

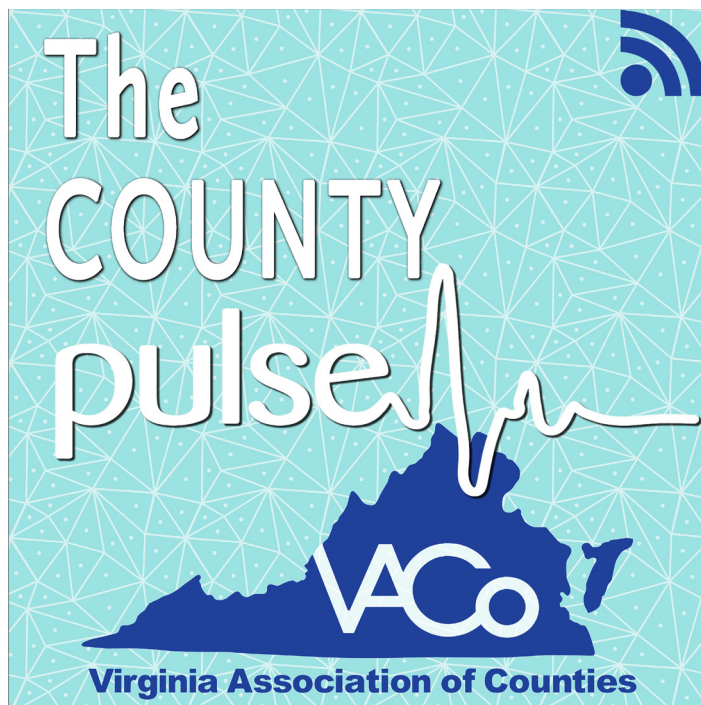


**VACo 90th Annual Conference**

**SEE YOU SOON!**



**November 9-12, 2024**  
**Bath County**  
**Conference Agenda**



## Season 4

### Energy Landscape of Virginia Series with Joe Lerch

#### Energy Landscape of Virginia Episode 5 | Reclaiming the Landscape of Southwest Virginia for Energy | Part 1



[Listen to the Podcast](#)

#### **Part 1. Reclaiming the Landscape of Southwest Virginia for Energy.**

Listen in to Part 1 of a two-part episode recorded in Washington County, where we sit down with business partners Will Clear and Will Payne, who are investing in Southwest Virginia with a particular focus on reclaiming abandoned mine land to repurpose for a reboot of the energy economy of the region.

Where to find out more about the topics covered in this episode:

- [InvestSWVA](#)
- [Project Oasis](#)
- [Energy DELTA Lab](#)

## Latest Updates on Federal Regulatory Changes to Prescription Drug Box Program



VACo recently received several updates regarding the transition of the prescription drug box program in Virginia. On October 9, 2024, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued an [exemption](#) from the enhanced drug distribution security requirements of section 582 of the FD&C Act for eligible trading partners, extending the compliance date for one year to November 27, 2025. It's expected that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency's (DEA) anticipated enforcement of the Protection of Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act may be released sometime in 2025.

On October 28, 2024, the Virginia Regional EMS Medication Kit Transition Workgroup met to discuss the extension. The workgroup proposed an April 15, 2025, drug box program transition date. On October 30, 2024, the Virginia Society of Health-System Pharmacists and Virginia Hospital and Healthcare Association [agreed](#) to extend the transition deadline to the proposed April 15, 2025, date. However, should the DEA publish its final rule for the Protection of Patient Access to Emergency Medications Act with an enforcement date before April 15, 2025, the transition date will be adjusted to the earlier of the two dates.

More information can be found on a [memorandum](#) provided by the Old Dominion Emergency Medical Services Alliance.

As previously [reported](#), VACo encourages members to continue to coordinate with their EMS providers and area hospital pharmacies to seek opportunities to reduce cost burdens in the process of shifting responsibilities for the drug box program to local governments.

VACo would like to thank the members and staff of the Virginia Congressional Delegation for all their efforts and continued support in trying to provide relief to local governments on this issue.

VACo also contacted the [Opioid Abatement Authority \(OAA\)](#) on whether OAA funds could be used to help fund transition costs associated with the new standards of the prescription drug box program. According to the OAA, this would not be an approved use of OAA funds, and for localities to use their direct settlement funds would not meet the OAA's voluntary gold standard as this expense is an unfunded mandate on EMS agencies to continue their current level of operations. It is not a new or expanded opioid abatement strategy. The OAA Board has a [policy statement](#) that addresses the use of opioid settlement funds for EMS, Fire, and law enforcement related expenses.

If your county or EMS providers are still struggling to implement changes to the prescription drug box program as a result of the new regulations or are facing delays in the approval of waivers submitted to the FDA, VACo encourages you to contact members of your congressional delegation for assistance. A useful compilation of additional information and resources provided by the Peninsulas EMS Councils can be found [here](#).

VACo will continue to engage on this issue and provide updates as they become available.

**VACo Contact:** [Jeremy R. Bennett](#)



PHOTO SOURCE:  
[Virginia Is For Lovers](#)

## Visit Pittsylvania County and the Pittsylvania County Historic Courthouse

**Location:** 1 North Main Street / Bank Street

**Built:** 1852 – 1853

**Style:** Classical Revival and Italianate

**Architect:** Lindsay Shoemaker (Shumaker) and L M Shumaker

**Contractor:** Lindsay Shoemaker (Shumaker) and L M Shumaker

**Description:** The building faces west and is a two story red colored brick and wood structure. The building is located on landscaped grounds in the center of Chatham. The west front has a large portico with four white colored columns rising to a pediment at the roof line. Stairs ascend to the second story. On the center of the roof is a large square white colored cupola with clock, belfry and hipped roof. North and south wings extend from the building and the Courthouse Annex constructed in 1968 is attached on the east side. In the interior, the Circuit Court courtroom is located on the second story and has elaborate Italianate plasterwork which consists of paneled ceiling, a large circular ceiling medallion and a three-part cornice. The cornice has engaged balls, acanthus leaves and a plain band. The judge's bench is separated from the auditorium by a balustrade with vase-turned balusters. The Colonial Revival aedicule and paneling behind the bench date to 1947. The building houses the County Circuit Court of the 22nd Judicial Circuit. Alterations were made in 1896 and 1927. On the east side is the 1968 County Courthouse Annex.

**SOURCE:** [courthouses.co](#)

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SAVE THE DATES!

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**VACo Supervisors Certification  
Program (Budget Module)**

January to March 2025  
VACo Headquarters

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**VACo County Government Day**

Thursday, January 23, 2025  
Omni Richmond Hotel

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**VACo Chairpersons' Institute**

Friday and Saturday, January 24-25, 2025  
Omni Richmond Hotel and  
VACo Headquarters

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Join us for these important events.

Call VACo at 804.788.6652 for more information





## Open Enrollment

### Don't Let Renewal Season Spook You

Does your team have a process improvement plan in place to enhance your open enrollment experience? It's not too late to start.

Here are [3 Ways Your Organization Can Improve Open Enrollment.](#)

**It's not too late to step up your open enrollment game for 2025.**

Engaging busy employees in the enrollment process can be a challenge, but effective planning can dramatically reduce your administrative burden and ensure that everyone is making the most of their benefits. Here are three best practices for HR professionals and benefits administrators to consider as they gear up for open enrollment season...

[\*\*READ MORE\*\*](#)



October 31, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ATTORNEYS HONOR MICHELLE R. ROBL  
2024 FINNEGAN WHITING AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE**

The Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc. (LGA) awarded its highest honor, the Edward J. Finnegan Elizabeth D. Whiting Award for Distinguished Service, to Michelle R. Robl, County Attorney, County of Prince William, at its fall conference in Norfolk, Virginia.

The Finnegan Whiting Award recognizes Michelle Robl for her significant and sustained contributions to Virginia local government law and LGA. The Award noted that Michelle began her local government career as an Assistant Prince William County Attorney in 1993 and was named Acting County Attorney effective in June 2015, before being appointed County Attorney in December 2015.

Michelle has served as LGA Immediate Past-President, President, Vice-President, Treasurer, Secretary, and on the Board of Directors and has given countless hours to help serve local governments across Virginia. She is a regular presenter to the Virginia Association of Counties sharing invaluable knowledge, insight, and experience with elected leaders from across Virginia. In recognition of her contributions to the Prince William County legal community, Michelle received the 2024 Prince William County Bar Association’s Arthur W. Sinclair Professionalism Award, which recognizes a Bar Association “member who demonstrates the highest standards of honor, integrity, competency, and courtesy within the legal profession.”

LGA promotes common interests and an exchange of information among its members on legal issues that are particularly relevant to Virginia’s counties, cities, and towns. The LGA’s

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member services include conferences, a legal handbook, a monthly newsletter, and other services intended to inform and enhance the practice of local government.



Michelle R. Robl, Prince William County Attorney and recipient of the Local Government Attorneys of Virginia, Inc. Edward J. Finnegan Elizabeth D. Whiting Award for Distinguished Service.



Michelle R. Robl (center) receiving resolution honoring her as the recipient of the Edward J. Finnegan Elizabeth D. Whiting Award for Distinguished Service, as presented by Curt G. Spear, Jr., Prince William Senior Deputy County Attorney

## Chesterfield Unveils Plaques Recognizing Service of Current and Former County Leaders



Chesterfield County unveiled seven plaques – including one for the Manchester District, which was lost to annexation by the City of Richmond in 1970 – during an ceremony on October 23.

Each plaque, which features the current and formers Board of Supervisors in the Bermuda, Clover Hill, Dale, Matoaca and Midlothian districts; and county administrators, will be permanently displayed in the Public Meeting Room at 10001 Iron Bridge Road at the county government complex.

In addition, the county has [launched a web page](#) with names, photos and years of service for all Board of Supervisors members.

“This is not just about names on plaques – it’s about the beginnings of building a history of our local government,” said Dr. Joe Casey, Chesterfield County administrator. “We want to hear from anyone who may have known any of these former board members; we have good records and minutes of county meetings, but we also want to know who they were as people.”

Keynote speaker Dean Lynch, executive director of the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) and a Chesterfield resident, described local government as “the bedrock of our democratic system” and “the



closest form of government to the people.”

“Leadership in local government is unique. Unlike state and federal positions, which are more distant from the citizenry, local elected officials are woven into the fabric of the communities they serve. They walk the same streets, send their children to the same schools and shop at the same stores. That proximity requires a special kind of leadership, one grounded in empathy and the ability to bring people together,” Lynch explained.

To view photos, video and read a complete overview about the Chesterfield County leadership plaque ceremony, visit the county’s [“Chesterfield On Point”](#) blog.



## Sales Tax is Focus of October 31 Meeting of Joint Subcommittee on Tax Policy



The Joint Subcommittee on Tax Policy delved into Virginia's sales tax structure at its second meeting of the year, receiving presentations from [the Department of Taxation](#) and [the Tax Foundation](#) on the structure of Virginia's sales tax and how Virginia's sales tax base compares with those of neighboring states, particularly with respect to the tax treatment of services.

As explained by Anna Dunkum, Lead Tax Policy Analyst with the Department of Taxation, most services are not subject to Virginia's sales and use tax; data limitations make foregone revenue associated with this exemption difficult to calculate, but the Department provided estimates to the Joint Subcommittee. As noted in the presentation, imposing state sales tax on personal services (such as hairdressing, motor vehicle repair, and dry cleaning) would generate more than \$900 million in revenue in FY 2026, while capturing business services (such as advertising, maintenance and janitorial services, and taxi and limousine services) would generate more than \$2.9 billion, and sales taxes on professional services (such as accounting, computer science, health care, and legal services) would generate \$7.3 billion. Neighboring states vary in their treatment of individual services within these categories.

Ms. Dunkum also discussed the taxation of digital services, the topic of substantial discussion during the 2024 General Assembly session. Digital services, such as digital downloads, streaming, website hosting and design, and cloud-based services (such as data storage), are generally not taxable in Virginia, but neighboring states capture at least some of these services in their respective sales tax bases. As noted in the presentation, streaming services could be categorized under the retail sales and use tax, or the Communications Sales and Use Tax. Another issue the state may need to consider in imposing sales taxes on digital services is sourcing of the transaction, which may be a complicated question if the seller is out-of-state and the purchaser's location of use is unknown.

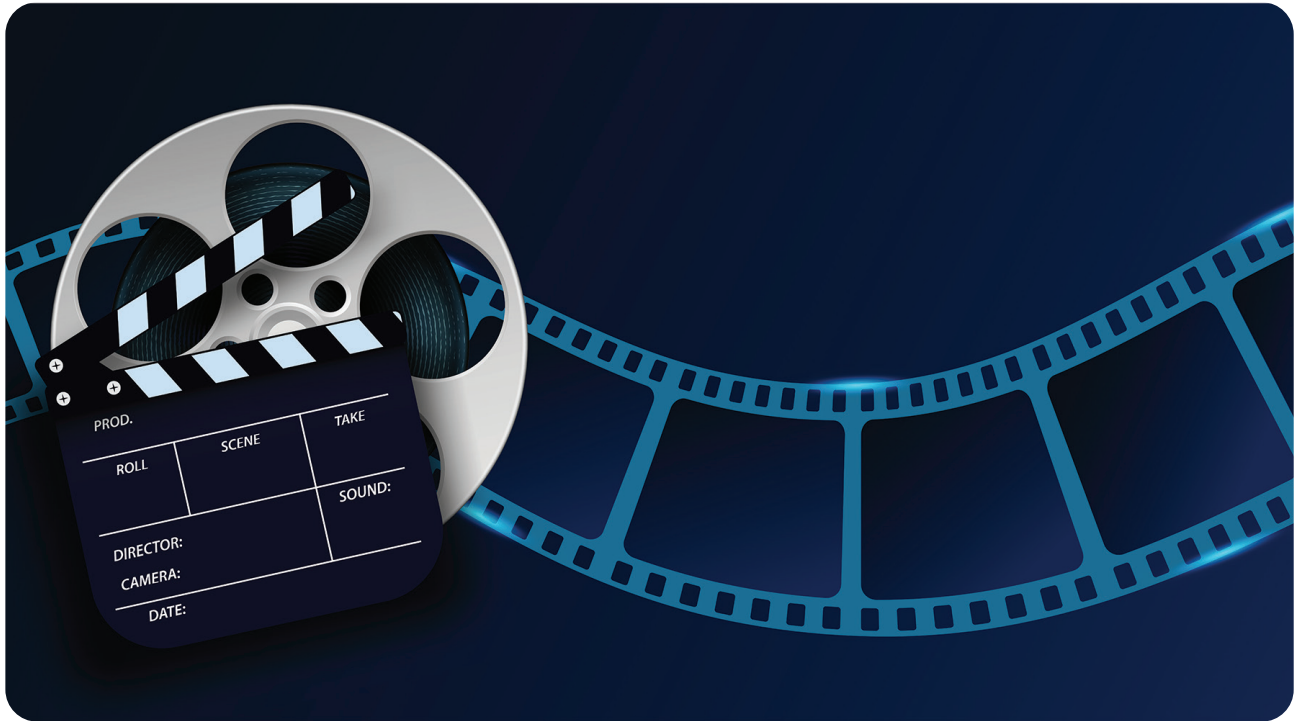
Dr. Andrey Yushkov of the Tax Foundation discussed national trends in sales taxes, noting that services' share of consumption (relative to goods) has grown over the last several decades, but services are not taxable in most states, resulting in an erosion of sales tax bases. Dr. Yushkov told the Joint Subcommittee that Virginia's sales tax base is particularly affected, with the breadth of its base (the share of the state's economy captured in the sales tax base) the third lowest in the nation. He offered several principles for sales tax reform, including the importance of broadening the sales tax base (to allow for lowering rates) and a strong preference for exempting business inputs and business-to-business transactions from sales taxes, arguing that imposing taxes on such intermediate transactions makes the sales tax a tax on production rather than consumption, and is less transparent than other methods of imposing taxes on businesses (such as corporate income tax). Several members raised the issue of considering local taxes – in particular, BPOL and machinery and tools taxes – in tandem with sales taxes in order to provide a fuller picture of taxation on businesses.

Delegate Watts also shared copies of a [presentation](#) she had delivered at a National Conference of State Legislatures event earlier this year regarding Virginia's experience in considering taxation of digital services.

Staff to the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee provided an [overview](#) of fiscal impact estimates for the numerous bills that were referred to the Joint Subcommittee during the 2024 session. Another meeting of the Joint Subcommittee is planned prior to the 2025 Session.

**VACo Contact:** [Katie Boyle](#)

## Joint Subcommittee on Tax Preferences Takes a Deeper Look at Tobacco Products Taxation and Film Incentives



The October 30 meeting of the Joint Subcommittee on Tax Preferences featured further discussions on the two study areas assigned to the Joint Subcommittee that had been the focus of the body’s September 17 meeting: taxes on “other tobacco products” (non-cigarettes) and state incentives for motion picture production.

For several years, language in the state budget has directed the Joint Subcommittee to study options to modernize the state’s tax on cigarettes, to include the tax treatment of liquid nicotine products. At the September 17 meeting, members discussed a discrepancy between state Code and the state budget with respect to how these products are taxed. Legislation passed in 2024 created a two-tier system of taxation of vaping products, depending on whether the product was a “closed” or “open” (refillable) system (one of the patrons of the legislation indicated that this difference was intended to reflect varying levels of nicotine in the two types of products) – but the superseding budget language retains an across-the-board cents-per-milliliter tax (which was increased in the 2024 Appropriation Act).

Dylan Bishop, representing the Virginia Smoke Free Association, **encouraged** members to consider liquid nicotine, or “vaping” products, as products that are less harmful than cigarettes and as tools to help adults quit smoking. Mr. Bishop told members that high excise taxes on vaping products could discourage cigarette smokers from transitioning to these less-harmful options, and shared information on the tax treatment of vaping products in other states. Delegate Vivian Watts, who chairs the Joint Subcommittee, instructed staff to prepare options

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for consideration at the next meeting that would harmonize the statutory and budget provisions governing the taxation of these products; these recommendations are to preserve the differential treatment of closed and open systems approved in current Code, but may adjust the tax rates to avoid reducing revenues assumed in the Appropriation Act.

Members also received [a presentation from the Cigar Association of Virginia](#), which contends that the 2020 actions to double the state “other tobacco products” tax on cigars (to 20 percent of the manufacturer’s sales price) have harmed retailers in Virginia by encouraging purchases in neighboring states with lower taxes on these products. However, there is limited data available on the number of cigars sold in Virginia, and the Association encouraged Joint Subcommittee members to authorize the Department of Taxation to require reporting of these sales figures. The Association also encouraged members to impose a rate of 20 percent or \$0.30 per cigar, whichever is lower. Members discussed the fairness of this approach to consumers of less costly cigars, and whether a cents-per-cigar tax would need to be adjusted over time to keep up with inflation.

The Joint Subcommittee also received a presentation by Rita McClenny, President and CEO of the Virginia Tourism Corporation, with additional information on the state’s film incentives that had been requested at the September 17 meeting. The Joint Subcommittee had received a referral from the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee earlier this year requesting a review of legislation that was considered in 2024 that would have expanded the state’s Motion Picture Opportunity Tax Credit, which is a refundable individual and corporate income tax credit for motion picture production companies spending a certain amount of money on production costs in Virginia. Mandy Rafool of the National Conference of State Legislatures also [presented information on film incentives offered by other states](#).

Lastly, members discussed [draft legislation that would harmonize certain tax provisions in the Appropriation Act with language in the Code](#). State budget provisions have the force of law, and some of these provisions have remained in the state budget for many years, but do not appear in the Virginia Code. Members discussed several provisions that would expire absent legislative action to extend them, and whether these provisions should include sunset clauses when they are incorporated into the Code. Members will consider these proposals, as well as statutory tax preferences that are scheduled to expire in 2025, at a future meeting of the Joint Subcommittee.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

## Joint Commission on Health Care Discusses Strategies to Extend Health Care Access to Vulnerable Populations



At its October 23 meeting, the Joint Commission on Health Care released results and recommendations from an extensive staff study on improving access to care for vulnerable populations. As defined in the study, vulnerable populations “have a high risk for health care problems, face significant hardship, or have a limited ability to understand or communicate effectively.” The report focuses on strategies that extend access to care to vulnerable populations, including older adults, individuals living in rural communities, and individuals who are members of racial and ethnic minority groups, who are also frequently underserved, defined in the report as “systematically denied opportunities to fully participate in health care based on shared characteristics,” such as living in rural areas or living in poverty.

The study examined five strategies to enhance access to care: mobile health clinics, community paramedicine programs, voluntary home visiting programs, community health workers, and telehealth, and offered a series of policy options for Commission consideration at its next meeting, which is scheduled for November 26. Public comments were due November 1. VACo submitted comments on several strategies considered in the report that address long-standing VACo legislative positions in support of voluntary home visiting programs and telehealth.

Key findings and recommendations from the report’s five areas of study include:

**Mobile health clinics:** These services are provided through specially modified vehicles and can operate flexibly to bring services to patients in areas that may otherwise lack access. This model of care can reduce overall health care costs by avoiding more expensive interventions, such as emergency department visits and hospitalizations. However, logistical and staffing challenges, and inconsistent funding, pose difficulties for the sustained operations of these services. Staff proposed establishing a grant program to support mobile health clinics providing services in rural and underserved areas. Staff also recommended including broadband access for mobile health clinics as a priority for Virginia’s allocation of federal Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program funding, to enhance the availability of telehealth at mobile clinics. Staff also proposed directing the Board of Pharmacy to work with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to allow dispensing of opioid use disorder treatment medications from mobile units (DBHDS is in the process of amending its licensure regulations to reflect certain new federal flexibility, [as reported in previous editions of County Connections](#)).



**Community paramedicine:** These programs involve paramedic-level Emergency Medical Services providers to increase access to primary care, link patients to services, and reduce inappropriate use of emergency resources; programs may schedule home visits with patients who are frequent users of 911 services or respond to low-acuity 911 calls. These programs are provided in addition to traditional EMS responsibilities, and reimbursement from commercial insurance and Medicaid does not fit well with this model of care, as typically EMS agencies are able to bill for services only when patients are transported to the emergency department. Policy options presented in the report include providing grant support to EMS agencies for community paramedicine programs; amending Virginia's Medicaid program to cover treatment provided by EMS on-scene, without requiring transportation to an emergency department; and requiring the Department of Medical Assistance Services to develop a plan for Medicaid reimbursement of community paramedicine services. Staff also proposed participating in the Ground Emergency Medical Transportation (GEMT) program to provide supplemental Medicaid payments to EMS agencies for emergency transportation services.

**Home visiting:** These programs assist expectant and new parents and children who are at risk for poor outcomes by connecting the family to a trained professional who offers coaching and other supports. Eight home visiting models operate in Virginia, serving 120 localities, but are only able to meet 5 percent of the need for services in most localities. Home visiting programs are funded by a mix of federal (53 percent), local (25 percent), state (3 percent), and private dollars (19 percent). Staff recommended providing funding to Families Forward Virginia to support required data collection to enable the program to qualify for federal funding; staff also recommended revisiting previous efforts to develop a home visiting benefit through Medicaid.

**Community Health Workers:** Community Health Workers are trusted messengers who provide a variety of services, including assistance with chronic disease management, public health outreach, and facilitation of access to resources and services. Recent infusions of federal funding have supported Community Health Workers in local health districts, but these funds are time-limited; state funding provided in the 2024 Appropriation Act did not fully cover the amount requested by the Virginia Department of Health for these positions. Staff recommended providing the additional funding to VDH and removing current language requiring VDH to prioritize these positions in areas with high maternal mortality. An additional policy option would direct DMAS to convene a stakeholder workgroup to develop a plan for Medicaid reimbursement for services provided by Certified Community Health Workers (a credential established by the Virginia Department of Health).

**Telehealth:** The report notes that Virginia has taken several steps to expand access to telehealth, including requiring parity in commercial insurance coverage for services provided via telehealth and in person, and covering an array of services provided through telehealth in Medicaid. The report points out that telehealth can improve access to care by reducing transportation-related barriers, and recommends several proposals to further enhance its use. Staff proposed improving state support of telehealth initiatives at VDH; funding a pilot program of telehealth access points within pharmacies; requiring school boards to facilitate student access to telehealth; providing additional funding to the Virginia Telemental Health Initiative to expand access to mental health care as well as professional development for providers in training; and requiring access to telehealth for individuals incarcerated in jails and prisons.

The full report provided to the Commission is available at [this link](#), and the staff presentation is available at [this link](#).

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

## **Commission on Youth Seeks Public Comments on Proposals Regarding Petitions for Relief of Custody**

The Commission on Youth received a briefing from its staff at its October 22 meeting with the results of a study and several proposed recommendations regarding the increased use of petitions for temporary or permanent relief of custody to place children in foster care. Virginia Code allows parents to petition a court to be relieved of their responsibility for care and custody of a child through a judicial process. Such a petition is first referred to the local department of social services for investigation and the provision of services. After a court hearing, if the petition is granted, the child may be placed in the custody of a person with a legitimate interest, a licensed child-placing agency, or a local board of social services. The Commission approved a study resolution in November 2023 on this topic, which was raised by local departments of social services and the Office of the Children's Ombudsman during the Commission's 2023 foster care study. Commission staff convened an advisory group and held regional roundtables as part of the process of developing recommendations for the Commission to consider.

Staff reported a number of themes emerging from the roundtable discussions. Summarizing these points, the Commission's Senior Policy Analyst Will Egen noted that by the time a petition has been filed, it is often too late for interventions to support the family; parents may not know how to avail themselves of services earlier in the process, or services may not be available. There is variation across the state in the number of these cases seen by judges; during a five-year period examined by staff, 48 percent of petitions for relief of custody were filed in the western part of the state. Some concerns were expressed about families' interactions with court services units and law enforcement and these entities' ability to refer parents to appropriate services.

Key recommendations proposed by staff include the following:

- Standardize the pre-hearing investigation by the local department of social services to require a written home study report on the child and family, based on a template to be developed by the Department of Social Services, and require the local department to refer the parent to the local Family Assessment and Planning Team for potential services to be provided through the Children's Services Act.
- Include the parent's efforts to use available services offered by the local department of social services or other agencies as part of the judge's consideration of the parent's desire to be relieved of custody.
- Clarify in statute that Children in Need of Services are eligible for CSA parental agreements and community-based services, and request the Office of Children's Services to make local partners and agencies aware of these options for families.
- Request that the Department of Social Services strengthen the ability of adoptive families to

obtain services in a new locality if the family has moved after an adoption is finalized.

- Request that organizations representing licensed child-placing agencies ensure that pre-adoption training includes a focus on trauma-informed parenting, mental health and neurodevelopmental conditions, and supports available to adoptive families.
- Require the Department of Education to survey local school divisions to review the access available to local departments of social services and Community Services Boards and what school-based mental health options are available at each school division.
- Request the Virginia League of Social Services Executives to compile information on best practices regarding collaboration between local agencies and judges on relief of custody cases. Request the Department of Juvenile Justice to distribute best practices to court services units for their use in discussing services available in the community with parents who may seek relief of custody. Request the Department of Social Services to work with law enforcement associations to distribute best practices for informing families about available services when law enforcement encounters families in crisis.

Staff's presentation is available at [this link](#), and the full list of proposed recommendations is available at [this link](#). Public comments are due by 5 p.m. on November 21 and may be directed to Commission Director Amy Atkinson at [aatkinson@vcoy.virginia.gov](mailto:aatkinson@vcoy.virginia.gov). Public comments will be considered by the Commission at its November 25 meeting.

The Commission also received [an update](#) on a series of listening sessions and an advisory group meeting held as part of the Commission's study of Virginia's special education dispute resolution system. This is a two-year study, with a final report due to the General Assembly by November 1, 2025. VACo participated in the advisory group meeting.

The Virginia Department of Social Services also provided [an update](#) on its efforts to promote kinship care for children who must be removed from their homes. Children who are placed with relatives or fictive kin have better outcomes, and placement with relatives can reduce the trauma of being removed from the home. Virginia has increased the percentage of children who are placed in kinship care from 12.9 percent in January 2023 to 18.4 percent in September 2024. The Department's presentation also included an update on the implementation of the Parental Child Safety Placement Program, which was authorized by legislation passed in 2024. This legislation outlined the process for voluntary agreements among parents, relative or fictive kin caregivers, and local departments to avoid entry into foster care while ensuring that children are safe in these placements. The State Board of Social Services adopted regulations to implement the program at its October meeting. Relatives and fictive kin who are participating in the Program are eligible for additional financial assistance, which is funded out of the state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families allocation; Senator Barbara Favola, who carried the implementing legislation in the Senate, encouraged the Department to track use of these funds to determine whether additional state support might be needed.

**VACo Contact:** [Katie Boyle](#)

## Workgroup on Alternatives to State Hospitalization Shares Recommendations with Joint Subcommittee on HHR Oversight



A workgroup convened to evaluate and recommend alternative options for individuals with neurocognitive disorders and neurodevelopmental disabilities who may otherwise be admitted to state psychiatric hospitals presented its draft recommendations to the Joint Subcommittee on HHR Oversight on October 31.

Legislation considered by the 2024 General Assembly directed the establishment of this workgroup; these bills were sparked by a [2023 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission \(JLARC\) study of the state hospital system](#), which found that individuals with neurocognitive disorders (such as dementia or traumatic brain injuries) or neurodevelopmental disorders (such as autism) were not well served by state hospitals. JLARC's report recommended that behaviors and symptoms that are solely the result of these disorders be excluded from the definition of "mental illness" for the purposes of temporary detention orders (TDOs) and civil commitments, and that state hospitals be allowed to deny admission to an individual under a TDO or civil commitment whose behaviors resulted solely from these disorders. However, JLARC staff suggested that such a policy change be enacted with a

[More on Next Page](#)

delayed effective date, due to concerns about the lack of alternative placements for individuals with neurocognitive or neurodevelopmental disorders who are in crisis. In keeping with this recommended delay in implementation, language in the bills required them to be passed again in 2025 in order to take effect; the bills also contained language directing the convening of the workgroup.

Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Resources Leah Mills [presented the key findings and recommendations of the workgroup](#), which met five times over the summer and fall; these proposals are being finalized and a report is being drafted as required by the legislation. The workgroup recommended against re-enacting the 2024 legislation, given the current lack of alternative services for individuals with these disorders and conditions; instead, the workgroup recommended improving the state's continuum of care, including pursuing a Medicaid waiver to cover services for brain injury and other neurocognitive disorders; enhancing the ability of crisis services, such as the REACH program, to serve individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders; building private sector capacity to serve individuals with these disorders who also have behavioral health needs, including establishing a treatment and rehabilitation center, similar to the Kennedy Krieger Institute in Maryland; and enhancing workforce training on serving individuals with neurodevelopmental or neurocognitive disorders. The workgroup also strongly encouraged additional support for caregivers, including respite care and clear protocols regarding family or caregiver involvement in crisis response or intervention.

Legislators on the Joint Subcommittee commended the workgroup on its efforts but encouraged strengthening its recommendations, expressing some frustration that individuals may continue to be hospitalized at state facilities in the absence of other options, and encouraging a sense of urgency in developing alternative placement options. Delegate Mark Sickles, who chairs the Joint Subcommittee, exhorted representatives of long-term care facilities to work with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to develop a proposal for consideration in the 2025 Session that would improve their capacity to serve individuals in the community.

The Joint Subcommittee also received [a presentation on long-term care insurance in Virginia](#), as well as [an update on implementation of the state's health benefit exchange](#).

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

VIRGINIA – HURRICANE HELENE



# Agriculture Recovery Resource Days

## Did your farm or agribusiness experience losses due to Hurricane Helene?

Agriculture Recovery Resource Days are daylong resource fairs for **farmers, private forest owners** and **agribusinesses** that were impacted by Hurricane Helene in Virginia.

**Over 15 local, commonwealth and federal agencies and nonprofit organizations will be in attendance** to provide information about programs and resources that can support your farm’s recovery.

## Visit one of the 4 remaining events!

ABINGDON	
THURSDAY <b>NOV</b> <b>7</b>	<b>9 am – 6 pm</b> Highlands Fellowship Church 22417 Watauga Road Abingdon, VA 24211

WYTHEVILLE	
SATURDAY <b>NOV</b> <b>9</b>	<b>9 am – 5 pm</b> Wytheville Meeting Center 333 Community Boulevard Wytheville, VA 24382

**MORE** **Location details coming soon:**

- Smyth County
- event central to Lee, Scott, & Wise counties

### Federal Agencies

- FEMA
- Small Business Administration
- U.S. Department of Agriculture
  - Farm Service Agency (FSA)
  - Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)
  - Rural Development

### Virginia Agencies

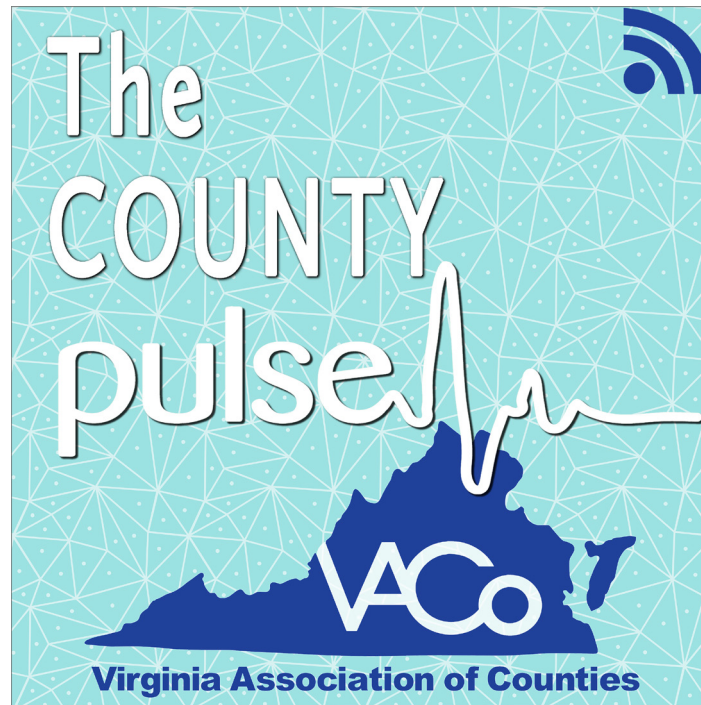
- Department of Emergency Management
- Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Department of Forestry
- Department of Conservation and Recreation
- Department of Environmental Quality
- Department of Health
- Cooperative Extension
- Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission
- Small Business Financing Authority

### Local Agencies and Organizations

- Holston River and Big Walker Soil & Water Conservation Districts
- Virginia Farm Bureau
- Virginia Cattlemen’s Association
- Farm Credit of the Virginias
- First Bank & Trust
- Agrisafe
- Washington County
- Wythe County

[fema.gov/event/hurricane-helene-virginia-agricultural-recovery-resource-day](https://fema.gov/event/hurricane-helene-virginia-agricultural-recovery-resource-day)





## Season 4

### Energy Landscape of Virginia Series with Joe Lerch

#### Energy Landscape of Virginia Episode 4 | DEQ Solar Permit-By-Rule Regulations - HB 206



[Listen to the Podcast](#)

#### **Draft Revisions to DEQ Solar Permit-By-Rule (PBR) Regulations – HB 206.**

This episode reviews regulations that amend the requirements for utility-scale solar installations to receive state permits to operate. Specifically, a 2022 law – commonly referred to as HB 206 – requires that applicants must avoid, minimize or otherwise mitigate certain losses to prime farmland and forests in order to get approval. In a conversation with Jonathan Rak and Susan Tripp with the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), we learn the details of the draft regulations, focusing on important aspects that counties will want to know, opportunities to comment on the draft, and next steps in the process before they become effective.

#### **RESOURCES**

- [DEQ's HB 206 Webpage](#)
- [Virginia Regulatory Town Hall page – Deadline for Comments: December 6, 2024](#)
- [Public Hearing Meeting Information – November 19, 2024 at 10 am](#)



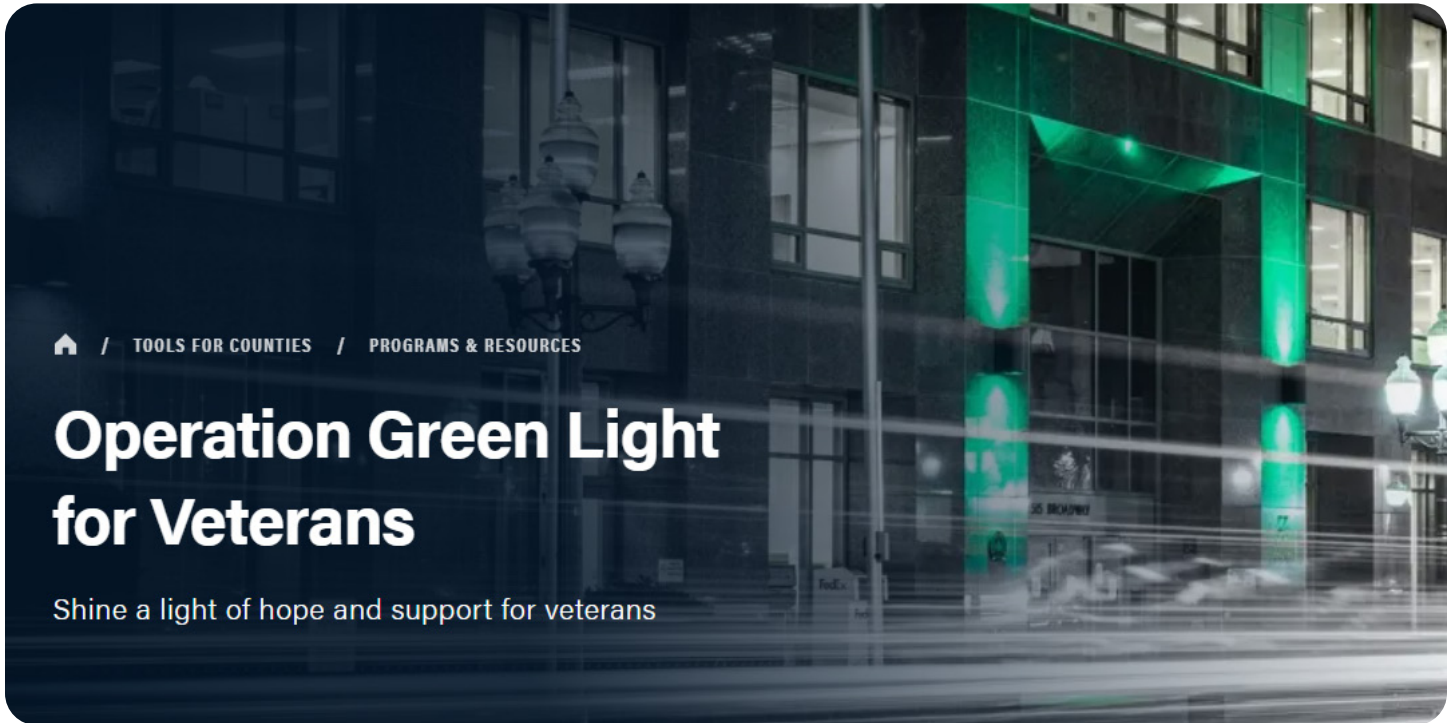
## Get your VA250 license plates - now available

Are you ready to show your pride in America's 250th anniversary? The VA250 commemorative license plate is now available for purchase! As a symbol of our nation's rich history and bright future, this limited-edition license plate offers a unique opportunity to drive with a piece of history.

By purchasing a VA250 license plate, you're not only adding a stylish touch to your vehicle, but you're also supporting a worthy cause. A portion of the proceeds from each plate sold will be donated directly to VA250, a non-profit organization dedicated to creating educational programs, events, and exhibits to commemorate America's 250th anniversary.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to own a piece of history and support a great cause. [Visit the Virginia DMV website](#) to purchase your VA250 license plate today.





America's counties have a long and proud history of serving our nation's veterans, a legacy that continues to this day as we work with our federal, state and local partners to ensure that the former service members have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Once again this Veterans Day, the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) invite the nation's 3,069 counties, parishes, and boroughs to join Operation Green Light and show support for veterans by lighting our buildings green from November 4-11, 2024. By shining a green light, county governments and our residents will let veterans know that they are seen, appreciated and supported.

To show support, counties are encouraged to use this template to pass a resolution declaring your county's participation in [Operation Green Light](#).

- [Download Flyer](#)
- [Explore 2023 Highlights](#)
- [NACo Veterans and Military Services Committee](#)
- [NACo Policy Brief: Authorize Resources for County Veteran Service Officers](#)
- [Find a County Veteran Service Officer](#)

# Congratulations!

We love presenting Achievement Awards  
at Board of Supervisors Meetings



## Congratulations Smyth County!

A huge congratulations to Smyth County for winning two Achievement Awards, including the BEST ACHIEVEMENT AWARD as the overall winner!

Smyth County Grows is a housing program that has made an impact on the community. [Read more about it here.](#)

Smyth County also won for its Smyth Promise program.



# Congratulations!

We love presenting Achievement Awards at Board of Supervisors Meetings



## Congratulations Orange County!

Orange County has won two Achievement Awards for the second year in a row!

Orange County now has won seven Achievement Awards, including Best Achievement Award in 2013 and Best Small County Achievement Award in 2022.



# Congratulations!

We love presenting Achievement Awards  
at Board of Supervisors Meetings



## Congratulations Botetourt County!

Congratulations to Botetourt County for winning an Achievement Award! Botetourt County won for its program titled “Setting the Record Straight - BOCO Facts4U.”

Botetourt County has won 9 Achievement Awards, including one in the first year of the program in 2003.

# Congratulations!

We love presenting Achievement Awards  
at Board of Supervisors Meetings



## Congratulations Prince George County!

Congratulations Prince George County for winning an Achievement Award! Prince George County won for its program titled "Capitol Region Military Alliance."

Prince George County has won 6 Achievement Awards all-time.

# Congratulations!

We love presenting Achievement Awards  
at Board of Supervisors Meetings



## Congratulations Isle of Wight County!

Congratulations to Isle of Wight County for winning its 10th Achievement Award!

Isle of Wight last won in 2018, and was an award winner in the program's inaugural year (2003).

# VACo Releases Its 2025 Preliminary Legislative Program



VACo has released its [2025 Preliminary Legislative Program](#), which was drafted through VACo's steering committee process. The document includes a host of important and timely proposed policy statements including language pertaining to K-12 education funding, local taxing authority, stormwater regulations, land use planning, transportation, broadband, health and human resources and other local budget and legislative issues.

Click on the link to read the [2025 Preliminary Legislative Program](#).

The 2025 Legislative Program will be adopted on November 12 during the Annual Business Meeting at the [VACo Annual Conference](#).

VACo's eight steering committees will finalize and adopt their policy sections on November 10. The Resolutions Committee will ratify the Legislative Program on November 11. VACo's membership will vote to adopt the Final Legislative Program on November 12.

VACo members are encouraged to continue to add their input to this document by working through their county's legislative process and the VACo steering committee process to put forward suggested changes to VACo's 2024 Legislative Program.

For questions regarding VACo's legislative process, contact Dean Lynch at [dlynch@vaco.org](mailto:dlynch@vaco.org) or 804.343.2511.

**VACo Contact:** [Dean Lynch, CAE](#)

# VACo CLOSING GENERAL SESSION



Join us for political talk with former Delegates Chris Saxman and David Toscano at VACo's 90th Annual Conference.

**NOVEMBER 12, 2024**  
9 am - 10:15 am  
The Omni Homestead | Bath County



For more information  
[www.vaco.org](http://www.vaco.org)

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



**Chris Saxman**  
Executive Director  
Virginia FREE



**David Toscano**  
Attorney and Author



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**Donna Pierce, Client Relations**  
[Donna@pierceins.com](mailto:Donna@pierceins.com)  
Direct Telephone # 704-576-0934



Thank you Wythe County Chief Deputy [Anthony Cline](#) for sharing your experience with Blue Line Solutions!



Thank you Sussex County Sheriff [Ernest Giles](#) for sharing your experience with Blue Line Solutions!

## Premier Partner Spotlight

# Blue Line Solutions Testimonials

**Blue Line Solutions** is making a positive impact on communities all over Virginia. In Smyth County - **Blue Line Solutions** recorded during a five-day period that there were 3,530 vehicles traveling through school speed zones at 10mph or higher above the speed limit. That's over 12,000 speeding vehicles a month during school days.

**Blue Line Solutions** uses information and communications rather than focus on enforcement to reduce speeds in school zones.

During **Blue Line Solutions** Public Information Phase of its program in Smyth County - the number dropped to 213 over a five-day period. That's without writing one ticket. The community heard the problem and reacted to it. During the warning phase - the number dropped to 175. Then during the enforcement phase - it dropped to 72. That's a 98 percent reduction of speeders compared to before the **Blue Line Solutions** program.

"That's absolutely fantastic that we can make a difference in a community," Blue Line Solutions CEO/Founder Mark Hutchinson said.

# VACo 90th Annual Conference

November 10 – 12, 2024

The Omni Homestead | Bath County



This year's Annual Conference theme - **“Energizing County Governments”** - was selected because of VACo's collective energy and momentum that has jolted counties to many successes. We are proud of our accomplishments and service to our communities.

Join county and state leaders from all over the Commonwealth on November 10-12 at the Omni Homestead for [VACo's 90th Annual Conference](#).



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**Questions?**

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# VACo Seeks to Create Mentorship Program for Supervisors



Dear Members/County Administrators...

VACo is blessed to have many smart and experienced Supervisors. This year we welcomed a slew of newly elected Supervisors, some of whom have expressed interest in being mentored. VACo thrives when Supervisors connect and share experiences and challenges. Therefore, we would like to establish an informal, voluntary mentoring program to offer opportunities for personalized connections among Supervisors.

If you are interested in being a mentor or being connected with a mentor, please contact Karie Walker, [kwalker@vaco.org](mailto:kwalker@vaco.org) or 804-343-2504.

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

**Karie Walker**  
Director of Programs and Development  
Virginia Association of Counties



## You are VAcorp

You are not merely a customer of VAcorp; you **are** VAcorp! We are both owned and governed by you – our members! VAcorp is created under 15.2-2700 of the local government code where all assets and surplus belong to the members. In addition, VAcorp is controlled by a Supervisory Board that is elected from and by our members. The Board determines and approves all major risk pool decisions, and as a voting member, you have a voice in the decisions that matter most.

### Know Who You Are

Because you are VAcorp itself, we think it is critical that you understand exactly what VAcorp is and why it exists. Many simply think of us as their “insurance carrier” – writing customized coverages and handling claims when they occur – but we are so much more!

## Our History

### The Birth of Risk Pools

VAcorp is not an insurance company, but rather a Risk Pool.

Unstable economic conditions in the mid-1980s led to a commercial insurance crisis with ballooning premiums and widespread policy cancellations. As a result, Risk Pools began to form as an alternative to volatile traditional carriers, allowing Pool members to exert more control over their coverages and costs. Today, almost all public sector entities throughout the country get their coverage from Risk Pools rather than from commercial insurance companies.

### VAcorp’s Origin

VAcorp was founded by a handful of Virginia counties in 1993. The ultimate goals of the program were to provide **cost stability**, the most **comprehensive coverages** possible, and **custom services** tailored specifically to the unique needs of our members. While we are pleased by how well our prices compare against the competition, our goal was never to guarantee the lowest cost. Instead, we promised to avoid the wild price swings that we’ve seen in other providers and provide stable pricing year after year, and that is exactly what we have delivered. VAcorp rates are actually **lower today in 2024 than they were in 1993!**

### VAcorp’s Growth

Today, VAcorp is the **largest self-insurance risk pool** for public sector entities in the Commonwealth with a membership retention rate of better than 98%. Over the years, we have expanded beyond counties to include municipalities, school divisions, authorities, volunteer fire & rescue companies, state agencies, and non-profits funded by taxpayer dollars. **Over 560 members** have joined VAcorp, including 8 of the 10 largest counties, 8 of the 10 largest cities, and 8 of the 10 largest school divisions. We believe that the extraordinary success of the program can be attributed to our unwavering commitment to our founding principles.

## VAcorp Exists to Serve You

VAcorp was created solely to serve Virginia's public sector entities, and from day one until now, we have never lost sight of that purpose. Because we answer only to our members, every decision is designed to benefit the group over the long haul.

VAcorp advocates for local government through a myriad of partnerships with affiliated associations including: VACo, VSBA, VLGMA, VASS, VFGOA, VASBO, LGA, Regional Jail Association, PDC, etc. While there is a cost associated with these partnerships, they add value to the group by aiding in our ability to lobby the General Assembly on behalf of our members.

You may not always see the immediate payoff, but every VAcorp decision is made in alignment with our vision to serve our members and promote the health and longevity of your program.

Take a look at a few of VAcorp's milestones over the years:

- **1993** - VAcorp is established with 12 founding members and less than \$700,000 in annual contribution.
- **1998** - VAcorp terminates service contract with claims administration vendor and hires staff to promote more control and efficiency.
- **1999** - VAcorp offers coverage to K-12 Public Schools across the Commonwealth.
- **2001** - VAcorp begins offering Public Officials Liability coverage in response to VARisk offering limited coverage.
- **2004** - VAcorp begins providing Environmental Liability coverage to all members at no additional cost. Even in 2024, VAcorp is the only provider offering this coverage with a low \$25,000 deductible. Other providers offer this coverage with a \$250,000 deductible.
- **2008** - VAcorp responded to the great recession by freezing rates and providing financial relief with over \$8,000,000 in dividends to members.
- **2011** - VAcorp introduces Line of Duty Act (LODA) coverage, creates the only LODA trust in the state, and absorbs existing LODA losses in response to the state pushing this cost to the local level. VAcorp paid all of its members' 2010 past liability for over \$1,000,000.
- **2013** - VAcorp merges with the VSBA Self-Insurance Group and assumes their liabilities to prevent School Boards from being assessed. This action saves Local Governments in excess of \$5,000,000.
- **2013** - VAcorp becomes the first to offer Cyber Risk coverage in Virginia offering the broadest coverage available to local governments anywhere in the US.
- **2016** - VAcorp offers Student Accident and Catastrophic Accident coverage in order to fill VHSL coverage gaps.
- **2020** - VAcorp provides over \$5,000,000 in rate credits during the COVID pandemic to assist members.
- **2023** - VAcorp includes security risk management coverage (active shooter) for all members (coverage has been included for Schools since 2013).







## OneDigital is thrilled to be one of VACo's newest Premier Partners.

What truly distinguishes OneDigital as a leading **insurance, financial services, and HR consulting advisory firm** is our holistic approach to creating environments that enable people to do their best work and live their best lives. OneDigital understands that counties face rising insurance costs while still struggling to attract/retain talent. This is why we use proprietary software to provide accurate and predictable insurance consulting projections for those core benefits that impact your bottom line and incorporate solutions to improve retention. While voluntary benefits may be the focus of other providers, OneDigital has the expertise in alternative funding strategies, best-in-class analytics, and an in-house actuarial team.

OneDigital has a track record of providing cost-saving solutions to counties. This has been achieved through creative funding strategies, rate holds, and exclusive partnerships with various carriers. One of these exclusive partnerships is through VACORP and Anthem Life. OneDigital is responsible for the inception of the Virginia Local Disability Program (VLDP) which is through the Virginia Retirement System (VRS). Our team of fierce advocates negotiated a 5-year locked rate, including short-term and long-term disability benefits. Your division may already work with us in this capacity, as we currently serve over 270 public sector entities in the VLDP program.



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**Business Development Executive**  
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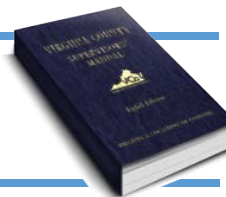


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The Virginia Association of Counties accepts employment ads in a PDF file or a link to a job site. Please include information for applying, and a link to other important information. Please do not fax your employment ad. VACo members are not charged for placing an employment ad. **The cost is \$100 per ad for non-VACo members.** VACo publishes the ad on its website and mobile app as well as the upcoming County Connections issue. If you have any questions or concerns, please email [Valerie Russell](mailto:Valerie.Russell@vacounty.org).

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### ADVOCACY

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### EDUCATION

Our educational programs offer County leaders and staff opportunities to become more effective in their communities.



### MEMBERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Some of VACo's best moments are when members convene and work to improve communities all over the Commonwealth.



### BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Our business development opportunities offer savings and innovative approaches to delivering services at the County level.

## VACo LEADERSHIP



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VACo exists to support county officials and to effectively represent, promote and protect the interests of counties to better serve the people of Virginia.

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