



## VFC LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM 2020 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

### Annexation Moratorium/Fiscal Stress Statement

*As the only Virginia organization dedicated solely to the needs of the Commonwealth's historic core cities, Virginia First Cities members request the Commonwealth fully fund the commitments made to our fiscally stressed cities when the moratorium on annexation was put in place (see items below). There is recognition that there should be a statutory process to enable reversion of a city to town status where mutually agreed. Further, that financial and other incentives are necessary to accomplish reversions. However, Virginia First Cities will strongly oppose: 1) any change to the current moratoria process including repeal of the county immunity to city annexation; 2) elimination or alteration of the financial and legal agreements (statutory or negotiated) that are currently in effect.*

#### \* Action Items

- Fund Aid to Local Police according to statute (§ 9.1-169).
- Increase funding for street maintenance.

### Unregulated Skill/"Grey Machines"

*Our member cities have experienced an unparalleled proliferation of unregulated games of chance that prey on many of our citizens, especially those that are least able to afford it. These so-called "grey machines" should **either be disallowed** at the state level **or they should be regulated as soon as possible** with a structure capable of auditing machine registration and ensuring compliance. Local Commissioners of Revenue will require a consistent application of taxing authority in order to aid in collection. Localities should retain existing land use authority to regulate businesses with gaming machines. To ensure a level playing field between "games of chance" and "games of skill," these machines should be charged fees to cover the cost of regulation and, like other forms of legal gaming in Virginia, their profits should be taxed and funds raised directed to a specific purpose, either to the Lottery Proceeds Fund or to be returned in some proportion to the local government. In short, any cash payouts should be treated the same as legal gaming. Any changes to or the addition of regulation of the so-called "grey" machines," should include a mechanism to return dollars to local governments directly affected.*

### Community Wealth Building

*Virginia First Cities was the pioneering organization in the Commonwealth pushing for new, holistic approaches to lift individuals out of poverty. As the ultimate economic development issue, ensuring our cities are vibrant and our citizenry are engaged and contributing are all part of a healthy community. We urge the General Assembly to do the following:*

## TANF for Employment

- Maintain funding for the TANF for Employment Grant Programs at \$7.5 million and \$3 million in each FY21 and FY22.

## Social Services Delivery

- Support efforts to reverse the Commonwealth's enforcement of a modified ban on SNAP/TANF for persons with misdemeanor felony drug possession convictions.

## Public Transportation

- Support VTA efforts to assist low-income working individuals and trainees by taking advantage of Virginia's public transportation network. The lack of transportation is a major barrier to achieving and retaining employment for our low income working individuals and job trainees.

## \* Action Items

- Budget language under the TANF for Employment Grant Program for a pilot project to enable technological advancements via text platforms for application, renewal, and balance access for TANF benefits and a 6-month extension of benefits /tiered down process to reduce benefits over time.
- \$5 million in TANF, non-general funds to provide low-income working individuals and job trainees with free transit passes.

## Housing

*The Code of Virginia does not currently offer urban localities the “carrots” and policy options that are responsive to the growth challenges we are experiencing. These challenges are decidedly NOT the same as those challenges facing suburban and more rural communities. Market forces are not delivering new affordable units. Further, the over-complexity of the density bonus provisions within the current statute (§ 15.2-2305) make it difficult to interpret and to apply for localities that regulate density. For localities that don't regulate density, there is nothing upon which to grant a bonus. Our **central cities** are desperate for tools that **will make them more responsive to our citizens who require safe long-term affordable housing options ... “one size does not fit all.”***

- Use a portion of the unspent TANF funding to leverage funding for public housing replacement.
- Support increased funding in the Virginia Housing Trust Fund.
- Provide eligible working citizens better access to affordable housing and financing for public housing replacement and public housing infrastructure improvements. Formalize a state coalition (VHDA, DHCD, local housing authorities, VFC) to identify financing methods to assist our cities with transformational, mixed income neighborhoods and resident communication and transitioning resources.

\* Action Item

- Create and support coalition efforts for a new, affordable inclusionary housing statute that is responsive to our member-cities' diverse housing challenges and opportunities.

### **Economic Gardening/Resiliency/Sustainability**

*Virginia First Cities' Economic Gardening Task Force was charged with finding existing, or creating new, state programs to leverage federal Opportunity Zone and other funding. Over the course of two years, several very concrete recommendations came about that will be great catalysts to our cities' redevelopment and vibrancy.*

- Support maximum funding for the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF).
- Support for Healthy Food Financing and investments to ensure our cities and citizens have access to thriving, sustainable grocery options and that these small businesses succeed.
- Oppose a decrease or a further extension of the cap on the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit.
- Support flood/resilience risk reduction infrastructure projects and aid to localities for tidal and street flooding mitigation efforts including grant matching and Shoreline Assistance Fund.
- Support legislation giving cities the authority to make decisions regarding the location or disposition of monuments on City property.

\* Action items

- Increase funding by \$3.5 million in each year for the Industrial Revitalization Fund.
- Increase the Virginia Main Street Program by \$4 million in each year.
- Increase of \$5 million per year for the Urban Public Private Partnership Redevelopment Fund.
- Increase of \$3.5 million each year for the Brownfields Restoration and Remediation Program and budget language for environmental justice for public housing on landfill sites.
- Increase to the Enterprise Zone Program to avoid grant proration to the Real Property Investment Tax Credit.

### **Education/Early Childhood Initiatives**

*The General Assembly must recognize and fund the true costs of public education. The Virginia State Board of Education's recommendations are aspirational and would go a long way to righting the education funding ship. The fact remains that Virginia's public schools rely more on local governments to fund their budgets than all but nine other states in the country, resulting in one of the most regressive funding structures in the nation. Virginia spends less per student in our highest poverty communities than in our wealthiest ones. Now is the time for action. The Virginia Board of Education revisions to the state's Standards of Quality call for more than \$850 million per year in additional state funding and would certainly be positive news for our at-risk school divisions. However aspirational the BoE's funding goals are, the At-Risk Add-On is still critically important to VFC member school divisions, as are other proven programs that VFC has championed through the years.*

- Support the creation of a robust early childhood/Pre-K mixed delivery model and grants.
- Support the extended-year and year-round school grants program.
- Support for Virginia Early Childhood Success, to promote a vision for a cohesive early childhood system for Virginia – in statute, as well as demonstration, through a funded pilot project initiative.
- Provide seamless, affordable access for the most at-risk families to quality early childhood services, including home visiting, subsidized childcare, and preschool.
- New state funding avenues for public school construction and renovation.

\* Action Items

- Increase the At-Risk Add-On.
- Increase the per pupil amount provided for the Virginia Preschool Initiative.
- Increase funding for the Master Teacher Residency Program to \$3 million each year and support teacher and principal mentoring.

### Elections & Census

*The General Assembly should ensure that Virginia elections are fair, secure, accurate, accessible and transparent.*

*Because census results affect many federally funded programs like Title 1, grants to school districts, Head Start early childhood development programs, WIC food grants, public transit, road rehabilitation and construction and emergency aid, it is critical that an accurate census count is made in 2020. Following the last federal census, Virginia ranked eighth for the highest undercounted population of children under age 5 in the country.*

- Support additional dollars for education and outreach efforts leading up to the 2020 Census, which will begin in April 2020.

### Public Safety

*Our cities have a disproportionate amount of gun issues, from lost/stolen firearms to kids and gang activity using guns. Gun violence in our cities may be attributed joblessness, lack of investment in at-risk communities, inadequately funded and resourced violence reduction and youth mentorship programs, and other support networks and services that can provide stability. Our cities are in crisis because of the proliferation of crimes committed with guns.*

- Maintain and strengthen curbs on the availability of guns to children and the mentally ill; prohibit the modification of guns using bump stocks or other methods to create automatic-like trigger features; ensure the safety and security of all persons in their schools, workplaces, places of worship, and other places of public assembly.
- Support granting Virginia local governments the authority to ban firearms in municipal buildings, non-school educational facilities, parks and polling places.
- With the increased use of police body worn cameras and the administrative costs that come from utilization of body-worn cameras that the public has asked for, we request the

state refrain from shifting of costs on local governments, especially in the hiring of additional local commonwealth attorneys. Further, if localities require the hiring of additional commonwealth attorneys, it should be at state expense.

- Support legislation creating a separate training or waiver process for municipal Special Conservators of the Peace (SCOP) enforcing municipal codes.
- Support the continued study by the Virginia Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Council (with local government participation) of abusive data harvesting of citizens and public employees as a result of a FOIA request.

#### \* Action Items

- Fund Aid to Localities with Police Departments according to statute with a formula responsive to urban police departments and annexation agreements from the 1980s.
- Increase the per diem rate for all state-responsible inmates incarcerated in local jails to a rate that recognizes the increased burden of mental health and substance abuse on the local jail population.

### Taxation

*The Machinery and Tools and Business and Professional Occupational License taxes comprise a major part of our city budgets and are extremely important to local government revenue streams.*

#### \* Action Item

- VFC will vigorously oppose any attempt to eliminate or reduce the M&T and BPOL taxes unless it includes an alternative funding mechanism.

### Transportation

- Support increased funding for street maintenance funding to ensure equitable funding for independent cities and urban areas that, in the current formula, do not receive adequate funding for on-street parking areas, bike lanes, transit lanes and turning lanes.

***\*\* Once approved by the Board of Directors, individual items in the 2020 VFC Legislative Agenda may not be officially supported by every member city.***

***Adopted December 6, 2019***