

VACo's 2010 Legislative Priorities



VACo is pleased to present its 2010 Legislative Priorities that represent the membership's top policy concerns. Conceived in the depths of the Great Depression, when acting separately meant failing alone, VACo began as an initiative among six counties.

VACo members develop and adopt their annual legislative program from which the priorities are derived. The program then guides the members and staff during the legislative session. The 2010 Legislative Program is available at www.vaco.org.

Fiscal concerns are prominent throughout this brochure because local governments provide a number of state mandated services. Budget concerns are dominating the time and attention of the Commonwealth's localities. County leaders are reacting to state budget reductions in addition to significant reductions in local revenues. Counties stand ready to partner with the Commonwealth to make the tough decisions required in 2010.

In addition to pressing fiscal and funding issues, VACo priorities include concern about new mandates, expansion of high speed broadband services, authority to establish land use policies and management of the pending stormwater regulations.

VACo's legislative team is honored to serve Virginia's counties and to work with the governor and members of the General Assembly.

Sincerely,

James D. Campbell
VACo's Executive Director

VACo's Priorities

State and Local Fiscal Sustainability

During a period when the Commonwealth and its local governments are experiencing the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, VACo reaffirms its commitment to protecting state and local fiscal stability. Fiscal stability enables the Commonwealth to provide core public services critical to the long-term economic vitality of Virginia. Difficult financial times require government, at all levels, to evaluate its service delivery and determine the continued importance and viability of the programs created to meet critical service needs. The counties in Virginia stand ready to partner with the state to make the tough decisions required.

State Funding

- VACo is concerned with protecting the reliability and sustainability of the Commonwealth's general fund which finances most core government functions mandated by the state but provided by local governments, including public primary and secondary education (K-12).

State Tax Reform

- VACo supports significant tax reform that includes a restructuring of state income and sales and use taxes with the intent to stabilize and increase revenues to meet current and foreseeable core service demands. Tax reform also will reduce pressure on local government leaders who continually must consider raising real estate tax rates to fund K-12 public education, public safety, CSA, mental health and mental retardation, and other critical services.

Local Government Revenues

- VACo supports equal taxing authority for cities and counties. VACo also asks the Commonwealth to grant counties and cities the option, by action of the local governing body without a referendum, to increase the local sales and use tax by 0.5 percent to help offset state budget reductions affecting localities.

Local Discretion for Budget Reductions

- VACo supports sufficient local discretion to manage state-mandated reductions.

Local Government Fiscal Policy

- VACo supports proposals ensuring the appropriate collection of applied and assessed taxes including Transient Occupancy Taxes from online transactions.
- VACo opposes constitutional amendments mandating real property tax relief.
- VACo opposes proposals reducing state and local grantor and recordation tax revenue.
- VACo opposes state-mandated policies affecting the Local Government Investment Pool.

Broadband

- VACo urges the Commonwealth to assist counties in their efforts to deploy universal affordable broadband services, particularly in underserved and rural areas, by adopting targeted statewide budgetary and statutory policies.

Education

- VACo supports full state funding for public education programs, including the Standards of Quality, teacher salaries and retirement costs, the Standards of Accreditation, the Standards of Learning, incentive/categorical aid, and capital/maintenance support.
- VACo opposes changes in methodologies and the division of financial responsibility intended to shift education costs from the state to localities.
- VACo supports local flexibility to make appropriate reductions across state educational categories when general funding that supports the Standards of Learning and Standards of Accreditation is reduced.

Health and Human Resources

- VACo supports state policies and funding to ensure the Commonwealth's at-risk families have access to high quality and appropriate services.

Growth Management

- VACo opposes any legislation to weaken the authority of localities to plan and regulate land use.
- VACo supports legislation to grant localities additional tools necessary to adequately meet citizens' increasing public infrastructure needs that are driven by new development.

Sovereign Immunity

- VACo opposes any substantive change in local governments' present defense of sovereign immunity for tort liability. VACo opposes bringing counties under the Virginia Tort Claims Act.

Stormwater

- VACo opposes any stormwater requirements on local governments related to new development, redevelopment and existing development that are not cost-effective, affordable and manageable at the local level.

Transportation

- VACo urges the Commonwealth to enact a transportation funding package to include dedicated, new, significant and recurring annual revenues to address the Commonwealth's documented transportation infrastructure needs.
- VACo supports restoration of the Transportation Revenue Sharing program to the structure that existed prior to the 2006 session with robust funding.

Unfunded Mandates

- VACo opposes unfunded mandates by the Commonwealth.

Water Quality

- VACo supports additional state funding and technical assistance to help localities improve water quality in a manner consistent with tributary strategies, implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loading goals, and water quality standards established by the State Water Control Board.

- VACo opposes the imposition of a state fee, tax or surcharge on water, sewer, solid waste or any other service provided by a local government or authority.

VACo Legislative Team



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VACo's process for the development and adoption of annual legislative program

1. Spring regional meetings: In even number years VACo members and legislators are invited to attend regional meetings to identify and discuss key statewide legislative and policy issues.
2. Three Resolutions Committee meetings: The committee oversees the development of the annual Legislative Program. The meetings occur in the spring after the regional meetings, early fall, and during the annual conference in November. The committee receives regular legislative updates, via conference call, during the regular legislative session in the winter.
3. VACo's eight Steering Committees meet at least twice: Late summer and November during the annual conference. The Steering Committees develop their policy sections in the annual Legislative Program.
4. The membership is asked to adopt the new legislative program with priorities during the annual business meeting. The meeting occurs on the last day of the annual conference in November.