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA) contracts with the 25 local **Area Agencies on Aging (AAA)** to provide these services through the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program. The State Ombudsman, who has expertise in both long-term care and advocacy, coordinates and supports designated local ombudsmen who completed a certification curriculum and then identify, investigate, and resolve complaints made by or on behalf of older persons. Individuals needing advocacy services can contact the ombudsman at their local AAA directly or through VDA's statewide toll-free telephone hotline.

**The March of Dimes of Virginia**, [www.marchofdimes.com](http://www.marchofdimes.com): Headquartered in Richmond, with offices in Roanoke, Harrisonburg, and Chesapeake, this organization conducts research, community outreach, education, and advocacy to improve the lives of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality.

**Medicaid Waiver Technical Assistance Center (MWTAC)**, [www.endependence.org](http://www.endependence.org) (under Services): This center provides materials and workshops with detailed information about Virginia's Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Waivers to assist individuals with disabilities and their families understand how to access services available under these waivers. Funding from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) has supported the work of MWTAC, including initiation and ongoing communications support of the **Medicaid Waiver Advocacy Network** affiliated with MWTAC. This independent, voluntary network of individuals and representatives of organizations across the state with expertise in

Medicaid HCBS Waivers is committed to improving knowledge of and access to waiver services.

**Medical Home Plus**, [www.medhomeplus.org](http://www.medhomeplus.org): This nonprofit organization facilitates family, professional, and community partnerships to create a more seamless service delivery system that improves the quality of life for children with special health care needs or disabilities. Its website includes information for medical professionals and a family resource center detailing laws related to special needs, financing of a child's needs, planning for education and future needs, referral resources, preventative services, and information regarding diagnosis-specific conditions such as autism.

**Mental Health America of Virginia (MHAV)**, [www.mhav.org](http://www.mhav.org): This nonprofit, nonpartisan organization promotes mental health, develops services to prevent mental illness, and works to ensure that children and adults with mental illness receive proper care and treatment. It advocates for public and private sector policies, services, and financing to ensure adequate and appropriate detection, treatment, and rehabilitation for mental illness and for housing and other supports. It raises public awareness of mental illness in order to eliminate the stigma that prevents individuals from seeking help when they need it.

**The Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA)**, [www.mda.org](http://www.mda.org): This volunteer health agency, founded in 1950 by adults with muscular dystrophy (MD) and parents of children with MD, seeks to conquer neuromuscular diseases that affect more than a million Americans. Its national website contains information and educational resources for families, including a zip-code-based locator to assist them in finding local offices which can direct them to other community and governmental organizations for assistance. MDA's Virginia offices are located in Richmond, Hampton Roads, Chesapeake, and Fairfax.

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) of Virginia**, [www.namivirginia.org](http://www.namivirginia.org): This organization provides information and support for those affected by mental illness, including teens, family members, friends, veterans, and others. It maintains a hotline for information on mental illness and makes referrals to local self-help groups that provide support, share additional information on community services, and advocate on behalf of individuals with mental illness and their families. NAMI of Virginia's Richmond office is responsible for state-level policy and legislative advocacy.

**Office of Human Rights (OHR)**, [www.dbhds.virginia.gov/OHR-default.htm](http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/OHR-default.htm): This office within the **Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS)** fulfills the *Code of Virginia* (37.1-84.1) requirement for protection of legal and human rights of individuals with mental illness, intellectual disability, or substance abuse disorder who receive services in facilities or programs operated, licensed, or funded by that agency. OHR monitors compliance with state human rights regulations, promotes the basic precepts of human dignity, advocates for the rights of persons with disabilities, and manages the human rights dispute resolution program. More information can be found in the monitoring and evaluation section of the Community Supports chapter of this assessment.

**Parent Education Advocacy Training Center (PEATC)**, [www.peatc.org](http://www.peatc.org): Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, PEATC is Virginia's parent education, support, training, and information center committed to building better futures for children with disabilities. PEATC staff work collaboratively with families, schools, and service professionals to improve opportunities for excellence in education as well as personal success in school and community life. Its disability information development and training curricula for families and professionals are easy to understand, experience-based, and research-tested. It also provides information on the *Comprehensive Services Act*, foster care, transition services, and other areas of interest to families.

**Parent Resource Centers (PRCs)**, funded by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and found in most but not all school divisions, work closely with PEATC. Drawing on a variety of state and community resources, they are a local source of assistance, referrals, and workshops on special education issues for parents and educators. A list of PRCs across Virginia can be found at [www.doe.virginia.gov/special\\_ed/parents/parent\\_resource\\_centers.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/parents/parent_resource_centers.pdf).

**Parent to Parent (PTP) of Virginia**, [www.ptpofva.com](http://www.ptpofva.com): This program brings together parents of children with disabilities and special health care needs to serve as mentors for one another, exchange information, and provide peer support. It also develops educational materials, sponsors training workshops, and advocates for family-directed care and supports that enable children with special medical needs to live in communities with their families.

**Parents of Autistic Children (POAC)**, [www.poac-nova.org](http://www.poac-nova.org): This organization, which began in the early 1990s in northern Virginia, principally Fairfax County, became statewide in 2007. It serves as a clearinghouse for research-based instructional methodologies for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD), advocates for their use in public and private schools, and provides training to enable successful implementation.

**Partnership for People with Disabilities (PPD)**, [www.vcu.edu/partnership](http://www.vcu.edu/partnership): The Partnership, as it is commonly referenced, at **Virginia Commonwealth University** is Virginia's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities as authorized by the federal *Developmental Disabilities and Bill of Rights Act* of 2000 (DD Act). It operates more than 30 state and federally funded programs, staffed by more than 100 professionals and students, who provide support for individuals with disabilities and their families. Its activities are diverse and include, but are not limited to: advocacy on issues affecting individuals with disabilities and their families, promotion of changes to related state policies, training, and development of resources for families and professionals. Early intervention, education, health, and self-advocacy are among the many topics that those activities address. The Partnership maintains an interdisciplinary approach in all its activities as it strives to create communities in which all people, with and without disabilities, can live, work, and play together with choices and independence. Its collaborators include disability service providers, elementary and secondary schools and school divisions, higher education, state and local agencies, and professional organizations.

**SeniorNavigator**, [www.SeniorNavigator.org](http://www.SeniorNavigator.org): This private, nonprofit organization has grown out of a collaboration of the Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA), local governments, and hundreds of private sector participants to become a national model for aging and disability information and service referrals. Individuals seeking assistance can now access more than 23,000 health and community support resources for seniors, adults with disabilities, their families, and caregivers online directly or through a statewide network of volunteers. At the time of this assessment, a grant from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities is enabling SeniorNavigator to further expand its network of VirginiaNavigator Centers operated in partnership with local and regional governmental and nongovernmental organizations. 2-1-1 Virginia and Virginia EasyAccess, two interrelated and complementary resources, are also described in this listing.

**vaACCSES (Virginia Association of Community Rehabilitation Programs)**,

[www.vaACCSES.org](http://www.vaACCSES.org): Members of this association provide employment, day support, training, and support services for persons with disabilities. vaACCSES advocates on public policy areas of interest to its members and provides educational resources and training for them, other service providers, individuals with disabilities, and their families. Training topics include work incentives for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) beneficiaries. vaACCSES is also a Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) project under the federal *Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act*, providing benefits counseling to individuals who wish to work but need to maintain public benefits such as Medicaid. Additional information on work incentives can be found in the Employment chapter of this assessment.

**Virginia Advocates United Leading Together (VAULT)**, [www.virginiavault.org](http://www.virginiavault.org): Created through a collaboration of Virginia self-advocates and disability organizations with support from the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University, this new organization fulfills a mandate under the federal *Developmental Disabilities Act* that the Board support a statewide organization led by self-advocates. VAULT applied for federal 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status in April 2011, and its inaugural Board of Directors included representatives from the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network, Hearing Loss Association, People First, Virginia Association of Centers for Independent Living (VACIL), Virginia Association of the Deaf-Blind, Virginia Organization of Consumers Asserting Leadership (VOCAL), and Youth Leadership Forum alumni.

**Virginia Alliance for Community**: This collaboration of The Arc of Virginia, the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University, and the Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy was created in 2008 as a united advocacy voice for the civil rights of Virginians with intellectual and developmental disabilities. More than 100 public and private agencies and organizations subsequently expressed support for its “Community for All” message requesting that the Governor and legislature build capacity for community services and redirect funds from costly

institutional residential settings to community-based alternatives. Additional information can be found at [www.thearcofva.org/advocacy/vaac.html](http://www.thearcofva.org/advocacy/vaac.html) and [www.vaboard.org/vapolicy.htm](http://www.vaboard.org/vapolicy.htm).

**Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS)**, [www.vats.org](http://www.vats.org): This statewide program, authorized and funded by the federal *Assistive Technology Act* of 2004, as amended, and administered by the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS), promotes public awareness and provides training and technical assistance about the availability and use of assistive technology for people with disabilities. Staff at its central and three regional offices demonstrate or assist with training on specific devices, provide information on equipment sources, and coordinate an equipment exchange program and statewide network of recycling programs. They can also provide information on low-interest loans that make devices more affordable. More detailed information on VATS and other assistive technology resources is available in the Community Supports chapter of this assessment.

**Virginia Association of Area Agencies on Aging (VAAAA)**, [www.vaaaa.org](http://www.vaaaa.org): This private, nonprofit organization supports information sharing, training, and other educational activities for and by the state's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) in their work on behalf of older Virginians and their families. It also serves as the AAAs' liaison with the Virginia Department for the Aging (VDA) and other state and national public and private organizations working on aging issues.

**Virginia Association of Community Services Boards (VACSB)**, [www.vacsb.org](http://www.vacsb.org): As the statewide organization for Virginia's network of 37 local Community Services Boards (CSBs) and three Behavioral Health Authorities (BHAs), the VACSB represents those local service providers on matters of state and federal public policy, including funding, legislation, and regulation. VACSB advocates on behalf of the CSBs and BHAs, engages in public education activities, and promotes the improvement and expansion of an accessible, affordable, statewide public system providing prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation services for individuals with mental illness, intellectual disabilities, or substance abuse disorders. The VACSB website offers e-learning opportunities, conference information, legislative updates, and links to other resources and services for individuals with disabilities and their families.

**Virginia Autism Resource Center (VARC)**, [www.varc.org](http://www.varc.org): At the time of this assessment, Virginia Commonwealth University plans to merge VARC into its new Center for Excellence in Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), previously described in this appendix. Until then, VARC continues to serve as a separate resource. It provides information and referral, training on evidence-based best practices, and direct consultations for individuals with ASD, their families, professionals, school divisions, and other agencies. It also maintains an extensive internet lending library and assists professionals pursuing a Certificate on Autism Spectrum Disorders baccalaureate degree.

**Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD)**, [www.vaboard.org](http://www.vaboard.org): The author of this assessment, often referred to simply as the Virginia Board, is the Commonwealth's federally authorized Developmental Disabilities (DD) Planning Council under the *Developmental*

*Disabilities and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act).* DD Councils are mandated by federal statute to engage in advocacy to promote systems change and barrier elimination that will build service capacity and contribute to the development of a coordinated, comprehensive system of services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance for individuals with developmental and other disabilities. In fulfilling this mandate, the Virginia Board supports public and private policies and practices that enable Virginians with disabilities to live successfully in communities of their own choice with access to individually appropriate services and supports. Through its advocacy, policy, and investment activities, the Board leverages public and private funds and works in partnership with numerous organizations, state and local agencies, private nonprofit service providers, and institutions of higher education throughout the state to increase the independence, productivity, and integration of people with disabilities. The activities that it conducts directly or funds include educating policymakers, demonstrating new approaches to services and supports, leadership and advocacy training for individuals with disabilities and their family members, self-advocacy, research, outreach, information distribution, and expanded public awareness.

**Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Ombudsman Program**, [www.doe.virginia.gov/special\\_ed/resolving\\_disputes/ombudsman/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/resolving_disputes/ombudsman/index.shtml): The VDOE Ombudsman acts as a source of information and referral, answers individuals' questions, and assists in the resolution of concerns and issues. The program serves as a resource for parents in non-legal special education matters and does not provide direct advocacy. No formal complaint forms or documentation are involved. The interests and rights of all parties involved are taken into account in considering any given instance or concern. The Ombudsman's role is neutral as an independent advocate for a fair process, encouraging all parties to resolve differences at the lowest organizational level possible through appropriate informal or formal dispute-resolution processes. There is a focus on listening and providing information, discussing issues and options, and making referrals to other services, including mediation.

**Virginia Easy Access**, [www.easyaccess.virginia.gov](http://www.easyaccess.virginia.gov): This interactive, online gateway to information on public and private long-term services and supports for older adults and adults with disabilities was developed in partnership by the Commonwealth of Virginia, SeniorNavigator, and 2-1-1 Virginia as a part of the state's **No Wrong Door** initiative. Three different search functions allow users to access the extensive **VirginiaNavigator** database of service providers and other resources related to community supports, emergency preparedness, finances, housing, transportation, legal rights, veterans' issues, and other topics. Telephone and e-mail support for the website is provided by 2-1-1 Virginia. SeniorNavigator and 2-1-1 Virginia, two interrelated and complementary resources, are also described in this listing.

**Virginia Fair Housing Office**, [www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/fho\\_index.cfm](http://www.dpor.virginia.gov/dporweb/fho_index.cfm): Details on discrimination prohibited by fair housing laws and of the processes for investigating and resolving complaints under those laws may be found in the Housing chapter of this assessment. In addition to its role in these processes, the Fair Housing Office provides free training for state and local officials, housing providers, and individuals.

**Virginia Housing Search**, [www.virginiahousingsearch.com](http://www.virginiahousingsearch.com): This housing locator service, launched by the Virginia Housing Development Authority (VHDA) in 2009, provides detailed information about rental properties and helps people find housing that best fits their needs. It can be accessed at no cost, 24 hours per day online or Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, using a toll-free, bilingual call center. Individuals can search for rental housing using a wide variety of criteria and special, accessible mapping features, and listings provide detailed information on each available unit. The service also provides links to housing resources and helpful tools for renters such as an affordability calculator, rental checklist, and information on renters' rights and responsibilities.

**Virginia Legal Aid**, [www.valegalaid.org](http://www.valegalaid.org): Free or low cost legal services are provided for individuals with low incomes on matters such as immigration, health care, family and domestic violence, elder law, debt and consumer issues, criminal defense, employment, education, benefits, and housing. In addition, educational materials and referrals on topics including debtor's rights, elder law, and eligibility for social and other services are available from the central education site in Richmond and satellite offices in Charlottesville, Harrisonburg, Lexington, Petersburg, Roanoke, and other locations across the state. The website contains an electronic listing of all offices in Virginia, and not all services are available at all offices.

The **Legal Aid Justice Center** ([www.justice4all.org](http://www.justice4all.org)), the legal aid entity based in Charlottesville, performs significant work in the area of disability. Its **Civil Advocacy Program** addresses legal issues in housing, public benefits, employment, consumer protection, and the rights of the elderly and individuals with disabilities. Its **JustChildren** program works to ensure that young people have access to the services and supports necessary for them to live successfully in their communities by providing direct legal services for local families with children from birth to age 18 through its offices in Charlottesville, Richmond, and Petersburg. It also engages in statewide advocacy on important issues affecting Virginia children. Legal representation is provided in matters concerning appropriate education services for children with disabilities, necessary treatment services for children with psychiatric concerns, and services and supports required for children involved with the juvenile courts to remain in their communities. JustChildren also engages in community education and works with other statewide advocacy efforts involving foster care, the juvenile justice system, and other issues.

**Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy (VOPA)**, [www.vopa.virginia.gov](http://www.vopa.virginia.gov): As the Commonwealth's federally authorized and funded Protection and Advocacy entity under the *Developmental Disabilities and Bill of Rights Act* of 2000 (DD Act), VOPA's mission is to "protect and advance the legal, human, and civil rights of persons with disabilities; combat and prevent abuse, neglect, and discrimination; and promote independence, choice, and self-determination by persons with disabilities." It is also authorized in state statute as an independent state agency but does not receive any state funds. Because VOPA does not have unlimited funds, priorities and goals for its activities are set annually by its governing board. All individuals who contact VOPA requesting assistance receive appropriate information or referrals; however, only individuals with problems targeted in VOPA's goals and priorities may

be provided with advocacy or legal assistance. Information on VOPA's programs, goals, and objectives can be obtained on its website or by calling its toll-free telephone line.

**Virginia Organization of Consumers Asserting Leadership (VOCAL)**,

[www.vocalvirginia.org](http://www.vocalvirginia.org): Initially formed to address mental health and mental illness concerns, VOCAL is increasingly involved in providing services for individuals with multiple disabilities, including intellectual disabilities. The VOCAL Network is a statewide coalition of individuals with disabilities and their families united to provide a voice for individual empowerment and to foster a mental health system driven by individuals with disabilities themselves. Coalition partners act as peer mentors and work with other advocacy organizations to protect individual rights and to fight discrimination, encourage the exchange of information, build service system capacity, improve state mental health policies, and increase the well-being of individuals with mental illness, intellectual disabilities, or substance abuse problems.

**Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC)**, [www.vplc.org](http://www.vplc.org): This nonprofit organization advocates on poverty issues of statewide importance on behalf of Virginians with low incomes. VPLC supplies local legal aid staff members, private attorneys, and people with low incomes with technical assistance, training, and publications that exclusively address the legal rights of Virginia's poor. It also sponsors an annual legal aid conference and provides assistance with legislative and administrative proposals affecting Virginians with low incomes. VPLC areas of interest include health care, housing, public benefits, and consumer, elder, and family rights.

**Voices for Virginia's Children**, [www.vakids.org](http://www.vakids.org): Established in 1994 to champion public policies in the interest of Virginia's children, this statewide research and advocacy organization conducts policy analyses and distributes reports on multiple issues, including federal spending trends and tax policies. It also conducts research regarding children living in poverty, provides information on domestic and international adoptions, and raises awareness of issues, forms coalitions, and organizes grassroots advocacy efforts. Its areas of focus have included improvements to permanent planning for youth in foster care, supports for immigrant families, and improved access to quality preschool education for all children.