



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

2009 GENERAL ASSEMBLY LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Arlington County and the Commonwealth are facing one of the most challenging economic crises in our history. Questions remain about the full impact on the local level, but notwithstanding local uncertainty about that impact, we need to prepare the Commonwealth for a new era of economic stability. Fiscal stability of the Commonwealth is important to Arlington County as it ensures that Arlington can provide cost-effective, quality services with equitable and sufficient tax structures.

Arlington County is committed to working toward protecting the reliability and sustainability of the Commonwealth's general fund. Commonwealth support is critical for core government functions including public education (K-12 and higher education), health and human resources, public safety, natural resources and environmental services. During an economic downturn, the Commonwealth must ensure a safety net for the most vulnerable citizens.

Separate user fees should be increased to support transportation. Although a core government service, the Commonwealth historically has funded transportation with dedicated, non-general funds in order to preserve the general fund for the other core services. Adequately funding transportation is critical to sustaining the economy in Arlington and the Northern Virginia region.

Arlington County supports equal taxing authority for cities and counties. The County Board also calls upon the state to recognize and fully fund the true costs of K-12 public education. Full state funding should reflect actual educational services, not just artificially recognized costs.

I. Arlington Legislative Policy Priorities

A. Finance

- Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Program: Support the Commonwealth's joining 22 other states in the multi-state Streamlined Sales and Use Tax program to collect state and local sales taxes on interstate mail order and internet sales to Virginia customers. Joining the multi-state effort to streamline and simplify the current 7,500 different state and local sales and use taxes would enable the Commonwealth to receive sales and use taxes from over 1,000 corporations that have agreed to voluntarily participate in the program.
- Hotel.com/Modifying State Sales and Use and local Transient Occupancy Taxes: Support legislation to modify Virginia's sales and use tax laws and local Transient Occupancy Taxes to ensure taxes are collected on the room charges actually paid by the customer/user, not just on the payment by an internet broker to the hotel.

B. Workforce Competitiveness

Highly Educated and Trained Employees: Ensure equal access by our immigrant population to higher education in order to produce the highest caliber employees for all employers within Arlington County. Promote the integration, assimilation and increased civic engagement of our immigrant population so that they are work-ready and able to fill the demanding jobs of our vibrant economy. Encourage services for our immigrant population that prepare them for the workforce and include adequate first language support services for all interactions with state and local governments.

- Employee Benefits/Health Care: Increase Arlington County's and other public employers' competitive edge by permitting benefit coverage for household members as currently permitted for private employers in Virginia. This would allow localities that self-fund a health insurance program for their employees to extend coverage under such programs to any other classes of persons as may be mutually agreeable to the locality and the policyholder.

C. Affordable Housing

- Tax Credits and Other Incentives: Support creation of tax credits and other incentives and mechanisms for preservation of affordable housing. This would include creating a statewide affordable housing fund, tax abatement for non-profits that provide affordable housing and other initiatives to assist in ensuring that there is more affordable housing in Arlington and other localities.
- Housing Trust Fund: Create a State Housing Trust Fund with a dedicated source of funding that would provide statewide funding for affordable housing, including the construction of new housing, and the purchase and renovation of existing housing to make it livable, accessible, and affordable. The fund could also become a receptacle for new federal monies coming to the state as a result of the passage of The American Housing Rescue and Foreclosure Prevention Act of 2008.
- Classification of Affordable Multifamily Rental Housing for Real Estate Tax Purposes: Create a separate class of property for affordable, multifamily, rental housing to permit a different real estate tax rate from the tax levied on other real property.

D. Civil Rights Initiatives

- Expand State Hate Crimes Statute to Include Sexual Orientation: Add sexual orientation to the state hate crime statute, §18.2-57A that currently applies to race, religious conviction, color and national origin.
- Human Trafficking: Make human trafficking a felony. Trafficking is a modern day form of slavery through which victims are coerced or forced into labor or sexual servitude. This would go beyond the federal Victims Protection Act of 2000 to ensure closure of existing legal gaps in combating trafficking.

E. Public Safety/Emergencies

- Domestic Violence: Strengthen laws to protect victims of domestic violence.
- Gang Prevention: Provide additional funds for prevention-based efforts focused on services and opportunities for youth before there is a problem, instead of focusing on problems after the fact.
- Pedestrian Safety: Support requiring drivers to stop, not just yield, at all marked crosswalks statewide when a pedestrian is present including enhanced penalties for failure to stop for pedestrians and promoting the use of marked crosswalks. Include a public awareness campaign in multiple languages to educate the public on pedestrian safety.
- Jail Diversion Efforts: Support jail diversion efforts for mental health and substance abusing individuals who become involved with the criminal justice system.

F. Energy and the Environment

- Renewable Portfolio Standard: Require electricity providers to obtain a minimum percentage of their power from renewable energy resources by a date certain.
- System Benefit Fund: Establish a fund by adding a fraction of a cent per kilowatt-hour charge to utility bills to raise millions of dollars for statewide education programs, to stimulate energy efficiency, renewable energy development, and for low-income housing energy upgrades.
- Chesapeake Bay Cleanup and Land Preservation: Maintain funding for Chesapeake Bay cleanup costs and other water quality needs, including the Water Quality Improvement Fund.
- Solar Energy Tax Credits: Permit an income tax credit for solar energy (or renewable energy source) expenditures.
- Energy Consumption Information for Home Buyers: For the purchaser, provide the option to conduct a home energy audit prior to the purchase of residential property. The purchaser should also be provided with copies of the electric, gas and home heating oil bills, or a summary of such, for the immediate prior 12 months unless the property was unoccupied during that time.
- Banning Plastic Bags: Authorize local governments to ban the use of light-weight plastic bags by retail outlets.
- Energy Star® Benchmarking on State Buildings: Require the Commonwealth of Virginia to conduct an annual audit, using the Energy Star® Portfolio Manager benchmarking tool on all State owned or operated buildings greater than 10,000 square feet, and to publish the information on a public website.
- International Code Commission Energy Efficiency Changes: Accelerate the adoption of ICC energy efficiency changes into Virginia's Uniform Statewide Building Code.
- Improving Existing Buildings Energy Efficiency: Request a study of the use of incentives or rebates to: (1) bring buildings up to current energy efficiency standards at the time of sale; or (2) bring buildings up to current building code standards when upgrading or replacing major building material or equipment.

G. Human Services

- Comprehensive Services Act:
 - Advocate sharply limiting the use of foster care for treatment of truancy, delinquency or social problems not related to abuse, neglect or abandonment of children;
 - Reduce administrative complexity of CSA system and seek state funding for its matching share of actual administrative costs;
 - Designate all truly community-based CSA services to lower community-based service match rate; and
 - Permit localities to use up to 5% of locality's CSA funding (of rolling 3-year average) for new community-based services at discretion of local Community Policy and Management Teams, with state agencies providing technical assistance and unused funds to be carried over to next year.
- Northern Virginia Aging Network: Help older Virginians avoid institutional placement and increase the capacity of proven, cost-effective, in-home and community-based services.
- Intellectually/Developmentally Disabled: Support increase in Mental Retardation slots and Medicaid waiver rates.

H. Technology

- Internet Option for Public Notices: Permit local governments to substitute an Internet notice in place of statutorily required public notices in newspapers. Legislation is needed to permit localities to publish public notices on the Internet where they would be more accessible instead of newspapers.

I. Transportation Funding

- Transportation Funding: Increase statewide funding for all transportation modes from one or more stable, reliable, and permanent non-General Fund sources; include a minimum of \$50 million annually as a dedicated source of funding for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA); and fully fund the Commonwealth's statutory 95% share of transit operating and capital costs.

J. Public Health & Environment

- Smoking: Authorize the prohibition of smoking in most buildings and enclosed areas frequented by the public.
- Healthy Behaviors: Support state efforts to improve fitness and healthy behaviors.

II. FY 08-10 Budget

Critical Amendments for Arlington and Northern Virginia

- Assimilation of Immigrants: Funding to assist with the integration, assimilation and increased civic engagement of our immigrant community including resources for permanent residents who qualify for citizenship.

III. General Guidelines:

- Oppose unfunded mandates.
- Support all efforts to ensure that the immigrant community is treated fairly.
- Support authority for optional impact fee ordinances that permit a full range of fees to offset all impacts of development.
- Oppose further limits on Medicaid eligibility which might prevent access to health care.
- Oppose efforts to restrict local zoning authority or the zoning process.
- Oppose privatizing Community Services Board mental health emergency service functions.
- Oppose restrictions and ceilings on real estate tax assessments or rates.
- Oppose reduction of local eminent domain authority.
- Support initiatives that highlight positive contributions of immigrants.
- Support efforts to provide a living wage to direct care providers.
- Support expansion of community outreach efforts for geriatric mental health services.
- Support state salary increases for public defenders to create less staff turnover and more stability in the services they provide.
- Oppose efforts to eliminate the Land Preservation Tax Credit.

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