

# Capitol Contact

## Virginia General Assembly

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Thursday, March 19, 2026

## Early Childhood Education and Child Care Legislation Status

Several pieces of legislation affecting public works contracting and labor requirements moved through the 2026 General Assembly and are headed to Governor Spanberger for her action by April 13. As a member of the Virginia Promise Partnership ([VPP](#)), VACo supports expanding access to affordable, quality childcare.

[HB 1208 \(Sewell\)](#) / [SB 134 \(Locke\)](#) establish a child care access calculation to provide Virginia's policymakers with clear and consistent information on funding Virginia early childhood care and education services. Virginia lacks an accessible way of determining the level of childcare funding needed from year to year. This contributes to volatility in the system, creating uncertainty for working parents, childcare providers, and Virginia employers. The results of this structural gap are readily tangible: thousands of children (age birth-five) remain on waitlists for subsidized childcare. On March 14, the Senate agreed to the conference report for SB 134 on a unanimous vote and the House of Delegates adopted the conference report 85-12. The conference report for HB 1208 was adopted by the House 76-20 and the Senate 39-0.

[HB 18 \(McClure\)](#) / [SB 3 \(Aird\)](#) establish the Virginia Employee Child Care Assistance Program, which will provide matching funds to incentivize employers to contribute to the child care costs of their employees, adding an additional payor to the current Early Childhood Care and Education Commission ([ECCE](#)) funding model. The Senate's budget proposal included \$50 million over the biennium, while the House proposed \$25 million for the program. Funding differences will need to be resolved between now and the Special Session on April 23. HB 18 passed the Senate unanimously on March 9. The Senate had previously accepted the House-approved substitute to SB 3, so the bills are now identical. A similar bill, [SB 119 \(Carroll Foy\)](#), was incorporated into SB 3.

VACo supports efforts to increase at-risk children's access to high-quality, enriching learning environments, including more resources and flexibility for localities

participating in programs like the Virginia Preschool Initiative and Head Start. VACo supports additional federal and state funding for programs such as the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) to support increased demand for childcare services. VACo supports local flexibility to administer or expand support services for childcare. VACo supports the work of, and local government representation on, the Commission on Early Childhood Care and Education to provide recommendations for and tracking progress on the financing of Virginia's comprehensive birth-to-five early childhood care and education system.

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

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## Oppose Bill to Override Local Authority to Regulate Off-Street Parking

By final votes [62-37](#) in the House of Delegates and [21-19](#) in the Senate, the legislature passed [HB 888 \(Shin\)](#). The bill mandates specific statewide standards for off-street parking be adopted in local zoning ordinances for “designated areas” defined as ... *any parcel that is (i) located within one mile of the entrance to a mass transit or public transportation station or facility; (ii) located within an approved small area plan and designated therein as a revitalization area or other designated district established for the purpose of facilitating residential or mixed-use development; (iii) located within a zoning district classification that permits residential, multifamily, or mixed-use development and authorizes a floor area ratio of 1.0 or greater, or an equivalent density based on units per acre, either by-right or by special exception, special use permit, conditional use permit, or other discretionary approval; or (iv) that is the subject of an application for rezoning, special exception, special use permit, conditional use permit, site plan, or subdivision plat, that if approved, will include affordable dwelling units in accordance with an ordinance adopted pursuant to § [15.2-2304](#), [15.2-2305](#), or [15.2-2305.1](#).*

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

- Contact [Governor Abigail Spanberger](#) and urge the Governor to oppose HB 888.

Within such areas localities are prohibited from requiring off-street parking spaces in amounts exceeding (1) one-half of one parking space per dwelling unit for multifamily or mixed-use residential development; and (2) one parking space per dwelling unit for one-family and two-family dwellings and townhouses.

The legislation also requires localities with a population greater than 20,000 to provide for administrative reduction of minimum off-street parking requirements of not less than

20 percent for residential, multifamily, or mixed-use development proposed on parcels outside of the designated areas defined in the legislation.

## **KEY POINTS**

- Off-street parking requirements should be crafted by local governments with the input of local stakeholders.
- Mandatory statewide standards arbitrarily applied to all localities will fail to address the unique needs and circumstances of individual neighborhoods and commercial districts.

## **KEY CONTACT**

- [\*\*Governor Abigail Spanberger\*\*](#)

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

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# **Skill Games Legislation Heads to the Governor; Bill Includes Local Opt-Out Via Referendum**

After failing to pass several times on the House floor on the final day of the session, legislation to legalize and regulate skill games is on its way to the Governor's desk. As passed by the General Assembly, [\*\*SB 661 \(Rouse\)\*\*](#) sets up a regulatory and tax structure for skill games under the auspices of the Virginia Lottery. The bill authorizes localities to bar skill games via referendum, which could be called for either by resolution of the county, city, or town governing body or upon a petition of qualified voters. If an opt-out referendum fails, the governing body may not hold another referendum for three years.

Other key provisions of SB 661 as passed by the General Assembly March 14:

- Authorizes the Director of the Virginia Lottery to issue licenses for manufacturers, distributors, operators, and host locations of skill games. Certain truck stops, businesses that hold a retail license to sell alcoholic beverages, and certain social organizations that hold a valid charitable gaming permit are eligible to be host locations for skill games.
- Limits truck stops to seven skill game devices. ABC licensees with on-premises licenses would be limited to four devices; ABC licensees with off-premises licenses would be limited to three devices, and social organizations would be limited to two devices.

- Sets an overall cap of 25,000 machines statewide and bars approval of any skill game machine for operation within 10 miles of a casino gaming establishment, or in a location that would adversely affect or interfere with the conduct of affairs of any primary or secondary school. Prohibits any manufacturer or distributor licensee from placing more than half of its gaming devices in a low-income geographic area (defined as any locality, or community within a locality, with a median household income of up to 80 percent of the local median household income, or any area designated as a qualified opportunity zone by the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury).
- Imposes a gaming tax of 25 percent of gross profits. Revenues from the tax would be distributed as follows: 15 percent to the locality in which the host location operates; 6.5 percent to the Lottery for administrative costs; 2.5 percent to the Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Fund; 1 percent to the Virginia State Police; and the remainder to the state General Fund.
- Prohibits anyone younger than 21 from operating a skill game machine.
- Directs the Lottery Board to adopt regulations to implement the legislation and authorizes the Lottery to begin accepting applications for licensure as of July 1, 2026; allows an applicant who has submitted a completed application on or after July 1, but before August 1, to begin manufacturing, distributing, placing, or operating skill game devices, even if the applicant's licensure application is still pending. (If the Board subsequently denied the license application, the applicant would be required to cease operations.)

**VACo Contact:** [Katie Boyle](#)

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## **COIA Electronic Filing Legislation Advances**

Legislation amending financial disclosure requirements under the State and Local Government Conflict of Interests Act (COIA) is heading to the Governor's desk, with [SB 530 \(Srinivasan\)](#) establishing a state-managed electronic filing system for local officials. This bill represents a shift in how local governments will manage compliance with COIA requirements, moving from largely local, paper-based processes to a centralized system operated by the Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory [Council](#). Under the legislation, local elected officials, certain employees, and candidates will be required to file their annual disclosure forms electronically through the Council's system. The legislation standardizes filing practices across the Commonwealth and places primary responsibility for system administration and oversight at the state level, with coordination involving general registrars and the Department of Elections.

The bill includes a phased implementation schedule that reflects differences in local capacity but ultimately requires all localities to transition to the new system. Larger jurisdictions will be required to comply first, beginning in 2028, followed by mid-sized localities in 2029, and all remaining counties and cities by 2030. While optional early participation is permitted, the mandate will apply statewide within the next several years. The bill passed the Seante unanimously and was approved by the House of Delegates on a vote of 82-15.

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

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## Dual Office-Holding Legislation Passes General Assembly in Revised Form, Heads to Governor

Two bills that seek to address a situation in the Town of Purcellville emerged from a conference committee and passed the General Assembly late last week. The conference reports for [HB 505 \(McAuliff\)](#) and [SB 648 \(Perry\)](#) essentially combine the provisions of both bills as passed by their chambers of origin.

As passed, the bills now provide that any member of a local governing body who has been employed by a governmental agency that is a component part of and which is subject to the ultimate control of the governing body is considered to have a continuing personal interest in the agency for two years after terminating employment.

Additionally, and only applying to the Town of Purcellville, based on ... *any town in Planning District 8 with a population between 8,000 and 10,000 according to the latest United States decennial census*, the following shall apply:

- Require that in the event of a criminal proceeding against any officer of the town, the court of appropriate jurisdiction is to suspend the officer pending the resolution of the proceeding and may appoint someone to act in the officer's place.
- Require the town to conduct a study, by July 1, 2027, of its debt and other liability risks and adopt a plan consistent with the study to address such town's needs in a fiscally appropriate manner that does not jeopardize the town's bond rating.
- Require that the town council shall only take votes on matters that have been (i) properly published at least three days prior to the vote as part of a town council agenda or (ii) otherwise approved as additional agenda items or as amendments to existing agenda items by a three-fourths vote of all the members of the council at the start of the meeting.

- Any resident of the town shall have standing in the general district court of the county in which the town is located to challenge a town council vote in conflict with this section or the provisions of § 2.2-3112 of the Code of Virginia, and such case shall take precedence on the docket. Any prevailing resident filing such case shall be entitled to attorney fees.
- Require the town manager to be a resident of the Commonwealth of Virginia unless the town council waives this requirement. (NOTE: This provision was added in conference.)

It is important to note that the provisions specific to the Town of Purcellville will expire on July 1, 2028.

VACo Contacts: [Joe Lerch, AICP](#), and [Katie Boyle](#)

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## **ACTION ITEM: Conference Report Advances to Governor Spanberger on Mandatory Collective Bargaining Bills**

*Counties encouraged to continue contacting Governor Spanberger's office as well as passing resolutions stating concerns and opposition to the legislation. Your advocacy is required.*

The General Assembly has approved legislation requiring mandatory collective bargaining for local governments in certain cases, and it now heads to the Governor for a decision. Lawmakers advanced identical conference reports on [HB 1263 \(Tran\)](#) / [SB 378 \(Surovell\)](#), combining them into a single final package. VACo continues to oppose the legislation, arguing it limits local decision-making and could create significant costs by requiring collective bargaining if employees petition and vote to form a bargaining unit.

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

- Contact [Governor Abigail Spanberger](#) and urge the Governor to preserve meaningful local flexibility rather than impose a one-size-fits-all statewide model.

The House approved the conference report on March 14, 2026, by a 62–34 vote, and the Senate approved it 20–18. The legislation now goes to Governor Abigail Spanberger, who has until April 13 to take action.

VACo remains concerned that, even as revised, the legislation would replace Virginia's current system, where local governments can choose whether to allow collective

bargaining with a single, statewide framework. This new system would be overseen by a state-created Public Employee Relations Board (PERB).

The conference report would also eliminate existing law that currently gives localities and school boards the authority to decide if and how to implement collective bargaining.

The conference report also preserves language recognizing existing bargaining relationships and agreements entered before July 1, 2028, but it does not preserve indefinite local discretion outside that new statewide structure. Existing certifications, active negotiations, and agreements are not superseded before that date, but on and after July 1, 2028, they are folded into the new framework administered by the state.

## **KEY POINTS**

Even after conference, several major VACo concerns remain:

- **Local decision-making is still preempted.**  
The legislation repeals the existing local option framework and replaces it with a statewide model. That means local, democratically elected officials would lose significant authority to tailor labor-relations policy to local fiscal capacity, workforce structure, and administrative realities.
- **A state PERB would oversee local labor relations.**  
The conference report establishes the Public Employee Relations Board within the Department, with five members, and no guaranteed local government representation. That board would determine bargaining units, oversee certification and decertification, handle disputes, and administer the new system.
- **Arbitration remains.**  
For public employees generally, unresolved impasses proceed from mediation to arbitration, and for firefighters and EMS providers the bill contains separate arbitration procedures whose final determinations are binding, subject to judicial review. This continues to raise serious concern about unpredictable fiscal outcomes and reduced local budget control. The following language has been included, “No provision of this section shall be construed to restrict a governing body's authority to establish the budget of or appropriate funds to the public employer.” However, in practice, this does not protect localities; instead, it shifts the conflict into disputes over good faith compliance, where refusals to appropriate funds can trigger legal challenges and enforcement actions, exposing counties to litigation rather than preserving real fiscal control.
- **Existing local agreements are not a permanent shield.**  
The conference language protects agreements and certifications already in place before July 1, 2028, but only as a transition. It does not preserve a long-term locally controlled alternative system once the statewide framework takes effect.

- **Implementation work begins before 2028.**  
Although major provisions take effect on July 1, 2028, the conference report directs the Department of Labor and Industry to promulgate regulations necessary to implement the act by that same date. That means substantive implementation work begins well before the nominal effective date.
- **The scope remains broad.**  
The final version provides that public employees may organize, choose representatives, and engage in concerted activity for collective bargaining and mutual aid, while also extending the framework to local governments, school boards, many state employees, home care providers, and certain higher education service employees.
- **Public employers must provide employee contact information and access.**  
The bill requires public employers to provide extensive employee contact information to exclusive bargaining representatives and to provide access to represented employees, including in connection with orientations for new hires. These operational requirements would create new administrative obligations for local governments.

With the General Assembly having adopted the conference reports, county attention should continue to focus on the Governor’s office. Your advocacy is required. As previously [reported](#), counties that have concerns about fiscal impact, administrative burden, public safety implications, interaction with existing personnel systems, or disruption of current local arrangements should continue sharing those concerns directly with the Governor’s policy team while the legislation is under executive review.

### **Governor’s Policy Team Contacts**

- **Bonnie Krenz-Schnurman**  
Chief of Staff to Governor Abigail Spanberger  
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When you reach out to the Governor’s policy team, please include VACo in any correspondence. VACo also encourages county boards of supervisors to pass resolutions expressing their opposition to the legislation in its current form. Additional VACo members continue to voice [concerns](#) in statewide media.

While the conference report resolves differences between the House and Senate versions, it does not resolve VACo's core concern: the bills would still move Virginia away from a local-option approach and toward a mandatory statewide structure with significant local fiscal, legal, and operational consequences. Counties should continue making the case that labor relations policy in Virginia must preserve meaningful local flexibility rather than impose a one-size-fits-all statewide model.

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

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## Oppose Bills to Allow “By-Right” Development of Faith-Based Owned Property Headed to the Governor

[SB 388 \(McPike\)](#) and [HB 1279 \(Cole\)](#) override local decision-making authority by allowing development of housing, with up to 30 percent of certain ground-floor nonresidential uses, on land owned by property tax-exempt religious organizations or certain property tax-exempt nonprofit organizations. The legislation also mandates that zoning ordinances shall allow the by-right development of up to 20 units per acre on property owned by such organizations. The measures specify 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.

### ACTION REQUESTED

- Contact [Governor Abigail Spanberger](#) and urge the Governor to veto SB 388 and HB 1279 ([see letter](#)).

The legislation includes the following key provisions, some of which were not decided until the last day of session by a committee of conference to overcome differences in how they passed each chamber:

- A qualifying religious or non-profit organization must own the property for five years prior to applying for a housing development application.
- At least 60 percent of the total housing units must be affordable at 80 percent or less AMI (area median income) for rental units, and up to 120 percent AMI for for-sale units.
- Affordability of units must be recorded and preserved for a minimum of 30 years by deed restrictions or other legally binding requirements.

- Existing public water and sewer must be within 500 feet of the property line.
- It does not apply to ... *property zoned for or adjacent to land zoned for industrial use provided there has been an active and operational industrial use as defined by the locality on the property within the previous five years.*
- The provisions of the legislation become effective on January 1, 2027 and expire on January 1, 2031

## **KEY POINTS**

- VACo supports maintaining local decisions regarding the location and density of residential and mixed-use development and how such projects may fit within and benefit their community.
- By-right development of residential and mixed-use development on any property, regardless of its location and access to adequate publicly funded facilities such as water, sewer, and roads, is inconsistent with the goals and objectives of sound land use policy and practice.
- Virginia Code requires that all ... *zoning regulations shall be uniform for each class or kind of buildings and uses throughout each district* ([15.2-2282. Regulations to be uniform](#)). This legislation upends this longstanding legal land use principle by granting different rights to properties of the same zoning classification based on ownership.

## **KEY CONTACT**

- [Governor Abigail Spanberger](#)

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

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## **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 pre-filing 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](#)