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March 9, 2026

The Honorable Abigail Spanberger
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, Virginia 23218

Dear Governor Spanberger:

On behalf of the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo), I write to respectfully express concerns regarding HB 1263 and SB 378, legislation that would significantly alter the framework governing collective bargaining for local governments in Virginia.

As you are aware, Virginia law currently allows local governments to determine whether and how to engage in collective bargaining with public employees. Several localities have exercised this authority and adopted locally tailored frameworks that reflect their workforce needs, fiscal capacity, and community priorities. Current law also allows local government employees to organize and to petition local governing bodies to vote on whether to adopt collective bargaining. This locally driven approach recognizes the diversity of Virginia's counties and allows elected officials to remain directly accountable to their residents for workforce and budget decisions.

HB 1263 and SB 378 would replace this flexible system with a mandatory statewide framework administered by the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB). Counties across the Commonwealth have expressed significant concerns that the legislation would shift decision-making authority away from local governing bodies while creating new fiscal, legal, and administrative risks for local governments.

Key concerns raised by counties include:

- The legislation vests broad regulatory authority in the Public Employee Relations Board (PERB), a state entity that would oversee and adjudicate disputes involving local governments despite the absence of dedicated local government representation.
- PERB would have authority to seek judicial enforcement of its rulings, potentially requiring counties to defend against litigation simply for disputing PERB interpretations of the statute or its orders.
- Binding arbitration could impose compensation, staffing, or benefit obligations that local governing bodies must fund regardless of local revenue constraints or competing service priorities.
- Arbitration outcomes may create unpredictable fiscal obligations that local governments must absorb while still meeting requirements to maintain balanced local budgets.
- The legislation risks disrupting existing locally negotiated agreements and processes already in place in several Virginia localities.

1207 E. Main St., Suite 300
Richmond, Va. 23219-3627

Phone: 804.788.6652
Fax: 804.788.0083

Email: mail@vaco.org
Website: www.vaco.org

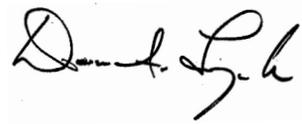
Virginia counties must balance their budgets annually while providing essential services including public safety, education, transportation infrastructure, and health and human services. The potential for arbitration outcomes to override local fiscal planning raises serious concerns, particularly for rural and smaller counties with limited tax bases and fewer revenue options.

Counties vary widely in population, workforce structure, and economic capacity. Policies that may be workable in large urban jurisdictions may create significant challenges in rural or smaller communities. Preserving local authority allows counties to develop workforce policies that reflect these differences while remaining accountable to the residents they serve.

VACo and its member counties remain committed to supporting public employees and maintaining professional workplaces. However, decisions about whether and how to engage in collective bargaining should remain with locally elected governing bodies rather than being dictated through a uniform statewide framework.

Thank you for your consideration and for your continued service to the Commonwealth.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean A. Lynch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dean" and last name "Lynch" clearly distinguishable.

Dean A. Lynch, CAE
Executive Director
Virginia Association of Counties

CC: Members, VACo Board of Directors