2025 Program Performance Report HGHLGHTS





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I am thrilled to share with you the highlights of the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities' achievements throughout the 2023 federal fiscal year. Over the past year, we have made remarkable strides towards our goals.

Collaborating closely with community leaders and organizations, we have been steadfast in our commitment to advancing inclusion and accessibility for individuals with developmental disabilities across all aspects of life. We continue to provide resources and

training to grow a strong network of self-advocates and family member leaders to drive the change they want to see come to Virginia.

Our Board has played an active role in shaping policies and legislation aimed at enhancing the lives of individuals with developmental disabilities. Through our tireless efforts, we have ensured that the voices of those we serve are not only heard but also acted upon.

As we set our sights on the future, our dedication to advocating for the rights and well-being of individuals with developmental disabilities remains unwavering.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to all our Board members and staff for their dedication and hard work throughout the year.

Warm regards,

Niki Zimmerman, Board Chair

Mission

To create a Commonwealth that advances opportunities for independence, personal decision-making, and full participation in community life for individuals with developmental and other disabilities.

Vision

Virginians with developmental and other disabilities direct their own lives and choose how they live, learn, work, and play.



he Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, your go-to hub for making Virginia more inclusive for everyone. Since 1992, we've been working hard to make sure people with developmental disabilities (DD) and other disabilities get the support they need. We advise the Governor, the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, lawmakers, and others on how to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Our mission? To make sure everyone can fully participate in community life.

We're not just talk - we take action! We educate policymakers, research the disability services system, and invest in new ways to support people with disabilities. Plus, we provide training and spread awareness in communities across Virginia.

With 40 members, including people with disabilities and their families, our Board is a diverse team dedicated to making a difference. And guess what? You can join the conversation too! We meet every quarter in Richmond and love hearing from you about how we can make Virginia even better for everyone. Got questions or ideas? Reach out to us anytime. Let's work together to create a more inclusive Virginia! The **first goal** is for people with disabilities to have better access to supports so they can live in the community.



The Board outlined four main goals in its State Plan. Each Board activity is categorized according to the corresponding State Plan goal it aligns with.

Information Access

During the development of the VBPD's five-year State Plan, VBPD Board members recognized that accessing information on community-based services was a significant challenge for people with disabilities and their families. To address this, an information access assessment was prioritized and released in August 2022. This year, a VBPD-funded Information Access Summit was held, featuring opening remarks from Virginia's Secretary of Health and Human Resources, John Littel. The summit attracted 54 attendees. A post-conference survey showed promising results: 96% of respondents found the summit beneficial, learning about barriers to accessing disability services and potential solutions.

Following the summit, the Information Access Steering Committee began planning and implementing further actions, including the <u>Information Access Champions initiative</u>. A champion is an agency or organization that pledges to make its information as inclusive and accessible as possible. It agrees to evaluate and improve its information accessibility in collaboration with the disability community.

Assessment

In FFY 2023, the VBPD completed the <u>Medicaid Consumer-Directed Services</u> <u>assessment</u>. Our research involved analyzing data, reviewing the literature, and collaborating with a consultant to develop 15 policy recommendations. We shared the assessment with 140 General Assembly members and 48 other stakeholders.

We advocated for the policy recommendations through public and written comments. This effort has already led to positive results. Two recommendations have been adopted. These changes ensure that legally responsible individuals can still provide Medicaid consumer-directed services and address any conflicts of interest that may arise.

Workgroup Participation & Collaboration

VBPD staff engaged in 14 workgroups focusing on community supports. Their involvement led to recommendations supporting three best practices: 1) using evidence-based practice, 2) leveraging technology to reduce administrative burden, and 3) ensuring accessible, jargon-free information - this latter recommendation was implemented. Additionally, a recommendation regarding soliciting feedback from selfadvocates, made last year, was implemented in the current Federal Fiscal Year (FFY).

The VBPD embraces opportunities for collaboration. Collaboration can be key to making positive change. This year the VBPD collaborated in the following ways:

- To promote the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ) Effective Communications in Healthcare Settings roundtable event.
 VBPD collaborated with DOJ staff by sharing event information with state agencies and providers, contributing to over 1,000 people attending the webinar.
- Presented to 30 No Wrong Door and Administration for Community Living staff on the information ecology of the disability services system and the importance of better understanding information management systems.
- In collaboration with The Arc of Virginia and The Partnership for People with Disabilities, met with Sentara Healthcare

to discuss Vanguard Landing, a proposed 185-bed campus-style community for people with DD. VBPD staff recommended that Sentara consider a multiuse development with a set-aside of affordable units for people with disabilities.

- Participated in the Digital Opportunity Plan focus group, during which it supported the best practice of affordable and accessible digital opportunities.
- Collaborated with the VA Association of Centers for Independent Living for a meeting with the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS). The aim was to figure out how to apply new CMS flexibilities, which allow for a targeted disregard of Social Security Disability Income (SSDI).
- In collaboration with other stakeholders, successfully advocated against a proposed rule in the Family and Individual Supports waiver application. This rule would have required legally responsible individuals to submit their worked hours through electronic visit verification. In addition, VBPD staff suggested that the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) update outdated language access information in the waiver application, which DMAS adopted.

Legislative Advocacy

VBPD staff testified on seven bills concerning community supports, educating 70 legislators. Three of these bills were approved, which will:

- 1. Expand Medicaid coverage for wheelchairs.
- 2. Increase flexibility in Medicaid spending caps for two services.
- 3. Remove the term "handicap" from the Code of Virginia.

Additionally, we successfully opposed a bill that would have expanded the list of offenses that are ineligible for the applications of deferred disposition provisions for defendants with autism or intellectual disabilities.

Goal 1: Grants & Investments (pages 7-9)

The VBPD provided a \$2,500 grant to support Sportable's RVA Adaptive Sports Festival in April 2023. The event aimed to educate participants about available resources for adaptive sports and inspire them to participate in inclusive sports. Sixty individuals attended the event. The event had promising early outcomes, based on the event survey. Across all survey respondents, 52 of 60 individuals (87%) reported that the event increased their knowledge about inclusive recreational opportunities.



Active Grants:

1. George Mason University (GMU)



The VBPD gave George Mason University (GMU) a \$149,921 grant to better understand how and where people find information about disability services and supports in Virginia. The

project began on April 1, 2023, and will conclude on May 31, 2024. This year's activities included setting up project rules and training for the project team, interviewing 60 people from 32 agencies across Virginia, and developing a codebook to help them understand what they learned from the interviews.

GMU will use what they found to develop a final report. This report will review what they learned and include recommendations to make getting information easier. Outcomes from the report will be reported in 2024.

2. Project Living-Well – A Project of National Significance

The VBPD continued working with the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) on a project called "Project Living Well." The project's goal is to help people with DD who use Home and Communitybased Services (HCBS) and those waiting for services. It also wants to create a model that others can use to grow and improve HCBS. The project started in September 2017 and was extended through September 2023.

The VBPD has been developing trend reports about the disability services system. The VBPD published two trend reports on health and community supports this year. The VBPD also created comics to explain reports from last year on Early Intervention and Education. The comics were translated into Spanish. This year's reports and comics were downloaded 899 times from the VBPD website. <u>View</u> resources developed through Project Living Well.

3. Children's Assistive Technology Service (C.A.T.S.)



The VBPD finished funding a \$41,000 grant to Children's Assistive Technology Service at Emory & Henry College for a

project called "Making Assistive Technology Accessible and Meaningful to Early Intervention Families in Rural Southwest Virginia." This project started on August 1, 2021. It aimed to help babies and toddlers with developmental disabilities and their families in southwest Virginia by giving them assistive technology devices, teaching them how to use them, and finally help the children develop self-determination skills and

Goal 1: Grants/Investments

support the family to better meet their child's needs.

During 2023, they 1) Gave assistive technology devices to 14 babies and toddlers with DD and taught 17 family members how to use them; 2) Worked with early intervention coordinators at three Community Services Boards (CSBs) in rural southwest Virginia to understand what assistive technology the babies and toddlers and their families needed 3) Bought 44 pieces of equipment for their "Lending Library," which adds to the collection of assistive technology and medical equipment that families can borrow. These activities had positive impacts:

- 88% of participating family members who took a survey said they were happy with the training, help, or device their child got.
- 75% said their child started doing more things on their own, and they felt more empowered.

The project ended on July 31, 2023, and they'll keep reporting outcomes for two years.

4. Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH)

Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing The VBPD began funding a \$214,450 grant to the Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing on January 1, 2023, for a project to help the Support Service Provider (SSP) workforce. During 2023, they 1) Worked with Reynolds Community College and the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired to create two new policies and procedures for picking who can join the program and how SSPs get trained; 2) Developed an online training program and trained 17 SSPs on how to interact with clients who are deafblind; 3) Trained 12 deafblind people, 8 of whom had DD, on how to use SSP services; and 4) Started developing surveys to see how the project is helping in FFY 2024. They think deafblind clients will begin hiring qualified SSPs in early FFY 2024.

5. Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU)



The VBPD continued funding a \$111,364 grant to the state's Partnership for People with Disabilities at VCU for a project

called "Training on Inclusion, Diversity and Equity" (TIDE). The project started in August 2021 and ended in December 2022, after which two years of post-grant monitoring began.

In 2023, they continued meeting with a diverse steering committee that included providers, three self-advocates, two parents, diversity experts, and Virginia Commonwealth University's School of Education staff to advise on project planning and development. They also gave diversity training to 221 people using Zoom and online modules. These activities has positive impacts:

Goal 1: Grants/Investments

- 89% of people who took a survey said they were happy with the training modules.
- 100% said the information was well presented.
- 87% felt more knowledgeable.
- 100% felt the training was helpful in their work.

In 2024, they will work with others to see how the project has helped in the long term, like how community-based organizations can apply the training to improve their policies and practices. They will also recruit other organizations to use the training with their staff. <u>View DEI training available online</u>.

6. The Arc of Virginia



The VBPD awarded a \$200,000 grant to The Arc of Virginia for a project called "Diversity, Inclusion & Visibility," which started on January 16, 2023. The goal of the project is to create an awareness campaign to teach the public

how valuable people with disabilities are in the workplace, neighborhood and community.

During 2023, they 1) Worked with Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) groups, including the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities (VCIC), to learn what people know and think about people with disabilities; 2) Formed an advisory group made up of five people with developmental disabilities, eight family members, as well as disability advocacy and DEI groups, to help with the project; 3) Worked with a media and storytelling organization to help make accessible videos that share the experiences and value of including people with disabilities in neighborhoods, workplaces, and communities; and 4) Started making three how-to guides with tips on housing, community, and employment. The VBPD approved a two-and-one-half month extension until March 31, 2024, to keep the project going and to use the momentum from Developmental Disability Awareness Month in March 2024.



The **second goal** is for people with disabilities to have better access to services so they can be healthy and safe.

2



Healthcare Advocacy

VBPD staff advised health stakeholders on four policy workgroups. VBPD staff made 23 recommendations to the Virginia Department of Health, Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services, and Virginia Health Catalyst. The recommendations aimed to improve provider training, provider accessibility, provider diversity, data collection, and information dissemination. The status of the recommendations is not known.

VBPD staff provided three public comments on proposed healthcare policies. VBPD staff provided 12 recommendations to strengthen Virginia's Medicaid program. One recommendation was implemented to expand coverage for out-of-network care. VBPD staff also recommended keeping a national oral health performance measure and increasing research on the health of people with disabilities. Both recommendations were implemented.

Other organizations also asked for help from VBPD staff. VBPD staff provided feedback on initiatives led by the Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) Partnership for People with Disabilities, VCU Massey Cancer Center, and Virginia Health Catalyst. The feedback aimed to involve people with disabilities more in healthcare research, healthcare outreach, and dental workforce initiatives.

Dental Care Assessment

VBPD staff researched dental care access for Virginians with developmental disabilities. Research methods included a literature review, data and document requests, stakeholder interviews, and provider focus groups. An assessment was released in early 2024 that summarized the findings and recommendations.

The research process inspired stakeholders to make changes. After conversations with VBPD staff in 2023,

- Virginia's Medicaid agency updated its dental provider directory to include information on sedation and anesthesia.
- Virginia's Medicaid agency added secret shopper studies to the contract with its

Goal 2: Grants/Investments

dental benefits administrator.

- VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities developed more oral health questions for the National Core Indicators data collection effort, in collaboration with VBPD staff and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services.
- Virginia Department of Education asked VBPD staff to help

them develop oral health resources for their Center on Transition Innovations website.

The assessment may lead to additional improvements in the coming years. Stakeholders are taking steps to implement some report recommendations. VBPD staff will further change by awarding grants, collaborating with stakeholders, and supporting a new oral hygiene training.

Active Grants:

James Madison University (JMU)



The VBPD continued funding a \$275,000 grant to James Madison University. The project began in 2021. It built upon a previous VBPD grant. The goal was to improve

health by expanding inclusive wellness programs in the Shenandoah Valley.

In 2023, the project connected stakeholders to information on inclusive wellness programs:

- 17 new organizations, 84 people with developmental disabilities, and 106 of their family members participated in the Shenandoah Valley Inclusive Wellness Coalition. The Coalition met regularly to find ways to expand inclusive wellness programs.
- A resource website was seen 20,238 times.

• 108 wellness instructors took training that increased their knowledge of how to work with people with disabilities.

The project also improved access to inclusive wellness programs. Five organizations created new wellness programs. 531 people with developmental disabilities and 198 of their family members got funding to join various wellness programs. These programs had a positive impact:

- 98% of survey respondents were satisfied with the programs.
- Participants with developmental disabilities had an average increase of 16% in strength, 28% in endurance, and 17% in flexibility.
- 78% of survey respondents reported less sadness.
- 79% of survey respondents reported improved nutrition.

The University hopes to get funding to continue their work in the coming years.

The **third goal** is for schools and employers to better include people with disabilities.

3



Education

VBPD staff advocated for inclusive education primarily through workgroup participation. Staff participated in three workgroups. In these workgroups, staff supported a best practice of ensuring parental involvement as part of an IEP team through recommendations made regarding providing diploma option information to parents. Staff also supported the best practice of ensuring that students with disabilities are not subjected to exclusionary discipline practices through advocacy to include recommendations from the VBPD's 2022 School to Prison Pipeline assessment.

VBPD staff educated 18 legislators through advocating and providing comments during General Assembly committee and subcommittee meetings on 4 bills related to disruptive behavior and behavioral supports for students with disabilities. The VBPD opposed a bill that would have established a uniform discipline system, and the bill was successfully defeated. Staff also supported three bills based on recommendations made in the 2022 School to Prison Pipeline assessment, but unfortunately, none of the bills were successful.

Employment

Virginia Ability is a business association focused on building inclusive communities and cultures through disability diversity in the workplace. VBPD staff participated as a member of their Community Advisory Council (CAC) in FFY 2023. As a member of the CAC, staff provided support as a volunteer at a Virginia Ability Forum event, sharing information about Virginia Ability and opportunities to connect people with disabilities with employers.

To further educate the broader community about the talented pool of people with disabilities who are ready to work, the VBPD collaborated with Virginia Ability on a statewide billboard campaign to raise awareness about the employment of people with disabilities. The VBPD funded the billboard campaign for \$63,255. It included 22 billboards throughout Virginia between June 2023 and September 2023. Data provided by the billboard vendor reported that there would be 3,265,261 views of the billboards during the campaign. Virginia Ability saw a 65% increase in website traffic during the campaign's

first month, followed by 57%, 37%, and 34% increases in the following months. As a result of the campaign, the VBPD and Virginia Ability were featured in two news stories on two local TV channels, increasing the campaign's reach.

VBPD staff participated in the Employment First Advisory Group. Through the Employment First Advisory Group, staff reiterated a concern shared in previous years that waiver funding was listed as a funding source for 71 people in sheltered workshops in the semi-annual employment report. Staff noted that waiver funds could not be used in sheltered workshops. DBHDS updated its data reporting protocol and analysis to accurately report the funding stream for individuals receiving services in sheltered workshops.

In FY 2023, VBPD staff trained 128 Project EPIC vocational rehabilitation counselors during three retreats targeting different areas of the state. Project EPIC is a five-year demonstration project that the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services is leading to help support transitions from subminimum wage to competitive, integrated employment. The training focused on the principles of Human Centered Design when designing new programs and initiatives. The training also focused on the importance of clear communication when developing stakeholder materials.

During the 2023 legislative session, VBPD staff supported two employment-related bills. First, a bill to eliminate subminimum wage for people with disabilities, through testimony to 24 legislators about the value of competitive, integrated employment. The bill passed, phasing out subminimum wage over five years. Second, staff supported a bill that directed the Department of

Human Resource Management to update a policy related to the alternative hiring process for the employment of people with disabilities through testimony to 6 legislators. With the passage of this bill, i) all state agencies must post all available positions on the Alternative Hiring Process webpage, and ii) individuals currently employed with the Commonwealth of Virginia have an equal opportunity to apply for and obtain a Certificate of Disability.



Goal 3: Grants/Investments

Conference/Event Activities:

Virginia Down Syndrome Association (VDSA)



The VBPD gave a \$2,500 grant to the Virginia Down Syndrome Association (VDSA) to sponsor their 10th Annual Disability

Education and Transition Conference on February 4, 2023. 273 people attended in person, and 44 additional people attended virtually. Of those attendees, 10 were individuals with a developmental disability, 124 were family members of people with DD, and 114 were education professionals and other stakeholders.

Two individuals with developmental disabilities and 27 family members who took a survey said they were satisfied with the conference. 100% of the 27 people who took a 6-month follow-up survey said they advocated for someone with a disability within the past 6 months.

Virginia Ability



The VBPD gave a \$2,000 grant to Virginia Ability to support its ADA and the Mental Health Crisis event, held in July of 2023. The

event, which provided strategies for addressing mental healthrelated issues in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, was attended by 24 people.

All 24 participants completed a post-event survey. 100% said that what they learned was helpful and that it increased their knowledge of mental health issues and best practices in the workplace. Based on a survey given a few months after the event, one organization said that they began distributing articles on their company's website to raise awareness about mental health.

The **fourth goal** is for people with disabilities and their families to be better able to advocate for themselves and others.



Training Programs

The VBPD values using self-advocates as trainers whenever possible. Using selfadvocates as trainers improves the quality of VBPD training programs and gives selfadvocates an opportunity to practice their presentation skills. This year, a total of 13 people with developmental disabilities were trainers in VBPD programs, including 3 during the Youth Leadership Academy Capitol Day event, 6 in the Partners in Policymaking program, and 4 during a Training Alumni strategic planning retreat.

Youth Leadership Academy

The VBPD is committed to the leadership development of students with DD. This year the YLA held a one-day virtual YLA Capitol Day event. This event provided an opportunity for 6 students with DD to participate in a mock legislative committee meeting and deliver testimony to a panel of legislators. VBPD staff worked closely with the students assisting them in developing and practicing delivering their testimonies. A panel of 6 legislators actively participated, offering valuable feedback and words of encouragement to the students. All 6 participants with DD took a post participation survey and reported being satisfied with the event. They all also reported feeling more confident in their ability to say what they want or what is important to them and feeling more inspired to advocate.

The VBPD's commitment to empowering self-advocates remains steadfast.

Training Alumni

The VBPD continued operating its year-round Alumni Development Program (ADP), also known as Training Alumni. ADP hosted two alumni strategic planning retreats and two continuing education sessions.

1. The goal of the annual ADP strategic planning retreat was to identify continuing education topics and priorities for both alumni and the broader community. 31 alumni participated and 100% of survey respondents reported being satisfied with the planning retreat.

2. A successful second ADP planning retreat with alumni leaders was held. During the retreat, alumni leaders finalized alumni only and statewide workshop topics for the next year.

This year's continuing education workshops included one session for alumni only and one for alumni and members of the public.

The alumni only continuing education workshop topic was competitive integrated employment (CIE) and transition services. 19 alumni attended this event. VBPD staff collaborated with the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) as a presenter. 100% of survey respondents reported that the workshop increased their understanding of CIE, increased their knowledge about DARS employment services, and made them feel more prepared to obtain CIE for themselves or others.

The topics for the statewide workshop were 1) the direct support workforce crisis, and 2) family members as paid Medicaid providers. VBPD staff collaborated with the National Office of Policy at PHI and the Department of Medical Assistance Services to present during this workshop. 168 people attended, 94% of survey respondents reported being satisfied with the workshop. Most survey respondents said the workshop increased their knowledge of barriers that direct care workers are facing, ways to strengthen the direct care workforce, and the new rules about legally responsible individuals being paid caregivers. Over twothirds of survey respondents also said the workshop made them feel more prepared to address challenges that they or others face accessing paid caregivers.



Grants/Investments:

The Arc of Virginia

The Arc. Virginia In 2022, the VBPD put out a new Request for Proposal for self-advocacy and gave a \$50,000 grant to The Arc of Virginia to build on a project funded the previous year. This

new project, called "Strengthening Self-Advocacy through the ALLY Alliance," aims to help self-advocates in Virginia as leaders in the DD advocacy movement. They want to expand their membership, leadership, and training of liaisons and coaches that began in previous years. The project started in October 2022 and ended in October 2023.

During FFY 2023, they 1) Recruited 11 new self-advocate members with developmental disabilities (DD) into the ALLY Alliance, with a focus on including more people who are black, indigenous, or people of color (BIPOC), as well as those from underrepresented communities; 2) Developed a training program with the help of eleven paid self-advocate coaches with DD; and 3) Trained 81 people with DD on how to start, organize, and lead their local self-advocacy groups. 100% of the self-advocates with DD who took a survey said they were satisfied with the training and that the training increased their knowledge; and conducted diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training for 8 staff members to ensure that they are using best practices for outreach to the BIPOC communities. These trainings led to some good things happening regarding increased self-advocacy and policy improvements:

- Thirteen self-advocates from the Alliance got new leadership positions on coalitions, policy boards, and governing boards within their communities;
- They advocated to eleven of their local representatives, which helped lead to removal of the word handicap from the Code of Virginia by 2025;
- Successfully advocated to their representatives to combine the spending caps for Electronic Home-Based Services and Assistive Technology within the Developmental Disabilities waivers;
- Talked to local city officials to advocate for additional curb cuts, and one member successfully petitioned local city officials to implement a more accessible website;
- Provided training to 200 medical students to discuss how health care providers can better serve the needs of people with disabilities; and
- Presented recommendations to local authorities for accessible road signage and parking spaces. Their advocacy efforts resulted in 3 new accessible parking spaces.

Workgroups: Making an Impact

The VBPD participated in approximately 25 advisory councils, stakeholder groups, and workgroups in FFY 2023:

- Building a United IDD Research Agenda Together
- Coalition for Community Safety
- Community Engagement Advisory Group
- ADA Coalition Building and Roundtable Discussion
- DD Advocacy Coalition

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services No Wrong Door Resource Advisory Council

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Employment First Advisory Group

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Community of Practice for Supporting Families

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Combined Study Workgroup

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Community Engagement Advisory Group

Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services Provider Issues Resolution Workgroup

Department of Education State Special Education Advisory Committee

- Department of Special Education Advocacy Stakeholders Group
- Future of Public Oral Data Workgroup

Home and Community-Based Services Advisory Committee

- Project Living Well Advisory Council Leadership Team
- VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities I-CAN! Accessibility Project Advisory Board
- Virginia Brain Injury Council
- Virginia Autism Council
- Virginia Department of Health Advisory Council on Health Disparity and Health Equity

Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services Medicaid Managed Care Advisory Workgroup

- Virginia Ability Community Advisory Council
- Virginia Health Catalyst Policy Committee
- Oral Health Report Card Workgroup
- Virginia Brain Injury Council

Virginia Board for People with Disabilities

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