



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

2008 GENERAL ASSEMBLY LEGISLATIVE PACKAGE

I. Arlington Initiatives

- A. BRAC Funding [Base Realignment & Closure]: Funding to enable the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to remain in Arlington.
- B. Transient Occupancy Tax: Renew the one quarter of one percent tax on hotel rooms that is dedicated to promoting tourism and business travel in Arlington County.
- C. Electronic Meetings During Emergencies: Authorize local governments to convene meetings electronically, e.g., speaker phone and video conference, when the governor has declared a local emergency. This would include the initial meeting where the governing body declares or ratifies the declaration of an emergency. The authority would apply for the duration of the emergency.

II. FY 08-10 Budget

Critical Amendments for Arlington and Northern Virginia

- New Comprehensive Services Act Mandated Categories: Additional funding for the new categories of at-risk children identified in the Governor's recent guidelines.
- Comprehensive Services Act - Foster Care Prevention Services: Increase Medicaid reimbursements for outpatient psychiatric services in Northern Virginia so that at-risk children can receive mental health services.
- Community Services Boards: Increased funding for emergency mental health services.
- SAFER grants: Continue funding for fire and emergency response based on the FEMA SAFER (Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response) grants.
- 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.
- Foster Care: Support amendment for a Northern Virginia budget differential to address inequities in state foster care funding.

III. Arlington Legislative Policy Priorities

A. Finance

- Homestead Exemption: Permit localities discretionary authority to fashion property tax relief tools to provide the most effective tax relief in their communities, including homestead exemptions, with each locality given the authority to determine the procedures and limits on any such relief.
- Streamlined Sales and Use Tax Program: Support Commonwealth membership in 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. The multi-state effort to streamline and simplify the current 7,500 different state and local sales and use tax systems 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 payment by internet broker to hotel.

B. Workforce Competitiveness

- Employee Benefits: Increase Arlington County's and other public employers' competitive edge by permitting benefit coverage for dependent household members as currently permitted for private employers. 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.
- 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 bilingual services for all interactions with state and local governments.
- Payday Loans: To protect vulnerable workers, support legislation to reform the payday loan industry, including placing appropriate caps on interest rates.

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, the purchase of existing housing, and the renovation of existing housing to make it livable, accessible, and affordable.
- Financial Incentives: Support financial incentives for home ownership including cooperatives and other innovative financial initiatives.

D. Civil Rights Initiatives

- Expand State Hate Crimes Statute to Include Sexual Orientation: Add sexual orientation to the state hate crime statute, §18.2-57 that currently applies to race, religious conviction, color or 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 to combating trafficking.

- Absentee Voting: Enact legislation to ensure absentee voting is both easier and more accessible. Current state law restricts absentee voting - both the circumstances under which one can apply for an absentee ballot, and how and where one can vote.

E. Public Safety/Emergencies

- Emergency Management Trust Fund: Establish an annual surcharge on property insurance policies with the funds raised returned to local governments to fund emergency management, preparedness and assistance. In the post-September 11 era, funds are needed to provide essential emergency training and preparedness activities. This fee would allow localities to educate and inform the public about actions needed for natural and man-made disasters such as hurricanes, terrorist attacks and pandemic flu.
- Domestic Violence: Strengthen laws to protect victims of domestic violence.
- Public Defenders' Salaries: Support increased funding for public defenders salaries.
- 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.
- Seat Belt Use: Support state law to make failure to use a seatbelt a primary offense.
- 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.
- Firesafe Cigarettes: Support requirement requested by the Virginia Association of Fire Chiefs that cigarettes sold in the Commonwealth be manufactured with self-extinguishing paper. Currently twenty-one states require the use of such paper. The paper snuffs the flame if a lit cigarette is not being smoked. The legislation should require that the paper conform to standards established by the State of New York.

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.
- Tree Canopy Requirements: Enact legislation to allow local governments to increase tree canopy requirements and incentives for builders to preserve mature trees.

- Energy Star and WaterSense Tax Credits: Enact tax incentives that encourage the purchase of Energy Star certified products, and extend the tax credit program to WaterSense certified products. EPA's WaterSense program is designed to save the energy embedded in drinking water treatment, waste water treatment, and in water and wastewater delivery infrastructure.
- Chesapeake Bay Cleanup and Land Preservation: Fully fund cleanup costs for the Chesapeake Bay and other water quality needs, including additional funding for the Water Quality Improvement Fund. Support the Governor's initiative to preserve an additional 400,000 acres, including land in Northern Virginia that is in the Chesapeake watershed.
- Energy and Conservation Measures: Review recommendations submitted by the State Corporation Commission with regard to the implementation of programs to reduce electric energy consumption by retail customers by ten percent by the year 2022, with an eye toward supporting legislative initiatives after that review.

G. Human Services

- Comprehensive Services Act: Support policy changes for CSA (Foster Care Prevention Services) to address the under-funded mental health system care for children.
- Comprehensive Services Act/Minority Foster Care: Support specially targeted campaign to promote more foster parents who are minorities.
- Community Services Board: Support policy changes to address gaps exposed by the Virginia Tech incident.
- Northern Virginia Aging Network: Support helping older Virginians avoid institutional placement and increase the capacity of proven cost-effective in-home and community-based services.

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

- Limit Development Where Infrastructure is Inadequate: Enhance local authority to limit development where transportation infrastructure is inadequate.
- Towing Second Signature Option: Oppose efforts to repeal local authority to require a second signature prior to the tow of a trespassing vehicle.

J. Public Health & Environment

- No Smoking Ordinances: Authorize local governments to prohibit smoking in public places.
- Communicable Disease Outbreaks in Assisted Living Residences: Require assisted living facilities to report communicable disease outbreaks to the state and/or local health department, clarify state DSS authority to enforce compliance with state and/or local health department recommendations for outbreak control and prevention and increase fine schedule for residential providers who disregard instructions on how to handle outbreaks.
- Healthy Behaviors: Increase state resources to support fitness and healthy behaviors.

IV. General Guidelines:

- Oppose reductions in funding allocated to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority.
- 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 limitations on local funding of worker centers.
- 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 contribution that immigrants make.