



Tuesday, January 20, 2026

Governor Spanberger Addresses General Assembly

Governor Abigail Spanberger, who took the oath of office and was inaugurated as Virginia's 75th Governor on Saturday, addressed a joint session of the General Assembly on Monday afternoon, setting out her legislative priorities and encouraging work to find common ground. Governor Spanberger highlighted several Executive Orders she signed on Saturday that are intended to reduce costs and streamline housing production, and discussed several legislative proposals designed to address cost-of-living concerns in the areas of health care, energy, and housing, including:

- Placing guardrails on certain practices by pharmacy benefit managers
- Providing targeted health care premium assistance
- Strengthening health care workforce incentive programs
- Expanding energy storage
- Enhancing programs that assist low-income Virginians with energy efficiency improvements
- Rejoining the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative
- Bolstering certain protections for tenants
- Allowing local governments to adopt affordable housing programs (as the Governor explained, "Our proposal will empower local governments to adopt affordable housing programs that fit their needs – because the people closest to the problem are often best positioned to solve it."), and
- Creating a revolving loan fund to support mixed-income housing developments

The Governor complimented Governor Glenn Youngkin's economic development efforts, notably his investments in site development, and indicated her plans to build on these successes

through initiatives such as the creation of the state's Economic Resiliency Task Force to coordinate a statewide response to federal actions; her directive to her Cabinet members to support farmers in expanding their markets; and her support for workforce development efforts. She reiterated her opposition to repeal of Virginia's "Right to Work" statutes, but emphasized her desire to be the best state for working families as well as the best state for business through initiatives such as a statewide paid family and medical leave program, increased access to child care, and a \$15 per hour minimum wage.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

ACTION ITEM: VACo Opposes Sovereign Immunity Bill

[SB 228 \(Surovell\)](#) proposes changes to Code, including limiting the sovereign immunity of local governments. The bill states that when a locality provides liability insurance or self-insurance under this section, that provision is "deemed a waiver of sovereign immunity." This means the locality may be liable for damages up to the total of the self-insurance or insurance coverage it has in place, including any pooled or excess coverage.

VACo Members – Contact your Senator on the [Courts of Justice Committee](#) to Oppose SB 228.

According to local government risk insurers, this will have significant fiscal impacts to local government liabilities, potentially raising existing liability costs by more than 2.5 times, resulting in several hundred million dollars in additional costs to local governments.

Local governments routinely perform inherently risky but socially necessary functions, such law enforcement and corrections, fire-EMS and emergency response, child welfare and social services, land-use decisions and zoning, and public works, and transportation. Without sovereign immunity, localities face open-ended liability for lawsuits, including high-dollar verdicts.

VACo opposes any substantive change in local governments' present defense of qualified immunity and sovereign immunity. SB 228 has been referred to the Senate Courts of Justice Committee, which could hear the bill as early as Wednesday, January 21. VACo urges member localities to consult with their risk insurance providers to determine individual fiscal impacts of the legislation.

VACo Contact: [Jeremy R. Bennett](#)

ACTION ITEM: VACo Opposes Bills to Allow “By-Right” Development of Faith-Based Owned Property

[SB 367 \(Carroll Foy\)](#), [SB 388 \(McPike\)](#) and [HB 1279 \(Cole\)](#) override local decision-making authority by allowing development of housing on land owned by property tax-exempt religious organizations or certain property tax-exempt nonprofit organizations and provides that zoning ordinances shall allow the by-right development of up to 20 units per acre on property owned by such organizations. The bill mandates that the review of such developments be completed pursuant to general law and states that localities shall not require a special exception, special use permit, conditional use permit, rezoning, or any discretionary review or approval process.

Contact your Delegates and Senators to Oppose SB 367, SB 388, and HB 1279.

KEY POINTS

- VACo supports maintaining local authority to make land use decisions on the location and density of residential development.
- By-right development of residential growth on any property, regardless of its location and access to adequate public facilities such as water, sewer, and roads, is inconsistent with the goals and objectives of sound land use policy and practice.

SB 367 and SB 388 will be heard in the [Senate Local Government](#) on Monday, January 26. HB 1279 has not been assigned to a committee.

VACo Contact: [Joe Lerch, AICP](#)

Key Dates for 2026 General Assembly Session

The General Assembly convenes today for a scheduled 60-day session.

Key dates for the 2026 session, as approved by the Joint Rules Committee in the procedural resolution setting out the schedule for the session, are as follows:

- **Wednesday, January 14:** General Assembly convenes; pre-filed bills must be submitted by 10:00 a.m. (after the prefiling deadline, legislators are limited to five additional bills or resolutions). Last day to submit bills creating or continuing a study or to submit bills dealing with the Virginia Retirement System. Governor Youngkin will address a joint session of the General Assembly at 7 p.m.
- **Friday, January 16:** Deadline to submit budget amendments.

- **Saturday, January 17:** Inauguration of Governor-Elect Spanberger, Lieutenant Governor-Elect Hashmi, and Attorney General-Elect Jones.
- **Monday, January 19:** Joint session of the General Assembly for remarks by Governor Spanberger.
- **Friday, January 23:** Last day to submit legislation, other than bills submitted by unanimous consent or bills requested by the Governor.
- **Tuesday, February 17:** Last day for bills to be acted upon in their chambers of origin, other than the budget bills. Bills must “cross over” to the opposite chamber by Wednesday, February 18.
- **Sunday, February 22:** “Budget Sunday” deadline for House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations committees to report their respective budget proposals.
- **Thursday, February 26:** Deadline for each chamber to act on its respective budget proposal.
- **Wednesday, March 4:** Deadline for each chamber to act on budget and revenue bills from the other chamber and appoint conferees as necessary.
- **Monday, March 9:** Deadline for committee action on all legislation by midnight.
- **Saturday, March 14:** Scheduled adjournment *sine die*.
- **Wednesday, April 22:** Reconvened session to consider Governor’s actions on bills and budget items.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

Advocate for Your Community at the VACo Local Government Day

Thursday, February 5, 2026 | [Omni Richmond Hotel](#)



REGISTER TODAY

It's a day for us. Localities. It's a day for us to learn how the decisions being made by the General Assembly might affect us. And it's a day to make our voices heard. Attend Local Government Day. Then visit the Capitol to meet with your legislators and observe committee meetings. Later join us for a reception.

Date: Thursday, February 5, 2026

Reserve a Room: [Omni Richmond Hotel Room Link](#)

Who should attend: ALL local elected officials and staff are encouraged to register and attend.

Registration Fee

\$100 | Includes Day Briefing (Noon – 2pm) and Reception (430pm – 630pm)

Agenda

- **9am** | VACo Board of Directors Meeting
- **10am** | Registration
- **1130am** | Lunch

- **Noon** | VACo Local Government Day
- **Afternoon** | Visit the Capitol to speak with legislators
- **430pm-630pm** | VACo Legislative Reception | Omni Richmond Hotel

Please email Valerie Russell at vrussell@vaco.org with questions.

For information on how to reach your representatives, see the [Virginia House of Delegates](#) and the [Senate of Virginia](#) member websites. Find information about VACo's positions in the [2026 Legislative Program](#). We will distribute the Local Government Day Bulletin before the event.

VACo Contact: [Valerie Russell](#)