



2022 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

 **VLBC**
Virginia Legislative Black Caucus

2022 AGENDA

In the last two years, the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) successfully championed and passed historic and important policy reforms centered around justice, access, civil rights, and equity.

The VLBC's 2022 Legislative Agenda is focused on building upon and protecting recent policy successes to continue to address ongoing challenges and to effectively meet new and developing challenges.

In the 2022 Session, the VLBC will protect and champion legislation on the following policy areas:

CIVIL RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

As stated last year, the VLBC continues to fight for a Virginia where everyone's rights are protected and where everyone has equal access to the ballot box. We will strongly oppose any attempts at voter suppression, discrimination, and inequality. As such the VLBC will:

- Protect the Voting Rights Act of Virginia. This comprehensive law is based on the 1965 Voting Rights Act—modernized and updated to expand and protect the right to vote for all Virginians;
- Protect the Ongoing Effort to Amend the Virginia Constitution to Provide for Easier Restoration of Rights and to Better Enshrine Constitutional Protections for the Right to Vote for All;
- Protect Measures that Expanded Access to Voting such as Allowing for Early Sunday Voting, Improving Access to Curbside Voting, and Repealing Restrictive Voter ID Laws; and
- Protect Allowing Students to Take Partial-Day Excused Absences to Partake in Civic or Political Engagement.

In addition, the VLBC will also build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation that will:

- Reform the Recall Process to Avoid Abuse and Harassment;
- Require Constitutional Officers to Identify on the Ballot the Nominating Political Party for Party Candidates and Identify Independent Candidates as Such; and
- Require a JLARC to Study Virginia's Election Governance System to Ensure Accountability, Uniformity, and Fairness.

JUSTICE REFORM

As in years past, the VLBC continues to stand in support of comprehensive justice reform. This includes:

- Protecting the Law that Ended the Death Penalty in Virginia;
- Protecting the Legalization of Marijuana and Continuing to Push for the Establishment of a Socially Equitable Structure;
- Protecting the Law Allowing Evidence of Mental Health Conditions to be Admitted in Criminal Cases;
- Protecting the Elimination of Jail Sentences for First-time Technical Violations of Probation;
- Protecting the Elimination of the Habitual Offender Statute;
- Protecting Laws that Help Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline, including the Law to Eliminate the Criminalization of Students for School-based Disorderly Conduct;
- Protecting the Elimination of the Presumption of Pretrial Detention for Certain Offenses; and

- Protecting the Law that Enables Localities to Establish Civilian Oversight Boards for Police Departments.

In addition, the VLBC will also build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation and efforts:

- Repealing Sovereign Immunity;
- Ending the Practice of Solitary Confinement;
- Improving Criminal Record Sealing Legislation by Removing Barriers to its Accessibility and Opening up Eligibility to More Virginians, Including Expanding Automatic Record Sealing;
- Removing all Mandatory Minimum Sentences from Virginia State Code;
- Guaranteeing a Right to an Attorney at First Appearance;
- Preventing People who are Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis from Being Charged with Felony Assault on a Law Enforcement Officer;
- Creating Early-Identification Systems to Help Municipalities Collect and Manage Data to Better Screen for Law Enforcement Officers that are Prone to Problematic Actions;
- Making Changes to Sentencing Guidelines – Barring “remote” (i.e., long ago) Convictions and Juvenile Adjudications from Being Considered on Sentencing Guidelines, Enhancements, or as Priors at Jury Trial;
- Allowing a Judge a “Second Look” at Lengthy Prison Sentences, Years After They Have Been Imposed, To Determine if That Severity Of Punishment is Still Necessary and Appropriate;
- Allowing Marijuana Re-Sentencing for Individuals Currently Convicted for Marijuana Offenses;
- Expanding Opportunities for People who are Incarcerated to Use Community Service and Underpaid Work to Pay Down Court Debt; and
- Strengthening and Fully Funding the Delinquency Prevention and Youth Development Act, Which Provides Localities with Resources to Prevent at Risk Young from Entering the Criminal Justice System.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY & SECURITY: SUPPORTING VIRGINIA’S LABOR FORCE & ESSENTIAL WORKERS

As our Commonwealth’s economy continues to face unprecedented barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the VLBC supports measures to protect and support Virginians. This includes:

- Protecting the Increase in the Minimum Wage;
- Protecting the Expansion of Worker Protections for Domestic Workers;
- Protecting the Establishment of the Virginia Jobs Investment Program and Fund;
- Protecting Legislation that Supports our Home Health Care Workers, Increases Medicaid Reimbursement Rates for Home Care, and Provides Paid Sick Leave for Home Care Workers; and
- Protecting the Expansion of Collective Bargaining Rights so that Every Worker in Virginia has a Seat at the Table.

In addition, the VLBC will also build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation:

- Establishing a Universal Framework for Paid Family and Medical Leave;
- Strengthening Employment Discrimination and Harassment Laws;
- Making Permanent Unemployment Overpayment Waiver Forgiveness & Continuation of Payment; and
- Expanding Workers Compensation Coverage.

HOUSING

Housing is a fundamental human right. Going into the new year, too many Virginians across the Commonwealth are struggling to pay their mortgage or purchase a home, are facing eviction or experiencing homelessness, or are in need of stable affordable housing. To address these issues VLBC will:

- Protect all Eviction Protections and Prevention Efforts;
- Protect the Expansion of the Right of Redemption and the Improvement of Post-Payment Notice to Prevent Evictions;
- Protect Efforts to Implement a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit;
- Protect Legislation Strengthening Foreclosure Protections for Homeowners as well as Protections for Virginians Who Own and Reside in Mobile Homes; and
- Protect and Further Investments in Virginia's Housing Trust Fund to End Homelessness and Increase Affordable Housing.

In addition, the VLBC will also build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation:

- Preventing Evictions by Allowing Judges to Waive the Appeal Bond Requirement for Indigent People Appealing an Eviction Judgment Based on Nonpayment of Rent; and
- Create Local Authority to Protect Residents from Inhumane Living Conditions.

HEALTHCARE & ESSENTIAL SERVICES

During the 2022 Session the VLBC will:

- Protect Measures that were Implemented to Help Mitigate COVID-19 Impacts;
- Protect the Reproductive Health Protection Act;
- Protect the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program; and
- Protect Abortion Coverage in the Health Exchange which Makes it Possible for more Virginians to Afford a Full Range of Reproductive Health Care.

In addition, the VLBC will also build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation and efforts:

- Addressing Maternal Mortality and Implicit Bias by Mandating Implicit Bias/Cultural Competency Training for all Health Care Professionals Licensed by the Virginia Board of Medicine;
- Increasing DD Waiver Funding;
- Increasing Sickle Cell Support/Adult Treatment; and
- Increasing Breast Cancer Diagnostic Screening Affordability for Women with Private Insurance.

EDUCATION & SUPPORTING VIRGINIA'S CHILDREN

To expand educational opportunities and access and to better address education issues, the VLBC will:

- Protect Legislation Establishing the Educational Equity Fund Pilot Program;
- Protect Legislation Expanding Access to Education for Immigrant Students;
- Protect Legislation Banning the Box in Education by Removing Criminal History Questions from Applications to Higher Education Institutions;
- Protect the School Equity and Staffing Act; and
- Protect the Establishment of Cultural Competency for Virginia Educators.

In addition, the VLBC will fight efforts that undermine public schools in the name of school choice and the VLBC will build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation:

- Implementing and Fully Funding the 2021 Standards of Quality Recommended by the Board of Education;
- Lifting the Cap on State Funding of School Support Personnel Put in Place During the Great Recession;
- Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in the Governor's School;
- Strengthening the Virginia Literacy Act to Address Literacy Issues in Grades pre-K-12;
- Supporting Efforts to Further Stabilize and Expand Access to Quality Childcare and Early Childhood Education;
- Increasing Teacher Pay; and
- Supporting School Construction and Modernization.

ENVIRONMENT & CLIMATE ACTION

The effects of global climate change and environmental degradation are already being felt across our Commonwealth and disparately impacting Black Virginians and Virginians of Color. In order to fight global climate change, protect the environment, and address inequities in environmental policy, the VLBC will:

- Protect Legislation Requiring Pre-application Community and Environmental Justice Outreach;
- Protect Virginia's Transition to 100% Clean Energy and Clean Car Standards;
- Maintain Virginia's Membership in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative;
- Protect Legislation Requesting a Study on Transportation Equity, Efficiency, & Modernization; and
- Protect Legislation Implementing Pipeline Accountability, Oversight, and Protection of Virginia's Water.

In addition, the VLBC will also build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation to ensure:

- Equity in Developing Infrastructure for Renewable Energy; and
- At Least 25 Percent of Grants Awarded from the Water Quality Improvement and Stormwater Local Assistance Funds Go to Projects in Low-income and Economically Distressed Communities.

PUBLIC SAFETY

In 2022, the VLBC will continue to work to ensure a safe and secure Virginia for all of its residents, and will continue to work to address preventable harm, violence, and death. As a part of this, the VLBC will:

- Protect Legislation Expanding Missing Child with Autism Alert Program to Include All Ages; and
- Protect Gun Safety Legislation, such as One-Handgun a Month, Local Authority to Ban Firearms in Public Buildings, Reporting of Lost and Stolen Firearms, and Banning Firearms at Polling Places and Recount Centers.

In addition, the VLBC will build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation:

- Establishing The Gun Violence Prevention Center;
- Establishing Reporting for Any Deaths While in Custody;
- Creating a Gun Violence Survivors Fund; and
- Ending the Levying of Collection Fees During Incarceration.

LEGACY REFORMS

In addition, the VLBC will champion and support legislation and efforts:

- Changing the Establishment Date for Historic African American Cemeteries Eligible for the Historical African American Cemeteries and Graves Fund From 1900 to 1948. In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court Struck Down Racially Segregated Cemeteries;
- Establishing The Virginia African Diaspora Advisory Board to Advise the Governor on Ways to Improve Economic and Cultural Links Between the Commonwealth and African Nations, With a Focus on the Areas of Commerce and Trade, Art and Education, and Government; and
- Supporting the Mitigation and Excavation of the Lumpkin's Jail Site for the National Slavery Museum.

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