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VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

October 27, 2022

Daniel A. Gecker
President
Virginia Board of Education
PO Box 2120
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear President Gecker,

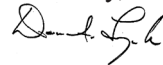
The Virginia Association of Counties is supportive of the efforts of this administration and the Virginia General Assembly in approving \$1.25 billion in funding dedicated towards the construction of new schools or modernizing existing buildings. The cost to replace or modernize school infrastructure 50 years old or older exceeds \$25 billion. The creation of the School Construction Assistance Program, School Construction Grant Program, and reforms to the Literary Fund are critical to the efforts of many counties to continue to undertake efforts to modernize school infrastructure across the Commonwealth.

At the October 20th meeting of the Board of Education, the Board heard the first review of proposed guidelines to the School Construction Assistance Program and members of Board directed Department of Education (VDOE) staff to solicit feedback from statewide K-12 associations in advance of the Board's next meeting on November 17th. As VDOE works to set parameters on the new program, VACo offers these thoughts that will expand the eligibility of the program and ensure that the existing funds appropriated by the General Assembly are allocated in a timely and thorough manner.

The School Construction Grant Program allows for eligible use of funds to include "...*school projects completed or initiated within the last ten years.*" In order to assist as many high fiscal stress localities as possible, and to maintain consistency across both the grant and rebate program, VACo recommends similar language be included in the proposed guidelines for the School Construction Assistance Program. Additionally, the School Construction Grant Program allows for funds to be used for debt service payments on school projects that have been completed or initiated within the same time period. We further recommend that similar language be included in the proposed guidelines. By freeing up debt service, many localities who are either maxed out or nearing full debt capacity will then be able to undertake additional school construction and modernization projects. Lastly, while prioritizing "need" is a vital criterion and in keeping with the budget language establishing the Assistance Program, we request the Board consider not only the most recent data on a locality's local fiscal stress index and local composite index, but also a multi-year average. This is a better indicator of long-term fiscal stress indicators and prevent fluctuations resulting from the unusual nature of the pandemic from distorting true fiscal stress.

We appreciate your consideration of our requests. We stand ready to assist you and your staff in your discussions and we look forward to continuing to build a robust state and local partnership in support of successful educational opportunities across the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,



Dean Lynch

Cc: Dr. Jillian Balow, Superintendent of Public Instruction
Members of the Virginia Board of Education
Secretary Aimee Guidera
Members of the VACo Board of Directors

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