

**VIRGINIA
GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**2017
Legislative
Priorities**



Virginia Association of Counties

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VACo 2017 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

OVERARCHING LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY POSITION

Increase Education Funding

To assure each child in Virginia a quality education necessary for his or her success, VACo calls upon the Governor and General Assembly to fully fund the Standards of Quality as recommended by the Board of Education and the Standards of Accreditation. The provision of a quality education for all Virginia's children is the most important function of state and local government. The infusion of K-12 funding provided in the 2016 General Assembly session was a step in the right direction toward restoring the state's partnership with localities in fulfilling this critical mission. However, when adjusted for inflation, state per pupil spending on public education is less than funding levels in FY 2006. With increased educational mandates, increased numbers of students, and state policy changes that decreased education funding, local school divisions have had to eliminate important academic programs, cut instructional and support staff, and increase class sizes, despite strong local efforts to improve efficiencies in public education.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

Land Use/Growth Management Tools

VACo supports maintaining local authority to plan and regulate land use and opposes any legislation that weakens these key local responsibilities.

VACo supports legislation that grants localities additional tools to adequately meet increasing needs for public services driven by new development without burdening current residents with the cost of new growth through increased real estate taxes. Such additional tools may include broad impact fee authority for all counties, and adequate public facilities provisions in subdivision ordinances.

Proffers

VACo supports changes to the conditional zoning law to allow greater flexibility in the process for determining impacts to be addressed when considering an application for development.

Regulation of Home-based Businesses

VACo opposes any legislation that limits or restricts local authority to regulate home-based businesses, including short-term rentals regardless of whether services or goods are purchased through an online hosting platform.

ENVIRONMENT AND AGRICULTURE

Water Quality Improvement Funding

VACo supports effective partnerships among and across all levels of government to improve water quality.

VACo urges state and federal agencies to consider impacts on local governments of any initiatives intended to reduce loadings of pollutants into state waters from both point and non-point sources. In order for comprehensive, watershed-wide water quality improvement strategies to be effective, major and reliable forms of financial and technical assistance from federal and state governments will be necessary. VACo supports the goal of improved water quality, but will oppose provisions of any strategy that penalizes 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 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.

FINANCE

Local Finance

VACo supports the authority of county governments to levy and collect revenue from local business taxes.

Meals and Tobacco Tax Authority

VACo supports granting counties the authority to adopt a local meals tax without referendum. VACo proposes the county meals tax rate be raised to a cap of 8 percent, which is consistent with current rates used by cities and towns. VACo also supports equal authority among all counties to levy and collect a tobacco tax.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Broadband

VACo urges the Commonwealth and the Federal Government to assist communities in their efforts to deploy universal affordable access to broadband for all areas, particularly in underserved and rural areas. Additionally, VACo opposes mandates that limit or restrict local land use authority for the siting of telecommunications infrastructure or result in a negative fiscal impact to county budgets.

HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Health and Human Resources Funding

VACo supports transparent state policies and funding to ensure the Commonwealth's at-risk families have access to high quality and appropriate services. The Commonwealth should provide full funding to localities for state-mandated human services and provide the necessary program flexibility to enable localities to provide comprehensive and case-tailored services.

TRANSPORTATION

Local-State Transportation Funding and Cooperation

VACo believes it is important to closely monitor and evaluate the implementation of "SMART-SCALE" and all other processes employed in recent years for distributing transportation funds. VACo supports the continuation of the state's investment in Virginia's transportation infrastructure statewide. While VACo appreciates the additional funding that has been provided in recent years to address the needs of Virginia's highway system, more funding will be needed in the immediate future for secondary roads, which are vital for economic development for Virginia's counties.

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