



**2023
LEGISLATIVE
AGENDA**

 **VLBC**
Virginia Legislative Black Caucus



2023 AGENDA

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

In the 2023 Session, the VLBC will protect and champion legislation on the following policy areas:

CIVIL RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

The VLBC continues to fight for a Virginia where everyone's rights are protected and everyone has equal access to the ballot box. Since 2020, Virginia made unprecedented progress in voting rights, moving from the 49th to 11th state in ease of voting rankings. This is in large part due to work done by members of the VLBC. We will strongly oppose any attempts at voter suppression, discrimination, and inequality. As such the VLBC will work to protect:

- The Voting Rights Act of Virginia;
- Advancements in our Elections Systems to Increase Voter Access; and
- The Virginia Values Act to Prevent Discrimination in Housing, Employment, and Public Accommodations and Spaces.

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

- Amend the Virginia Constitution to Protect Reproductive Freedom;
- Amend the Virginia Constitution to Provide an Affirmative Right to Vote for All and Automatic Voting Rights Restoration; and
- Amend the Virginia Constitution to Remove the Ban on Same-Sex Marriage.

JUSTICE REFORM

The VLBC has been at the forefront of justice reform work in the General Assembly for decades. Too many disparities still exist based on race, gender, and economic status. We continue to stand in support of comprehensive justice reform in order to deliver on the promise of "liberty and justice for all." This includes:

- Protecting the Ban on the Death Penalty in Virginia;
- Completing the Legalization of Marijuana in a Socially Responsible Way;
- 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 Laws that Help Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline, including the Law to Eliminate the Criminalization of Students for School-based Disorderly Conduct; 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 that create:

- Interventions for People Experiencing a Mental Health Crisis and Interacting with Law Enforcement;
- Ending the Levying of Collection Fees During Incarceration;
- Opportunities for People who are Incarcerated to Use Community Service and Work to Pay Down Court Debt; and

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, SECURITY, AND SUPPORTING VIRGINIA'S WORKERS

The VLBC knows that economic security is foundational to good health and wellbeing. The members of the VLBC are committed to dismantling economic systems and policies that hurt working Virginians and their ability to provide for their families. The members of the VLBC will remain steadfast in supporting essential workers as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. The VLBC supports measures that protect working Virginians. This includes:

- Protecting the Increase in the Minimum Wage;
- Protecting the Expansion of Collective Bargaining Rights and Union Rights so that Every Worker in Virginia has a Seat at the Table;
- Protecting the Expansion of Worker Protections for Domestic Workers;
- Protecting the Establishment of the Virginia Jobs Investment Program and Fund; and
- 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.

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;
- Increasing the EITC Refundability to 20 percent;
- Guaranteeing Paid Leave for our Healthcare, Home Care, and Grocery Store Workers who Have Been Essential Frontline Workers;
- Create a Transit Ridership Incentive Program to Increase Access to Job Opportunities;
- Codify The Virginia Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFI) Fund to support and build capacity for Virginia-based CDFIs dedicated to delivering affordable support to help low-income, low-wealth, and other disadvantaged people and communities join the economic mainstream;
- Establish a Refundable Child Tax Credit;
- Supporting the Affordable Energy Act to protect working families and businesses from soaring energy bills; and
- Expanding Workers Compensation Coverage.

HOUSING

Housing is a fundamental human right. Too many Virginians across the Commonwealth still are struggling to pay their mortgage or purchase a home, are facing eviction or experiencing homelessness, or are in need of stable, safe, and affordable housing. To address these issues VLBC will work to protect:

- All Eviction Protections and Prevention Efforts;
- Efforts to Implement a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit;
- Legislation Strengthening Foreclosure Protections for Homeowners as well as Mobile Home Owners; and
- Historic Investments in Virginia's Housing Trust Fund.

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

- Create a Local Option for Rent Stabilization;
- Increase the Virginia Eviction Reduction Fund;
- Establish and Fund the Virginia Housing Stability Fund for Affordable Housing Development & Rental Assistance;
- Extend the "Pay or Quit" Time Period from Five to Fourteen Days;
- Create a Pilot Program for First-time Low-income Homebuyers;
- Create Local Authority to Protect Residents from Slumlords & Inhumane Living Conditions; and

- Direct the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development to Conduct a Statewide Housing Needs Assessment Every Five Years with Measurable Goals and Outcomes and Report to the General Assembly.

HEALTHCARE, MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT, AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Our Commonwealth is experiencing a health and mental health crisis. We must invest in our care-giving systems. The health of every individual is critical—especially within our vulnerable populations. During the 2023 Session the VLBC will protect:

- The Reproductive Health Protection Act; and
- 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:

- Ensuring All Kids Under 19 Have Access to Healthcare Regardless of their Immigration Status by Passing the Cover All Kids Act;
- Providing Student Debt Relief for Virginia’s Mental Health Professionals;
- Shortening the Statute of Limitations on Medical Debt;
- Expanding Medicaid for Pregnant Imprisoned Persons; and
- Creating an Innovative Substance Use and Mental Health Treatment Program at Catawba Hospital.

EDUCATION & SUPPORTING VIRGINIA’S CHILDREN

The VLBC knows that education continues to be the “great equalizer” and will fight efforts to undermine our public school system. In addition, the VLBC will fight for the truth to be taught about our history. Every student deserves access to a quality education, a pathway to success, and support along their educational journey. To expand educational opportunities, access, and to better address education issues, the VLBC will:

- Invest in and Support our Commonwealth’s HBCUs;
- Protect Legislation Establishing the Educational Equity Fund Pilot Program;
- 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.

The VLBC will build upon the successes above and champion and support legislation:

- Fully Funding Our Schools and Meeting the Needs of All Students by Implementing/Funding the Recommended Standards of Quality and Lifting the Cap on State Funding of Support Personnel;
- Ensuring Clear & Transparent Partnerships Between Teachers & Parents to Best Educate Each Student;
- Increasing Teacher Pay;
- Requiring a College and Career Counselor in Each Public High School;
- Expanding the Virginia Literacy Act to Grades 4-8;
- Adding a Mental Health & Emotional Intelligence Course to Public Education Curriculum;
- Supporting & Investing in Our English Language Learners;
- Expanding Access to Education for Immigrant Students;
- Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in STEM Education;
- Supporting School Construction and Modernization; and
- Continuing to address COVID-19 Learning Disruption.

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 the Virginia Clean Economy Act and 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;
- 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; and
- All Communities Have Clean and Safe Drinking Water.

PUBLIC SAFETY

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:

- Implementing and Funding Comprehensive and Effective Strategies for Preventing Gun Violence;
- Creating a JLARC Study on the Impacts of Gun Violence in Affected Communities;
- Establishing Gun Safety Course and Gun Storage Requirements; and
- Establishing a Mandatory Waiting Period for the Purchase of a Firearm.

LEGACY REFORMS

Last but not least, the VLBC will champion and support legislation and efforts:

- Establishing a Henrietta Lacks Day in Virginia; and
- Continuing to protect Historic African-American Cemeteries, Graves, and Sites.

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