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**United Community and First Lady of Virginia Celebrate Childcare Equity  
Northam tours newly expanded Early Learning Center Infant Suite**

**Alexandria, VA (December 10, 2019)** – On Tuesday, December 10, 2019, United Community hosted First Lady of Virginia Pamela Northam and other leaders to celebrate the expansion of the newly remodeled Infant Suite at their Early Learning Center (ELC). The ceremony comes just a month after a major Early Childhood Education summit hosted by the First Lady and the Virginia Secretary of Education in Charlottesville.

“Nearly half of Virginia’s children enter kindergarten without the basic skills they need to succeed in school and beyond,” said First Lady Northam. “The Governor and I are dedicated to expanding access to quality early childhood care and education and I’m grateful to centers like United Community’s Early Learning Center for their commitment to serving more families.”

Following a brief ceremony, First Lady Northam and other guests were treated to a tour of the ELC’s newly remodeled infant suite, which has space to accommodate up to sixteen infants ranging from six weeks to seven months old. The expansion -- which was made possible by generous contributions from the John Ben Snow Foundation and other donors -- increased the suite’s capacity by 75 percent.

“This expansion is so important for the community we serve,” United Community Executive Director, Alison DeCoursey, shared. “Many area providers offer half-day preschool for toddlers to pre-K, which is a problem for many of the working parents we serve. This expansion allows our clients to continue to secure economic stability for their families without sacrificing an opportunity for their child to receive nurturing, high-quality care.”

A recent study by the Northern Virginia Healthcare Foundation revealed that less than 0.1% of children in sections of United Community’s service area, known as Region 1, are enrolled in preschool, making it one of Northern Virginia’s most infamous “child care deserts.” Fifteen percent of all families in Region 1 live below the poverty line. The area provides a stark contrast to the rest of Fairfax County, where the average family spends over \$20,000 on childcare expenses each year.

“We recognize that many of our parents face difficult challenges,” Early Learning Center Director Torria Baker shared. “That’s why we give our kids every resource they need -- including free vision, dental, and auditory screenings -- to help them grow and achieve their maximum potential.”

Operating since 1986, the Early Learning Center has served thousands of families from a wide range of social and economic backgrounds. Located in Bryant Alternative High School, the Center can now

accommodate up to ninety-six children, ranging from six weeks to five years old. The Center prides itself on providing curriculum-based childhood education that promotes the social and emotional development of every child.

***About United Community (formerly United Community Ministries)***

United Community envisions a community where everyone thrives. United Community empowers our neighbors in need to transform their lives through wrap-around programs and services that support children, youth, and families in southeastern Fairfax County. For nearly 50 years, United Community has been advocating for, supporting, and serving low-income residents in Northern Virginia. Learn more at [unitedcommunity.org](http://unitedcommunity.org).

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