

2023 Legislative Positions and Policy Statements

Agriculture

Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program: Support state funding for the Virginia Agricultural Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program in the amount of \$100,000,000 per year.

Broadband and the Internet

Broadband Deployment: Support legislation by the state and the federal government that would assist localities and provide financial incentives to localities and their communities in deploying universal, affordable access to broadband technology, particularly in unserved and underserved areas, while at the same time preserving local land use authority for siting telecommunications infrastructure. This includes supporting continued and increased funding for the Virginia Telecommunications Initiative (VATI). In addition, support legislation that would: (1) ensure that coverage maps used to determine underserved and unserved areas or census blocks are accurate; (2) amend the definition of “coverage” to mean that service actually exists in a census block or area and the service availability within that census block or area is substantial ; and (3) ensure definition of unserved and/or underserved includes those lacking 100 Mbps download/20 Mbps upload speeds.

Net Neutrality: Unless the Congress or the Federal Communications Commission restores net neutrality at the national level, support legislation that would prohibit internet service providers from slowing down or blocking access to websites, charging companies extra to deliver their services faster, and other acts that adversely affect consumers and discourage competition.

Growth Management, Environmental Protection, Land Use, and Transportation

Biosolids: Support legislation enabling localities, as part of their zoning ordinances, to designate, and/or reasonably restrict the land application of biosolids to, specific areas within the locality based on criteria related to the public safety and welfare of its citizens and the environment. In addition, support legislation regarding the land application of biosolids that protects the environment, public health and safety.

Environmental: Support legislation prohibiting businesses from using disposable plastic bags and straws and to require bottle deposits, or enable localities to do so, with exceptions applicable to straws for hospitals and other care facilities. Oppose legislation that reduces local authority to regulate new natural gas infrastructure for development projects.

Erosion and sediment control standards for agriculture and forestry operations: Support legislation that would establish minimum statewide erosion and sediment control standards for agriculture and forestry operations. These standards could include those within the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act’s regulations, which include: (1) for agriculture operations, soil and water quality conservation assessments evaluating the effectiveness of existing practices pertaining to soil erosion and sediment control, nutrient management, and management of pesticides, and, where necessary, resulting in plans outlining additional practices needed to ensure that water quality protection is being accomplished; stream buffers are maintained; and best management practices for agricultural ditches are used; and (2) for forestry operations, requiring operations to be conducted using the appropriate best management practices as prescribed by Virginia’s Forestry Best Management Practices for Water Quality, and requiring that a full 100-foot buffer be established in woody vegetation when the silvicultural activity ceases within the buffer area on the property and a new land use is proposed.

Impact Fee Authority: Support impact fee legislation that: (1) allows for effective implementation through simple locally based formulae and reasonable administrative requirements; and (2) does not cap or limit localities’ impact fee updates.

Open-space Easements: Support legislation that augments local efforts in natural resource protection through: (1) continued funding of the Virginia Land Conservation Foundation (VLCF) for locally established and funded Purchase of Development Rights programs (*e.g.*, the ACE Program in Albemarle County); (2) continued provision of matching funds to localities for their Purchase of Development Rights programs through the Office of Farmland Preservation; (3) retaining provisions in transient occupancy tax legislation so that funds can continue to be used to protect open-space and resources of historical, cultural, ecological, and scenic value that attract tourism; (4) increased incentives for citizens to create conservation and open-space easements; (5) fully allocating the Land Preservation Tax Credit transfer fee for the stewardship of protected land; and (6) restoring the individual cap on the use of the Land Preservation Tax Credit to \$50,000 per year.

Proffers: Support further changes to the current proffer system and, in particular, the proffer legislation approved in 2016 (Virginia Code § 15.2-2303.4) and amended in 2019, which limits the scope of impacts that may be addressed by proffers and establishes specific criteria as to when a proffer is deemed to be unreasonable. Support changes to provide more balanced and practical standards for determining whether a proffer is reasonable and restore a climate where localities and applicants can openly discuss rezoning applications and possible proffers.

Scenic Protection and Tourist Enhancement: Support enabling legislation for Albemarle County to provide for a scenic protection and tourist enhancement overlay district. The legislation would provide a method to ensure full consideration of visual resources and scenic areas when the county or state make land use decisions in designated areas.

Stop Extending the Sunset Provisions for Certain Development Approvals that Would Otherwise Expire: Support allowing the sunset provisions in Virginia Code § 15.2-2209.1:1 to expire. First established in 2009 when the General Assembly adopted Virginia Code § 15.2-2209.1 to extend the validity of certain land use approvals during the Great Recession, the General Assembly has repeatedly extended the sunset clauses for various land use approvals. Most recently, the General Assembly extended the validity of these approvals in Virginia Code § 15.2-2209.1:1 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The continued extension of these approvals results in non-vested and undeveloped but approved projects to retain their validity well beyond their otherwise applicable expiration date. Some projects protected by the extension of the sunset provisions were approved as much as 15 years ago. These projects may no longer be consistent with the locality's current planning policies or zoning or site development requirements.

Stormwater Management: Support state funding for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF) in the amount of \$80,000,000 per year in Fiscal Years 2023 and 2024. Oppose any legislation that would impact the resource and funding needs of the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to fully administer, enforce, and maintain the State Stormwater Management Act, the Erosion and Sediment Control Law, and the Chesapeake Bay Preservation Act.

Transportation Funding: Support legislation to: (1) establish a new dedicated funding source for a Charlottesville-Albemarle Regional Transit Authority; (2) establish stable and consistent state revenues for Virginia's long-term transportation infrastructure needs; (3) direct funding efforts to expand transportation choices and engage in multimodal transportation planning; and (4) fund maintenance of rural road systems. Oppose any legislation or regulations that would require the transfer of responsibility to counties for constructing, maintaining, or operating new and existing secondary roads.

Water Quality and Resources: Support state funding for the following: (1) agriculture best management practices; (2) stormwater grant initiatives; and (3) wastewater treatment plant upgrades.

Health and Human Services

Abuse and Neglect: Support legislation to expand the definition of “abuse and neglect” to include parents who are habitually under the influence of drugs or alcohol while being responsible for children.

Administrative Appeals and Findings: Support legislation to amend Virginia Code § 63.2-1526(A) to require that an administrative finding be controlled by a court’s civil or criminal finding if those matters involve the same conduct and the same victim and arise under the same operative facts. Support legislation to amend Virginia Code § 63.2-1526(C) to stay child protective services administrative appeals while abuse and neglect proceedings, findings, or both, are pending in juvenile and domestic relations district court or circuit court, or on appeal in any court.

Child Care for Low Income Working Families: Support legislation to provide additional funds to localities to assist low-income working families with childcare costs. Funding helps working-class parents pay for supervised day care facilities and supports efforts for families to become self-sufficient.

Children’s Services Act (CSA): Support: (1) a locality’s ability to use state funds to pay for mandated services provided directly by the locality, specifically for private day placements, where the same services could be offered in schools; (2) maintaining cost shares on a sum sufficient basis by both the state and localities; (3) enhanced state funding for local CSA administrative costs; (4) a cap on local expenditures in order to combat higher costs for serving mandated children; and (5) proactive efforts by the state to make residential facilities and service providers available, especially in rural areas. Oppose changing the funding mechanism to a per-pupil basis of state funding, which would shift the sum sufficient portion fully to localities.

Increase Funding for Community Services: Support increased state funding for community services.

Local Department of Social Services (LDSS): Support increased state funding for LDSS to match all available federal funding to assist LDSS staffing needs in order to meet state mandated services and workloads.

Targeted Grants: Support improving the state’s targeting of grants to businesses that pay higher wages by increasing the minimum wage requirements for eligible grant applicants.

Local Government Administration and Finance

Community College Capital Costs: Support legislation for the state to fund 100% of public funding required for community college capital costs. Currently, localities are required to fund a portion of operating and capital costs.

Composite Index: Support legislation to amend the Composite Index Funding Formula by re-defining the local true value of real property component of the formula to include the land use taxation value of real property rather than the fair market assessed value for those properties that have qualified and are being taxed under a land use value taxation program.

Drones: Support legislation enabling localities to have authority to regulate the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in their jurisdictions not preempted by federal law.

Drug Court Funding: Request full funding for the Drug Court Program, which provides effective treatment and intensive supervision to drug offenders through the circuit courts of several Virginia localities.

Public Defender Funding: Request that the state adequately fund compensation for public defenders in localities.

Regional Library Funding: Request full funding of State Aid to the Jefferson Madison Regional Library and other regional libraries in the state system.

Seat Belts: Support legislation that would make the failure to use a seat belt a primary offense.

State Mandates Funding: Request full funding for state mandates in all areas of local government including, but not limited to, the Standards of Quality (SOQs) and other mandates imposed on local school divisions, positions approved by the Compensation Board, costs related to jails and juvenile detention centers and human services positions.

Taxing Authority: Support legislation to further enhance county taxing authority so that counties enjoy authority comparable to cities to address capital and operations needs and to reduce over-reliance on the real property tax as a revenue source.

Virginia Retirement System: Support continuing restoration of funds to the Virginia Retirement System to maintain the long-term solvency of the system without further devolving the funding responsibility to localities.