

**The Hanger Commission
Elk Hill Farm
October 9th 2007**

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Executive Director
Elk Hill**

First Lady Holton, Mr. Chairman and members of the Commission:

Good morning and welcome to Elk Hill Farm. We are so honored to have the Hanger Commission and the First Lady of Virginia here in the Singleton Chapel.

Elk Hill Farm was established in 1970 serving 6 boys. During the past 37 years our organization has grown to 4 sites and 7 programs throughout central Virginia. Last year we served 260 children and their families through a variety of programs; in home community outreach, our two day schools, our two group homes, our residential school, an aftercare program and a therapeutic academic summer camp –serving 7-10 year old inner city Richmond kids. At the request of Fluvanna County, next month we will be opening a group home for 8 young women Elk Hill – Spring Garden located in Bremono Bluff. Elk Hill's programs are licensed by the Departments of Education and Social Services. Our schools are fully accredited by the Virginia Council on Private Education and the Virginia Association of Independent Specialized Education Facilities.

Today I am also representing the Virginia Coalition of Private Provider Associations – VCOPPA. Private providers under the VCOPPA umbrella serve thousands of children and their families through an array of programs ranging from adoption to in home to foster care to psychiatric services. Representatives of VCOPPA serve on FAPT teams, CPMTs, SLAT, the SEC and a variety of workgroups.

Since the inception of CSA an array of programs for at-risk children has been developed across the Commonwealth of Virginia. Important components of this mosaic of services are the residential programs. These programs range from small 4-8 bed group homes to larger psychiatric locked facilities. In-between are a myriad of programs including residential schools and programs serving specific challenges such as substance abuse and sexual offenders. The structure, treatment, experiences and education provided by these residential programs provide a core foundation for a child to build upon.

The CSA concept of a continuum of services from least restrictive (less costly) to more restrictive (more costly) is often the way in which the referral sequence plays out. Many of the boys referred to Elk Hill's residential school have had multiple failed placements prior to arriving on our campus. This practice has resulted in residential placements often times being the final intervention- the last resort –

rather than a timely appropriate placement based on the needs of the child and the family.

VCOPPA applauds the First Lady's For Keeps Initiative. Children deserve permanency. They deserve good schools and after school programs. They deserve to grow up in functional families and functional safe neighborhoods. Unfortunately, the majority of the children served in many residential programs often come from just the opposite. They come from dysfunctional families and/or cultures and/or neighborhoods. Often times, the dysfunction has become literally toxic.

The kids we work with have emotional, behavioral and learning problems, often times as a result of abuse from the hands of those adults entrusted to care for them. They don't trust adults. Our most important responsibilities are to provide a safe environment for a child to grow and to surround these children with reliable caring adults. It often takes a significant period of time before a child realizes that there are adults who can be trusted and counted upon.

Children do deserve permanency. At Elk Hill we strive for family reunification - whenever it is possible. Our counselors work with moms, dads, grandparents, aunts, uncles, siblings, extended family and foster families on our campus and in their homes to pave the way for a sense of permanency in the child's life. However there are situations where there are no viable family options. We then work with the child's social worker to develop an alternative permanency plan, which might include adoption or foster care. For older adolescents we try to step the child down to one of our independent living programs - group homes - one in Richmond and one in Charlottesville. In these programs the boys can finish high school, attend college, attain employment and work through a curriculum designed to foster independence.

It is difficult to separate out the behavioral, emotional and educational challenges our kids face. With success in school often times behaviors improve as well as attitudes and vice versa. Most of our kids come into our residential school 2-3 grade levels behind. Their reading levels are - often times - several grade levels behind. Through individual instruction and small class teacher/pupil ratios our kids can increase up to 3 grade levels in one year. Educational progress and success is perhaps the biggest key to these kids becoming responsible adults. Our education does not stop at the classroom. Elk Hill's Education for Employment program provides direction for the transition of our students to the workforce. The program provides students with career exploration, work experience and community service learning.

The challenges that face our kids have often developed over years. The fix is not quick, easy or cheap. Our residential school program costs \$253 a day. Elk Hill is a 501C-3 not for profit. We subsidize all of our programs through private donations to keep the costs down. We also offer private scholarships to kids whose public funds have dried up and to kids who don't qualify for public funds - those non

mandated children. In 2006 we provided forty three full and partial scholarships. Our summer academic camp and our Education for Employment program are both privately funded.

We have followed up on our kids over years. Back in 1984 two professors – one from University of Richmond and one from VCU developed an instrument to measure our kid's success – the Success Rate Index. Their instrument takes a look at the time our kids were doing well after leaving our residential program (defined as living in a less restricted environment) vs. time they are not doing so well (more restrictive environment). Every five years we try to contact as many former students as possible. Last year we reconnected with 209 boys who had left our residential school in the past 5 years. It's a snap shot it but does provide a look at what has happened to our kids since they left the program. Over eighty percent of their time was spent in less restrictive living situations.

There are many outstanding residential programs in the Commonwealth. Some are represented here today in the audience. There are programs that send all of their graduates to college. Others provide on going assistance well into the child's adult life. These programs also become part of the child's permanence. The adults in these programs become the child's surrogate family. The experience and growth many of these children have in these programs remain with them for a lifetime.

I have been fortune to have spent the past 27 years working at Elk Hill. During those 27 years I have witnessed hundreds of lives transformed from despair to hopefulness. Returning to the US from the Peace Corps in Africa in 1980 I thought I would never find an experience as rewarding and fulfilling as my Peace Corps days. I was wrong.

Thank you.