

## Strengthen Child Labor Protections

**Problem:** Rampant, abusive child labor was commonplace in the USA until the 1930's. Since then, state and federal law have served the important role of ensuring youth can be employed in a way that does not harm their health or education. Unfortunately, child labor violations have increased dramatically in the last decade. In Virginia FOIA data on child labor violations showed that child labor cases almost tripled from 2021-2022. Young workers have much higher rates of non-fatal injuries on the job than adults and the highest rates of injuries that require emergency department attention. Recently there have been serious cases of child labor violations by staffing agencies or subcontractors used by larger employers. Additionally, new industries have emerged that target their products to teens and children, even though they are not legally allowed to purchase them. These new trends have led children to addiction and even death on the job.

**Policy solutions:** Many mechanisms are needed to ensure young people are empowered and protected in the workplace. Virginia's child labor laws are woefully low, and many have not been updated in decades. In 2024, HB 100 was signed into law increasing penalties for violations of Virginia's child labor laws. While this is a step in the right direction, more needs to be done to strengthen child labor protections. It is necessary to update Virginia's child labor laws to include new forms of hazardous jobs to the list prohibited work for children under 18.

**Who benefits:** Youth – For many young people, employment is necessary to provide for themselves, their families, and their future. Current law allows those as young as 14 to work in a broad

range of jobs like retail, hospitality, and more. There are, however, important limitations on dangerous work and excessive working hours that seek to balance allowing youth to be employed while continuing to work on their studies, hobbies, and social development. Protecting and strengthening current child labor laws will ensure all youth can have the benefits of employment without sacrificing their safety and development.

**Economy** – A healthy economy is supported by a healthy and educated incoming workforce. By ensuring that youth are employed in ways that increase their educational attainment, Virginia is guaranteed to remain a top state for business.

**Businesses** – Undermining youth health in employment also undermines businesses. When a business is using unfair labor practices to increase their bottom line, it is hard for other businesses to compete. Commonsense changes to Virginia law will allow more youth to be safely employed while ensuring the future of Virginia's educated workforce.

### **Our youth are our future!**

Everyone benefits from strengthening child labor protections. A well-educated and well-adjusted future workforce is the foundation for innovation. By strengthening current child labor protections, Virginia can safeguard its position as a top state for business and education.

*Sources: CDC, Economic Policy Institute, National Employment Law Project, UCLA Institute for Research and Employment, Center for Urban Economic Development, US DOL, VPM, National Youth Tobacco Survey.*