



**2020
LEGISLATIVE
AGENDA**

 **VLBC**
Virginia Legislative Black Caucus

A RESTORATIVE AND EQUITABLE AGENDA

This 2020 Legislative Session, the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) is supporting a comprehensive and reform-minded legislative agenda with restorative and equitable aims. This agenda comprises 8 key priority areas: Civil Rights & Democracy For All, Criminal Justice Reform, Economic Opportunity & Security, Housing, Healthcare, Education & Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline, Environmental Justice, and Public Safety.

The VLBC, at 23-members strong, proudly represents the diverse faces of Virginia in every corner of the Commonwealth on a number of issues. Decade after decade, the Caucus works to improve the economic, educational, political, and social conditions of African Americans and underrepresented groups in Virginia. All Virginians, regardless of legislative district, age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status, deserve the equitable opportunity to live in a commonwealth that helps and does not hinder their ability to prosper. We accomplish equity of opportunity by breaking down barriers to education, economic security, justice, and democracy.

This upcoming 2020 General Assembly Session presents a potent opportunity to achieve bold, generational change that benefits not only Black Virginians and Virginians from other underrepresented communities -- but change that benefits all Virginians. Building on our advocacy efforts for a more equitable budget (see previous press release on this here), the Caucus' legislative agenda supports a holistic approach to the problems facing our community and the Commonwealth, recognizing that all of these issues are interconnected, with solutions for one issue deeply tied to solutions for other issues.

CIVIL RIGHTS & DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

As we commemorate the 150th anniversary of the ratification of the 15th Amendment and the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, VLBC continues to fight for a Virginia where everyone's rights are protected, where everyone has equal access to the ballot box, and where electoral districts are drawn fairly. We will strongly oppose any attempts at voter suppression, discrimination, and inequality. We support expanding and protecting access to voting rights, ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment, and removing inequity and discrimination remaining in Virginia Law. We also support equitable redistricting that acknowledges the history of voter suppression against Black and minority communities and seeks to end racial gerrymandering that diminishes the power of Black votes.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

VLBC believes all Virginians should be protected equally under the law and should receive equal access to just and fair court proceedings. Poverty should not be criminalized, and our communities should be free from mass incarceration. We therefore support comprehensive criminal justice reform, including reforming pretrial services, cash bail, and the criminal discovery process; banning the suspension of Driver's Licenses for non-driving offenses; reinstating and expanding parole; and allowing the expungement, in certain circumstances, of misdemeanor and nonviolent felony convictions for certain offenses. We also support building on the Caucus' previous work by further increasing the Felony Larceny Threshold, reforming the Commonwealth's marijuana laws, and commuting related sentences. VLBC also believes in supporting avenues for reform and success for returning citizens through further investing in prisoner education and training programs and eliminating criminal history questions for public sector job applicants.

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY & SECURITY

VLBC advocates for a Virginia where everyone has the tools and resources needed to support their families and not only make ends meet, but also to thrive in a prosperous economy. This is why we support empowering workers through raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour and removing certain minimum wage exemptions, repealing the ban on project labor agreements, prohibiting discrimination against pregnant workers, introducing paid medical and family leave, and prohibiting retaliation against employees who pursue collecting unpaid wages. VLBC also believes in supporting all Virginians by relieving tax burdens on low and middle income individuals and families, changing the definition of "small business," and making Virginia's Earned Income and Tax Credit fully refundable. We also support measures to protect Virginians as borrowers, such as eliminating predatory lending and establishing a student loan borrower's Bill of Rights. VLBC further believes in ending discrimination in and eliminating barriers to housing and employment in Virginia, through banning discrimination in employment and housing based on sexual orientation and gender identity, prohibiting employment discrimination based on hair style and texture, and removing salary history questions for public sector job applicants.

HOUSING

VLBC believes in increasing the supply of affordable housing, expanding access to housing affordability for more Virginians, and introducing further protections for and eliminating barriers to housing in the Commonwealth. Housing is a human right, and housing stability is strongly correlated with the well-being of communities, families, and individuals. As such, we support increasing funding for the Housing Trust Fund, the Eviction Prevention and Diversion Pilot Program, and relevant Legal Aid funding. We will also continue our work in addressing the eviction crisis and strengthening tenant rights. In addition, VLBC supports further prohibiting discrimination in housing against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity, their status as domestic violence victims, and their source of income.

HEALTHCARE

VLBC believes in expanding access to affordable and quality healthcare, encouraging healthy communities, and supporting better health outcomes for all Virginians. We therefore strongly support legislation further reforming our healthcare system, such as banning surprise billing, additionally expanding mental health services, and lowering prescription drug costs. VLBC believes in expanding Medicaid coverage for pregnant women, dental care, and eyecare, as well as removing Medicaid work requirements. We also strongly support removing barriers to reproductive health access and introducing various measures to improve maternal health and address racial disparities in maternal health.

EDUCATION & ENDING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE

VLBC seeks a Virginia where all students have access to productive, safe learning environments with adequate supports and resources for success. In pursuit of this, we strongly support fully funding our K-12 education needs, addressing inequity in the education system, increasing pay and support to education professionals, reforming student-staff quotas, increasing early access to quality education, and

EDUCATION & ENDING THE SCHOOL-TO-PRISON PIPELINE, CONT.

improving educational infrastructure. VLBC also favors providing in-state tuition regardless of immigration status. In addition, VLBC supports increasing diversity in the education workforce, increasing funding for Virginia HBCUs, and increasing bias training and accountability to education staff (including SROs). We will continue our work in ending the school-to-prison pipeline through such measures as eliminating school-based disorderly conduct charges, returning discretion to administrators on when to refer certain incidents to law enforcement, reducing biases in school dress codes, and increasing funding to At-Risk Programs, especially those in more economically depressed communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

VLBC recognizes the devastating impacts climate change has on our communities. Environmental destruction disproportionately affects communities of color and other vulnerable communities. We believe that environmental justice is of paramount importance. Therefore, VLBC supports removing barriers to expanding renewable energy sources, banning off-shore oil and gas drilling, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening clean air and water protections, and introducing a mandatory clean energy standard. We further support protecting Virginia consumers and citizens through implementing electric rate regulatory reform to combat high energy bills and establishing an Environmental Justice Council. VLBC also believes in better educating Virginia's youth on the environment through setting education standards on climate change curriculum.

PUBLIC SAFETY

VLBC strives for a safe and secure Virginia for all. We acknowledge the trauma caused in our communities when Virginians live in fear of preventable harm, violence, and death. As we work on gun violence prevention, we are committed to comprehensive measures that address the everyday gun violence that many of our districts experience. We will also continue to support legislation that prevents domestic violence that disproportionately impacts our communities, including efforts to provide further services and support to survivors of domestic violence. VLBC thus strongly supports establishing a Domestic Violence Prevention fund, prohibiting individuals subject to a Final Protective Order from possessing firearms, establishing an Extreme-Risk Protective Order, and implementing red flag laws that restrict firearm access for those with restraining orders or violent offense records. In addition, we further support a number of gun violence prevention measures, including requiring the reporting of lost or stolen firearms, instituting universal background checks for all gun purchases and transfers, limiting handgun purchases to one gun a month, and expanding local jurisdictions' ability to regulate firearms.

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