

2012 Legislative Priorities

Virginia Association of Counties



VACo's 2012 Legislative Priorities

Thank you for reviewing VACo's 2012 Legislative Priorities that represent the association's top policy interests.

VACo members develop and adopt the legislative program at the Annual Conference. The priorities are derived from the legislative program, which then guides the membership and staff during the General Assembly session. The 2012 Legislative Program is available at www.vaco.org.

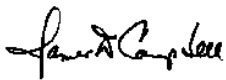
As you very well know, counties continue to struggle through the Great Recession with no end in sight. Though the state has claimed increased revenue, localities are still burdened by a regressive real estate market. Unfortunately, the near future does not appear to offer any relief as projections show that real estate values will continue to be depressed during the next two-year state budget cycle.

So it's not surprising that fiscal concerns are first and foremost on the minds of our members. Here are VACo's overarching priorities:

- VACo's commitment to protecting the reliability and sustainability of the state's general fund
- VACo's commitment for the Commonwealth to support the general fund by initiating comprehensive state tax reform
- VACo's support for expanded local tax and fee authority
- VACo's opposition to legislative or administrative initiatives that would transfer state services and responsibilities to counties
- VACo's commitment for the Commonwealth to restore all funding lost due to cuts made in programs funded by state aid to localities

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
Executive Director

Overarching Priorities

The state, working with local government, must reaffirm the partnership and program viability of core services through transparency, fiscal responsibility and service delivery.

VACo stands ready to partner with the Commonwealth to better serve the citizens of Virginia.

VACo is committed to protecting the reliability and sustainability of the Commonwealth's general fund. The general fund supports most of the core government functions, including public education (K-12 and higher education), the Comprehensive Services Act and human services, public safety, natural resources and environmental services.

VACo calls on the Commonwealth to support the general fund by initiating state tax reform. State tax reform should include a restructuring of the state income and sales and use taxes to increase revenues in order to meet current and foreseeable core service demands. Tax reform takes pressure off local leaders to raise the real estate tax to meet mandated services.

VACo supports expanded local tax and fee authority. Local governments require sufficient revenue streams in addition to the real estate tax to provide cost-effective and quality services.

VACo opposes legislative or administrative initiatives that would transfer state services and responsibilities to counties, such as line of duty, construction and maintenance of new and existing roads, or any other unfunded or underfunded mandates.

VACo calls on the Commonwealth to restore all funding lost due to cuts made in programs funded by aid to localities.

VACo's Priorities

Calculation of State Aid to Localities

VACo supports the use of the most current population statistics available for the purposes of determining state aid to localities.

Deployment of Universal Affordable Access to High-Speed Internet Services

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

Dillon Rule

VACo supports relaxation of the Dillon Rule to provide counties greater autonomy in areas including land use, local revenue measures and other issues of local concern.

Education Funding

- VACo supports full state funding for public education including the biennial re-benchmark of Virginia's Standards of Quality (SOQ), teacher salaries, targeted incentive programs and capital and maintenance support.
- VACo opposes legislation that would allow local school divisions to keep any unexpended funds from local governing bodies for use the next fiscal year.

Eminent Domain

VACo supports preserving eminent domain authority of local governments, governmental agencies and governmental authorities. VACo opposes legislation that will limit the use and increase the expense of eminent domain.

Employment Benefits

- VACo opposes using the VRS retirement funds intended for teacher retirement for other general fund purposes.
- VACo supports full funding by the Commonwealth of mandated benefits for particular classes of employees, such as teachers, and emergency service, fire and police officials.

Funding and Staffing of State-Mandated Positions

- VACo urges the Commonwealth to meet its full funding obligations for constitutional officers and other state mandated positions.
- VACo opposes any change to local ordinance violation penalties that removes a source of local revenue.

Health and Human Resources Funding

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

Growth Management Tools

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

State Funding

VACo is dedicated to protecting the reliability and sustainability of the Commonwealth's general fund that supports core government services mandated by the state, including public primary and secondary education.

Stormwater

VACo supports stormwater requirements related to new development, redevelopment and existing development that are cost-effective, affordable, and manageable at the local level.

Transportation

- VACo vigorously opposes any initiatives to transfer to counties the responsibility for the construction, maintenance or operation of new and existing roads.
- VACo urges the Commonwealth to enact a funding package for transportation with new revenues separate from the general fund that are stable, recurring and sufficient to meet Virginia's transportation infrastructure needs.
- VACo supports legislation to allow maintenance projects to receive matching funds under the Revenue Sharing program.

Water Quality Improvement Program Funding

- VACo supports partnerships among all levels of government to improve water quality.
- VACo opposes any strategy to penalize local governments by withdrawing current forms of financial assistance or imposing monitoring, management or similar requirements on localities without providing sufficient resources to accomplish those processes.
- VACo strongly opposes the imposition of a state fee, tax or surcharge on water, sewer, solid waste or any service provided by a local government or authority.

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

1. Spring regional meetings: In even number years VACo members 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 annual legislative session.
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 of the annual Legislative Program.
4. The membership is asked to adopt the new legislative program during the annual business meeting. The meeting occurs on the last day of the annual conference in November.

Additional information

VACo's President appoints steering committee chairs and vice chairs. VACo members volunteer to serve on steering committees. In early October, prior to the annual conference, the membership receives a Preliminary Legislative Program, which is revised during the annual conference.

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