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September 19, 2024

Joint Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Funding
Virginia General Assembly
Pocahontas Building
900 E. Main Street
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Members of the Joint Subcommittee,

On behalf of the Virginia Association of Counties (VACO), I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the General Assembly for the creation of this Joint Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Funding. Your leadership in moving forward with recommendations from JLARC's 2023 Report on Virginia's K-12 Funding Formula, including recent improvements and funding to the At-Risk Add-On Program and support for English Learners, demonstrates a commitment to ensuring that Virginia's students receive the resources they need to succeed. We are also grateful for the opportunity to provide input to you and House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations staff as you continue this critical work.

However, despite these important advancements, significant gaps remain in the state's financial support for K-12 education. One of the primary concerns is that the state only recognizes 2/3 of actual staff employed by school divisions, with the single largest unrecognized staff category being teacher aides. This persistent shortfall forces local governments to fill the funding gap, making it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of students across the Commonwealth.

Additionally, Virginia continues to provide less per-pupil funding than neighboring states, including Maryland, Kentucky, and West Virginia. This disparity places our school divisions at a disadvantage in recruiting and retaining high-quality educators and in delivering the instructional support that students require.

VACO respectfully urges the General Assembly to prioritize restoring pre-recession levels of funding by fully eliminating the support cap, which has constrained the state's contribution to critical school positions for over a decade, despite partial restoration of funding levels. To ensure that every child in Virginia receives a high-quality education, we believe it is essential that state funding more accurately reflect the true costs of education—including the actual labor and salary costs in school divisions across the Commonwealth. This includes properly accounting for rising salaries, health care costs, and other necessary support services.

Furthermore, as changes to the Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding formula are considered, we strongly encourage that such changes do not inadvertently reduce the financial support for local governments and school divisions. Many divisions are already shouldering a disproportionate share of the costs, most fund their school divisions well-above the required local effort, and additional burdens on localities could harm their ability to meet their obligations to their communities.

We are hopeful that with your continued commitment to education, these concerns will be addressed, and Virginia can move toward a more equitable and sustainable K-12 funding

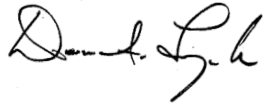
1207 E. Main St., Suite 300
Richmond, Va. 23219-3627

Phone: 804.788.6652
Fax: 804.788.0083

Email: mail@vaco.org
Website: www.vaco.org

structure. We stand ready to work with the Subcommittee to ensure that every student, regardless of where they live, has access to the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean A. Lynch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dean" and last name "Lynch" clearly distinguishable.

Dean A. Lynch, CAE
Executive Director
Virginia Association of Counties

CC: Members, Virginia Association of Counties Board of Directors