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**Business Leaders Explore Economics of Early Childhood
and the Connection to Future Workforce**

Fifth annual Va. Chamber/VECF event featured noted brain researcher & corp. executive

Richmond, VA (Oct. 9, 2018) – The Virginia Chamber Foundation and the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation (VECF) hosted an invitation-only luncheon and executive briefing for statewide business executives on “The Economics of Early Childhood: Smart Beginnings for Virginia’s Workforce Pipeline.” The event, held Tuesday, Oct. 9 at the Jefferson Hotel in Richmond, strengthened the growing recognition from Virginia’s business community that a strong educational start for children is linked to a stable, talented future workforce for the Commonwealth.

Guest speakers for the Oct. 9 event were:

- **Michael J. Friedlander, Ph.D.**, is a nationally recognized expert in the field of neuroscience, brain development and brain injury. He is vice president for Health Sciences and Technology at Virginia Tech; executive director of the Virginia Tech Carilion Research Institute; and senior dean for research at the Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine. His presentation addressed the impact of brain development during the early years on an individual’s life trajectory and how this is directly tied to creating a talented, productive workforce for the future.
- **Gary Thomson** is the regional managing partner for Dixon Hughes Goodman’s Mid-Atlantic Region. With more than 33 years of public accounting experience, Thomson is a member of DHG’s management team and executive committee. He currently serves on the Commonwealth’s School Readiness Committee and is a strong champion of investing in early childhood education initiatives to support the young children of Virginia. In his leadership role, he frequently presents on economic and legislative topics impacting businesses, including workforce preparedness and school readiness.

The 5th annual executive briefing, which drew around 150 business leaders from across the Commonwealth, was designed to highlight and reinforce the business case for early education as a foundation for success in learning, career development and the economic vitality of a region. From their unique perspectives in the health care research and corporate arenas, Dr. Friedlander and Mr. Thomson helped to underscore how important the early years are in laying the groundwork for lifelong success.

Both of the sponsoring organizations are committed to advancing quality early learning initiatives in the state:

- *Blueprint Virginia 2025*, presented in December 2017 and coordinated by the **Virginia Chamber of Commerce**, is a comprehensive initiative to provide business leadership,

direction and long-range economic development planning for Virginia. In *Blueprint Virginia 2025*, one of the key recommendations to strengthen the Commonwealth's position as a leader in the global economy is building a strong foundation from the beginning through early childhood education.

- The **Virginia Early Childhood Foundation** and its statewide Smart Beginnings initiatives are focused on ensuring that communities across Virginia have capacity to support the good health and school readiness of young children.

“Virginia’s economic prosperity is directly linked to the education and skills of its citizens,” said Barry DuVal, president & CEO of the Virginia Chamber. “The business community’s top priority is to build a strong and talented workforce in order to compete on the national and global stage and make Virginia the best place to do business.”

“Over the past five years, these Executive Briefings have explored many different aspects of the early childhood education landscape in Virginia,” said Bill Ermatinger, board chair of the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation and executive vice president and chief human resources officer for Huntington Ingalls Industries in Newport News, Va. “School readiness is a key driver for the long-term economic vitality of the Commonwealth. VECF and the Virginia Chamber are proud to partner on a number of forward-thinking and innovative initiatives that engage business leaders in this important work on behalf of our state’s young children.”

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About the Virginia Early Childhood Foundation: VECF creates results-oriented partnerships to ensure that young children are healthy and prepared for school, life and workforce success. To learn more about VECF and the Smart Beginnings initiative, visit www.vecf.org.

About the Virginia Chamber: The Virginia Chamber of Commerce is the largest business advocacy organization in the Commonwealth, with more than 26,000 members. The Chamber is a non-partisan, business advocacy organization that works in the legislative, regulatory and political arenas to act as the catalyst for positive change in all areas of economic development and competitiveness for Virginia. For more information, visit www.vachamber.com.