



**2021
LEGISLATIVE
AGENDA**

 **VLBC**
Virginia Legislative Black Caucus

2021 AGENDA

In 2020 our Commonwealth and our country faced a series of deep-seated crises, from a global pandemic and the economic issues that arose as a result to the scourge of systemic racism and racial injustice that has plagued our nation since its founding. In the face of these challenges, the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) was able to successfully champion and pass historic and important policy reforms centered around justice, access, civil rights, and equity.

Yet many challenges still lie ahead in 2021, as these crises continue into the new year. The VLBC's 2021 Legislative Agenda is focused on building upon last year's policy successes to continue to address these challenges and to effectively meet new and developing challenges.

In the 2021 Session, the VLBC will **continue to push for justice and equity, including by:**

- Declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis
- Providing an Option to Request Racial Impact Statements on Legislation
- Investing in and Supporting our Commonwealth's HBCUs

In addition, the VLBC will champion legislation on the following policy areas:

CIVIL RIGHTS, DIGITAL RIGHTS, & DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

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 the late Congressman and Civil Rights icon John Lewis constantly reminded us, the right to vote is key to the health of our democracy. As such the VLBC supports:

- Passing the Voting Rights Act of Virginia. This is a comprehensive bill based on the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and modernized and updated to expand and protect the right to vote for all Virginians;
- Amending the Virginia Constitution to Provide for Easier Restoration of Rights and to Better Enshrine Constitutional Protections for the Right to Vote for All;
- Signing the National Popular Vote Compact, which would Require Virginia to Make its Presidential Electoral Votes for whatever Candidate Wins the National Popular Vote;
- Allowing for Early Sunday Voting to Expand Access to the Ballot Box;
- Improving Access to Curbside Voting; and
- Encouraging Youth Civic Engagement by Allowing Students to Take Partial-Day Excused Absences to Partake in Civic or Political Engagement.

Digital rights and digital equity are also deeply tied to the health of democracy in the 21st century. The greater the digital rights, the easier Virginians are able to gain access to information, work, continue their education, organize and network, and petition their government. Therefore, the VLBC supports:

- Expanding Broadband Access, Increasing Broadband Affordability, Bridging the Digital Divide, and Protecting Digital Access and Rights in Rural, Urban, and Underserved Areas of Virginia; and
- Addressing and Protecting Data Privacy Issues.

In addition, the VLBC will also champion and support legislation that will:

- Declare the Right to Water Access as a Fundamental Human Right;
- Create the Virginia LGBTQ+ Advisory Board; and
- Create a Civil Rights Division in the Office of the Virginia Attorney General.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM & POLICING REFORM

As in years past, the VLBC continues to stand in support of comprehensive criminal justice and policing reform. This includes championing legislation:

- Implementing Automatic Expungement (as endorsed by the Crime Commission);
- Ending Qualified Immunity;
- Ending the Practice of Solitary Confinement;
- Ending the Death Penalty in Virginia;
- Removing all Mandatory Minimum Sentences from Virginia State Code;
- Legalizing Marijuana in an Equitable and Just Way;
- Requiring the Release of Body/Dash Cam Footage;
- Allowing Mental Health to be Admitted in Felony Cases (Insanity Plea Bill);
- Eliminating Jail Sentences for First-time Technical Violations of Probation;
- Eliminating the Habitual Offender Statute;
- Eliminating Presumption of Pretrial Detention for Certain Offenses;
- Eliminating Valid Court Orders to Detain Juveniles for Non-criminal Offenses;
- Guaranteeing a Right to an Attorney at First Appearance;
- Reducing Burdens on Families and Youth by Eliminating the Agency-related Child Support Attached to Incarcerating Youth;
- Improving Access to Due Process for Incarcerated Youth;
- Passing a Bill to Defelonize Drug Possession; and
- Accommodating Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD) in the Criminal Justice System through Lawyer Training, Bail Consideration, and Evidentiary Presentation as a Defense in a Criminal Case Where the Defendant has an ID or DD Diagnosis.

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

As our Commonwealth's economy faces unprecedented barriers during the COVID-19 pandemic, the VLBC supports measures to protect and support Virginians, including essential workers and small businesses. This includes:

- Guaranteeing Paid Sick Leave;
- Requiring Paid Family and Medical Leave;
- Classifying Our Frontline Workers as Essential Workers and Providing them with Hazard Pay and PPE;
- Expanding Worker Protections for Domestic Workers;
- Strengthening Workplace Harassment Laws;
- Sustaining and Expanding Unemployment Benefits & Streamlining the Application Process;
- Enacting Unemployment Overpayment Waiver Forgiveness and Continuation of Payment;
- Providing Support to our Home Care Workers & Increasing Medicaid Reimbursement Rates for Home Care;
- Establishing a Presumption that COVID-19 Causing Death or Disability for Essential Workers are Compensable Under Workers' Compensation;
- Increasing Employment Health, Condition, and Safety Standards;
- Establishing the Small Business Procurement Enhancement Program;
- Expanding Collective Bargaining Rights so that Every Worker in Virginia has a Seat at the Table;
- Removing the Minimum Wage Exemption for Farm Workers and Temporary Foreign Workers;
- Establishing the Virginia Jobs Investment Program and Fund; and
- Increasing COVID-19 Relief Funds.

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 supports measures:

- Extending and Strengthening the Eviction Protections Enacted through the Budget and Supporting Additional Funding for Rental and Mortgage Assistance and Relief;
- Expanding the Right of Redemption and Improving Post-Payment Notice to Prevent Evictions;
- Making Payment Plans and 14-Day Pay or Quit Notice Permanent;
- Implementing a Low-Income Housing Tax Credit;
- Passing an Anti-NIMBY Bill to Eliminate Discriminatory Housing Practices in Local Land-Use Ordinance and/or Guidance;
- Strengthening the Prohibition on Unlawful Evictions;
- Increasing and Strengthening Protections for Tenants — Especially During the Pandemic;
- Strengthening Foreclosure Protections for Homeowners as well as Protections for Virginians Who Own and Reside in Mobile Homes;
- Sustaining and Continuing to Invest in Virginia’s Housing Trust Fund to End Homelessness and Increase Affordable Housing; and
- Prohibiting Employer Retaliation Against Employees for Absence from Work Due to Appearance in Court for an Eviction Hearing.

HEALTHCARE & ESSENTIAL SERVICES

During this global pandemic the issues surrounding our healthcare system and facing our frontline workers are more potent than ever. As such, the VLBC supports:

- Providing Funding for Mass and Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccinations;
- Capping Prices on Asthma Inhalers;
- Ensuring that Asthma Inhalers are Stocked in all Public Schools for Emergencies;
- Passing the Reproductive Health Equity Act;
- Passing the Marijuana Flower Bill, which would Add Botanical Cannabis to the Definition of Cannabis Products for Medicinal Purposes;
- Establishing the Fruit and Vegetable Prescription Program;
- Implementing a Study of Maternal and Infant Mortality, including Discrepancies Based on Race;
- Introducing an At-risk Add On for Health Care Centers;
- Providing Orientation Services for Personal Care Aides;
- Providing Funding for Medicaid Reimbursement of Doula Services;
- Remove the Prohibition on the Provision of Coverage for Abortions in Any Qualified Health Insurance Plan that is Sold or Offered for Sale through a Health Benefits Exchange; and
- Eliminating the DD Waiver Priority One Waiting List.

EDUCATION & SUPPORTING VIRGINIA’S CHILDREN

Virginia’s students, teachers, parents, and education and childcare personnel have been forced to adapt to new and complicated circumstances in response to COVID-19, including adjusting to a virtual learning environment. At the same time, many of the issues in our education system remained or were exacerbated. To better address these education issues, the VLBC supports:

- Fully funding the DOE SOQ Standards Recommendations;
- Providing COVID-19 Relief and Resources to Ensure a Safe Return when Schools Open;
- Banning the Box in Education by Removing Criminal History Questions from Applications to Higher Education Institutions;

- Establishing the Educational Equity Fund Pilot Program;
- Strengthening and Supporting the Child Care Industry During COVID-19 & Beyond through a Pilot Program that Allows Flexibility in how Federal Subsidy Dollars are Used for Childcare Providers;
- Expand Access to Education for Immigrant Students;
- Passing the School Equity and Staffing Act;
- Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in the Governor’s School;
- Reallocating the State School Resource Officer Incentive Grant Fund to the At-risk Add-on Fund;
- Establishing Cultural Competency for Virginia Educators; and
- Defining Segregation in SOQs and Creating an Assessment System for Measuring a School System’s Performance in Addressing Systemic Segregation.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & TRANSIT

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 supports:

- Passing the Clean Cars Bill Establishing Regulations for Low and No-Emission Vehicles;
- Requiring Pre-application Community and Environmental Justice Outreach;
- Requesting a Study on Transportation Equity, Efficiency, & Modernization; and
- Pipeline Accountability, Oversight, and Protection of Virginia's Water.

PUBLIC SAFETY

In 2021 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 supports:

- Expanding Missing Child with Autism Alert Program to include All Ages; and
- Banning Firearms at Polling Places and Recount Centers.

RESOLUTIONS

- Commemorating the Life of the Honorable Mamyé E. BaCote
- Commemorating the Life of George Henry Banks
- Recognizing Liberty Amendments Month
- Authorizing the MLK Commission to Commission a Bust Honoring Senator Yvonne Miller
- Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1870
- National Statuary Hall Collection at the United States Capitol; Barbara Rose Johns.
- Establishing a Joint Subcommittee to Study Relationship Between MCOs and DMAS and any Inequitable Impacts to the Community's Access to a Provider of their Choice

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