

Ruth Larson Elected VACo President for 2024-2025

RICHMOND (November 13, 2024) — James City County Supervisor Ruth Larson has been elected as President of the Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) for the 2024-2025 term. This announcement was made during VACo's 90th Annual Conference held in Bath County with new officers beginning their terms at VACo's Annual Business Meeting on November 12.

Larson, succeeding Albemarle County Supervisor Ann H. Mallek, becomes the second President from James City County since VACo's establishment in 1934, following in the footsteps of Jack D. Edwards (1977).

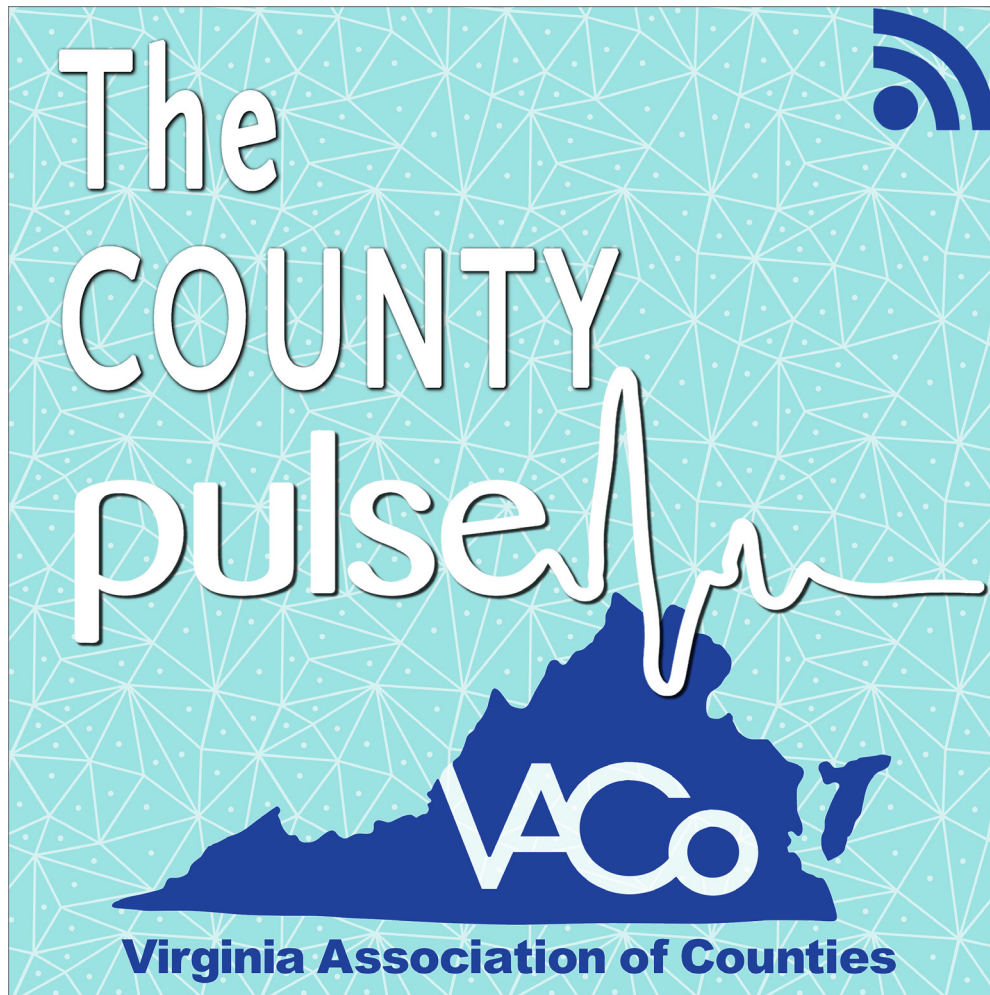
"I am excited and humbled to be selected as the next VACo President, and I'm honored to represent James City County and the Virginia Peninsula region." Larson said. "I've learned a lot from VACo over the years and want to ensure we continue our strength of educating and informing Virginia's local leaders. I'm also looking forward to working with state and federal leaders to protect important governing tools like local authority. I can't wait to get to work."



Larson, who works with husband Craig in several ventures, started her public service career as a PTA mom. She was elected to the Williamsburg-James City County School Board in 2006 and served until her election to the James City Board of Supervisors in 2016 to represent the Berkeley District. Larson can trace her family tree to the area back to when her great grandfather moved to be a silversmith at Colonial Williamsburg. Her mother's family roots in the area date back to 1670. Larson sincerely serves to give back to James City County, which has given her and her family so much through the years.

"Thank you to my colleagues on the James City County Board of Supervisors for their support, encouragement, and advice," Larson said. "I share this honor with them and our James City community."

VACo Executive Director Dean Lynch expressed enthusiasm about Larson's presidency, saying, "Ruth has longtime institutional memory on local issues because of the roots she has established in her community. She knows the issues of James City County and the Peninsula region. And she has made it a point to learn more about the issues affecting all localities in the Commonwealth. This curiosity and concern for local issues will serve Ruth well as our next President."



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 and Part 2

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. [Listen to the Podcast.](#)

Part 2. Reclaiming the Landscape of Southwest Virginia for Energy.

After learning about the opportunities for repurposing abandoned mine land for data centers in our 1st part with Will Clear and Will Payne, we visit with Mike Hatfield and Natalie Chapman from Wise County to expand on this conversation and take a tour of the future site of Data Center Ridge.

[Listen to the Podcast.](#)

VACo Recognizes the Class of 2024 of the Virginia Certified County Supervisors' Program



RICHMOND (November 14, 2024)—The Virginia Association of Counties (VACo) recognized the Class of 2024 – the second graduating class of the revamped Virginia Certified County Supervisors' Program – during VACo's 90th Annual Conference.

The Virginia Certified County Supervisors' Program consists of three core courses – budgeting; planning, land use, and infrastructure; and leadership. The program provides fundamental skills training as well as deep dive examinations and discussions of real scenarios that impact counties. Supervisors enrich the educational experience by sharing their journeys – the challenges and successes as an elected official serving a rural, or urban, or suburban community.

The 25 graduates ([group photo](#)) of the 12-month certification program are:

- **Cathy Binder** | King George County | [PHOTO](#)
- **T.C. "Tom" Bowen** | Mathews County
- **Edwin W. "Ike" Broaddus** | Fauquier County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Gerald Childress** | Spotsylvania County
- **Donna D. Comer** | Rappahannock County
- **William Donati, Jr.** | Powhatan County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Timothy P. Doss** | Mathews County
- **David M. Felts, Jr.** | Amelia County | [PHOTO](#)
- **John R. "J.R." Fidler** | Richmond County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Matthew D. Ingram** | Westmoreland County | [PHOTO](#)

More on Next Page

- **Marshall Jamison** | Franklin County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Deshundra Jefferson** | Prince William County
- **Francis X. McGuigan** | Greene County
- **Denise Morrissette** | Powhatan County
- **Phil C. North** | Roanoke County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Daphne V. Norton** | Nottoway County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Barbara E. Null** | James City County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Janice Hudgins Phillips** | Mathews County
- **Robert W. Powers** | Powhatan County
- **Travis L. Pruitt** | Henry County
- **Renee K. Rountree** | Isle of Wight County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Isaac B. Smelser** | Page County
- **Lorie Smith** | Franklin County | [PHOTO](#)
- **Jeff S. Stoneman** | Hanover County
- **James R. Walkinshaw** | Fairfax County

“Congratulations to our 25 graduates of the Supervisors’ Certification Program – the Class of 2024,” VACo Executive Director **Dean Lynch** said. “Our supervisors certification program emphasizes peer-to-peer learning and student engagement, and we continue to be amazed at the depth of experience of real-time issues being shared among the supervisors. Thank you, Class of 2024. Your support of each other will be remembered.”

The program was enhanced by the stewardship of each course instructor.

- Budgeting – **Suzette Denslow**
- Planning, Land Use, and Infrastructure – **Andrew Hopewell**, AICP, CZA; **Earl Anderson**, AICP; **Will Cockrell**, AICP; **Jeffrey Farner**
- Leadership – **Jane Dittmar**

Each course instructor led two in-person, all-day educational sessions as well as multiple virtual meetings. Students engaged with various leaders and experts in the three course areas.

“The instructors are owed a tremendous amount of gratitude for their work in leading each course,” Lynch said. “It’s not easy to balance the teaching of all the different components like fundamental skills training. Our instructors not only taught theory but also shared real skills, fundamental ways of tackling challenges, that the students can take back home and apply immediately to their role as supervisor.”

For more information about the Virginia Certified County Supervisors’ Program, contact Karie Walker at kwalker@vaco.org or 804.343.2504.

[Photo of Plaques](#)



PHOTO SOURCE: [Virginia Department of Historic Resources](#)

Visit Powhatan County and the Powhatan County Historic Courthouse

Location: 3880 Old Buckingham Road / Scottsville Road

Built: 1848 – 1849

Style: Greek Revival

Architect: Alexander Jackson Davis

Contractor: K Lewis Johnson

Description: The building faces west and is a two story cream colored stucco structure. The building is located on spacious landscaped grounds in the center of Powhatan. The original building is rectangular with the west front having a recessed porch with two columns and pediment at the roof line. On the east side is the new one story addition with large glass windows. The roof is hipped. In the interior, there are flat coffered ceilings. The courtroom has a wooden judge's bench set in a large alcove and with a gallery at the rear with enclosed stairs. The building houses the County Circuit Court, County General District Court and County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of the 11th Judicial Circuit. The building was remodeled in 1992. The architect was Browne, Eickman, Dalgleish, Gilpin & Paxton. On the east side is the old two story red colored brick County Jail and on the southwest side are the one story County Clerk's offices.

SOURCE: courthouses.co

SAVE THE DATES!

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

**January to March 2025
VACo Headquarters**

VACo County Government Day

**Thursday, January 23, 2025
Omni Richmond Hotel**

VACo Chairpersons' Institute

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

Join us for these important events.

Call VACo at 804.788.6652 for more information



Applauding Your Commitment to Growth: Leadership Development with the National Association of Counties



PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT
ACADEMY
WE MAKE LEADERS BETTER

We would like to acknowledge and congratulate the November NACo Leadership Academy graduates from Virginia. They join over 10,000 graduates and current participants from across the country benefitting from the 12-week online program enabling existing and emerging county leaders to achieve their highest potential.

- **Adima Camacho Encinas**, Service Coordinator, Fairfax County
- **Amy Webb**, Family Services Supervisor, Montgomery County
- **Ashley Eggleston**, Administrative Services Manager, Goochland County
- **Charles Wilkins**, Lt. of Emergency Services, Essex County
- **Fred Mitchell III**, Chief Deputy, Essex County
- **Heather Thomas**, Family Services Supervisor, Montgomery County
- **Jacqueline Scott**, ITR Representative, Prince William County - *Cybersecurity*
- **Jason Collins**, Deputy Chief, Loudoun County
- **Jonathan Sydnor**, Lt. of Emergency Services, Essex County
- **Kate Holloway**, Family Services Specialist, Montgomery County
- **Kathryn Weaver**, Therapist III, Prince William County
- **Kelly Edmonson**, Director, Montgomery County
- **Laura Halo**, Fiscal & Administration Division Manager, Prince William County
- **Melanie Menikheim**, Network Analyst, Augusta County - *Cybersecurity*
- **Ryan Miller**, Lt. of Emergency Services, Essex County
- **Sara Gallagher**, Special Projects and Grants Program Coordinator, Essex County
- **Tammy Wilson**, Director of Social Services, Alleghany County
- **Tessa Cwayna**, Family Services Specialist, Montgomery County

Start the new year with Leadership Development

Our January Cohort is right around the corner. Join us in investing in the workforce – empowering them to become better leaders today and into the future. **10th Anniversary scholarships available through December 31.**

[**CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE AND TO ENROLL**](#)

Developed by General Colin Powell, the Professional Development Academy and NACo, the High Performance Leadership Academy is an online 12-week program that helps your workforce develop fundamental, practical leadership skills to deliver results for counties and our residents.



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**](#)



Chesterfield County Announces Colonel Frank Carpenter Jr. as its New Chief of Police

Colonel Frank Carpenter Jr. was publicly introduced October 30 as chief of the Chesterfield County Police Department (CCPD).

Carpenter has worked for CCPD for nearly 25 years, steadily moving up through the ranks from sergeant to lieutenant, then captain and major before being appointed deputy chief of operations in July 2023. In that role, he oversaw performance, planning and budgeting for Patrol Services, the Investigations Bureau, and the Special Operations and Tactical Operations divisions.

“Thank you for your commitment. Each of you play a vital role in protecting and serving this community. Your dedication and professionalism truly make a difference in the lives of those we serve,” Carpenter Jr. said during a brief ceremony on the steps of the county’s historic 1917 courthouse.

Carpenter is Chesterfield’s ninth chief since the police department was established in 1914. He succeeds Jeffrey Katz, who retired from the county in May.

Read more about [his background and accomplishments](#) in this news release.

VACo Releases Its 2025 Legislative Program



VACo has released its [2025 Legislative Program](#), which was adopted by membership on November 12 at the Annual Business Meeting. The 2025 Legislative Program was drafted through VACo's steering committee process. The document has 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 Legislative Program](#).

VACo's eight steering committees finalized and adopted their policy sections on November 10. The Resolutions Committee ratified the Legislative Program on November 11. VACo's membership voted to adopt the final Legislative Program on November 12.

For questions regarding VACo's legislative process, contact Dean Lynch at dlynch@vaco.org or 804.343.2511.

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

VACo Provides Public Testimony at Federal Hearing on OSHA's Proposed Emergency Response Standard for Fire Brigades



On Wednesday, November 20, VACo staff provided testimony at a public [hearing](#) for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) proposed [rule](#) to update regulations regarding emergency response workers, who often face substantial occupational hazards. VACo staff stressed to the OSHA panel and presiding Judge how additional unfunded mandates proposed in the rule could pose yet one more challenge to local governments and fire departments in Virginia already struggling to provide needed services in a time of increased call volume, level state funding, and declining volunteerism. VACo was not alone in these concerns, as more than [600](#) individuals and organizations across the nation had also signed up to provide testimony. Among them, VACo was joined by representatives from the Virginia State Firefighters Association.

As previously [reported](#), while VACo understands the need to update the standards, we are concerned that the proposed changes, in their current form, could have a substantial impact and impose significant unfunded mandates on local fire organizations and governments. This long-developed proposal, officially published in the Federal Register on February 5, 2024, though laudable in its intent, poses potential challenges for local fire organizations and local governments if implemented in its current form. More than 70 percent of fire departments in Virginia are volunteer organizations. If the proposed rule goes through in its current form, it will pose yet one more challenge to local governments in the form of an unfunded mandate.

According to the Virginia Department of Fire Programs, a final standard from OSHA could take several years to be published. VACo will continue to engage and provide updates on this issue as they develop. Individuals who will not be providing testimony but would like to view the hearing as it takes place will be able to access the hearing via YouTube as it is livestreamed. The link to view the hearing will be available every day at this website: [Emergency Response Rulemaking | Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#)

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

JLARC Report Outlines Serious Concerns with Virginia Department of Health’s Financial Management, Staffing, Workplace Culture

JLARC

JOINT LEGISLATIVE AUDIT AND REVIEW COMMISSION

The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) received a [report](#) from its staff on November 7 outlining serious problems with the Virginia Department of Health’s financial management, staffing, and workplace culture. JLARC members had directed this review in fall 2023, directing staff to review the operations and management of the Virginia Department of Health (VDH), to include evaluating the adequacy of its staffing structure and assessing its financial management. JLARC staff proposed 31 recommendations to address the extensive issues identified in the study, which included problems with financial oversight (the laxity of which enabled a recent, widely-reported deficit in the Office of Emergency Medical Services, which was partially attributed to embezzlement by an employee); inadequate management of federal grants; late payments to vendors, state agencies, and VDH staff; an overreliance on contractors; staffing shortages that limit the agency’s ability to fulfill its mission; and a negative workplace culture. JLARC staff noted that VDH leadership has taken steps to address the agency’s shortcomings, but encouraged the legislature to continue to monitor progress toward implementing JLARC’s recommendations.

Key findings and recommendations in the report include the following:

Financial management: VDH’s financial management has exhibited “substantial shortcomings,” requiring additional infusions of state funds on several occasions. VDH frequently pays invoices late. Although federal grants made up nearly half of VDH’s budget in FY 2024, the Department’s management of grants has been so haphazard that the Environmental Protection Agency now

requires VDH to receive grant funds on a reimbursement basis, an unusual arrangement that creates cash flow challenges within the agency. JLARC recommended tapping resources in the Department of Human Resource Management and the Department of Accounts to assist VDH with filling key financial management positions. JLARC also recommended improving the training of existing staff, including directing the Department of General Services to assist with training on procurement and contract administration. The report also recommends that the Department of Accounts complete a quality assurance review of VDH's key financial processes and internal controls.

Staffing: VDH has experienced substantial turnover in recent years among central office staff, and turnover rates in some health districts exceeded 20 percent in FY 2024. Staffing shortages have hampered VDH's ability to meet key responsibilities, such as inspections of nursing homes and inpatient hospitals. VDH uses contractors to a greater degree than other state agencies or public health agencies in other states, which limits the development of institutional knowledge within the agency. The report includes a series of recommendations to improve the hiring process, to include development of more accurate job descriptions. JLARC recommends that VDH review its use of contractors and develop an internal policy to specify the circumstances under which contractors should be retained.

Agency management and accountability: VDH employees do not believe that the agency is well managed. Holding employees accountable for underperformance has proved challenging. JLARC recommended improving training for supervisors on the state's performance management process, ensuring that all employees receive timely performance evaluations, and ensuring that supervisors have appropriate numbers of direct reports. To ensure that agency leaders are informed about agency operations and performance (including the performance of local health districts), JLARC recommended establishing an agency management dashboard, and routing certain allegations of fraud, waste, and abuse to the state Office of Inspector General so that VDH's Office of Internal Audit will have capacity to conduct audits of local districts. JLARC also recommended codifying the role of the Chief Operating Officer and amending the statute setting out qualifications of the State Health Commissioner to require that person to have organizational leadership and administration experience.

JLARC's final recommendation in the report is to ensure that the legislature continues to oversee agency progress by requiring semi-annual reports to the Joint Subcommittee on Health and Human Resources Oversight through at least December 2026.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

Report on Preemptive and Ongoing Health Care to Local Government Employees Exposed to Toxic Materials Published



A [report](#) from a workgroup charged with identifying and analyzing options to help ensure that local government employees who respond to emergencies that expose them to toxic materials have appropriate preemptive and ongoing health care was recently published and recommends state grant funding to support eligible localities. This fund would help localities in supporting their emergency responders by right sizing benefits to fill the gap between insurance, workers' compensation, and the numerous expenses for cancer and other treatments. Local governments and certain state agencies would be eligible, with a limited number of truly extraordinary emergencies qualifying. The grant program also estimates a strategy to cover out-of-pocket costs for eligible first responders. The work group also recommends strategies for a potentially statewide cancer screening program. It recommends a program be developed based off the current initiative in Northern Virginia or a program to provide a minimum matching grant to localities who could negotiate with providers themselves. VACo served as a member of the workgroup.

Firefighter health has become an increasing concern in the United States as recent research reveals the effects of turnout gear, firefighting foam, and carcinogenic environments on firefighters and other emergency responders. Although the Commonwealth has employed strategies to mitigate these effects, there have been concerns about extraordinary emergency incidents where emergency responders are exposed to toxic chemicals. This concern was highlighted in 2012 when a military aircraft crashed in Virginia Beach. First responders in the area were exposed to numerous hazardous chemicals and toxic materials from the plane that may have seriously harmed them.

Established by the enactment of [HB 133 \(Convirs-Fowler\)](#) / [SB 650 \(Rouse\)](#), the legislation directed the Virginia Department of Fire Programs (VDFP) to convene a workgroup and report its findings to the General Assembly by November 1, 2024.

The full report can be accessed [here](#).

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

Behavioral Health Commission Receives Briefings on Permanent Supportive Housing, Crisis System; Local Contributions to CSBs Expected to be Area of Focus in 2025



The Behavioral Health Commission's Executive Committee met on November 4 to plan the Commission's work for 2025, and the full Commission met on November 12 for a series of briefings from its staff, as well as staff to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, Deputy Health and Human Resources Secretary Leah Mills, and DBHDS Commissioner Nelson Smith. Based on its November 4 discussion, the Executive Committee will recommend that staff complete a study in 2025 of the implementation of the Marcus Alert initiative, and begin a study of behavioral health services available in local and regional jails. Commission staff would also be directed to review local contributions to Community Services Boards and determine why some localities are not providing the required local matching funds; staff would examine potential barriers at the local level, as well as alternative state funding structures.

The full Commission opened its November 12 meeting with an update by Associate Policy Analyst John Barfield, who provided [an interim briefing](#) on a study of the statutes governing the civil commitment process and their interaction with the components of the crisis system, which have received substantial state investments in recent years. This study was directed by legislation in 2024. Mr. Barfield explained that several elements of the crisis system can divert individuals from unnecessary hospitalization, but are in varying phases of development and implementation: the 988 call system, mobile crisis teams, the Marcus Alert initiative, and short-term crisis facilities. Staff will present a full report with findings and recommendations in 2025.

Assistant Policy Analyst Abigail Cornwell presented [a report on the implementation of permanent supportive housing](#), as part of the Commission's role in monitoring state-funded behavioral health initiatives. Ms. Cornwell explained that permanent supportive housing demonstrates beneficial outcomes for participants, who are less likely to be hospitalized or incarcerated. DBHDS manages Virginia's program by contracting with CSBs, nonprofits, and local housing authorities; the state funding covers housing and related costs, but not the clinical services, which are provided by CSBs or private providers and funded through Medicaid, private insurance, other CSB funds, and federal grants. DBHDS has identified a need for 7,220 slots, and 3,377 have been funded, but only 1,712 of these slots are occupied, due to several barriers identified by staff, including the time required to select providers, find willing landlords, and match participants with available units, and limited rental stock, especially units that meet the needs of participants. Although Virginia's program prioritizes individuals being discharged from state hospitals for permanent supportive housing slots, this option appears to be underutilized. Members discussed several ideas to enhance the program, including matching individuals clinically ready to leave state hospitals but awaiting community placements with permanent supportive housing slots; examining state tax credits to ensure that appropriate rental units are available; and potentially requiring local contributions toward rental assistance.

Members next turned to the complex issue of alternatives to state hospitalization for individuals with neurocognitive or neurodevelopmental disorders, with JLARC Chief Legislative Analyst Drew Dickinson providing a [review of JLARC's 2023 study on the topic](#). This study resulted in legislation in 2024 that sought to preclude individuals with these conditions, and without a co-occurring mental illness, from placement in state hospitals. Due to concerns about the lack of alternative placement options, this legislation included a re-enactment clause and required the convening of a workgroup. Deputy Secretary Mills [reported on the workgroup's discussions and recommendations](#). While the workgroup generally agreed with the intent of the legislation, it did not recommend its re-enactment, instead recommending continued focus on establishing a continuum of alternative placement options, enhancing provider capability to serve individuals in the community, and supporting caregivers, to include improving communication with caregivers in crisis response.

JLARC's 2023 study also recommended that the state find or develop alternative placements for youth who would otherwise be served at the Commonwealth Center for Children and Adolescents, which has experienced persistent operational issues; this recommendation was incorporated in budget language in the 2024 session. Commissioner Nelson Smith [provided background](#) on the youth served by CCA and staffing challenges at the facility. He noted that children in the custody of local departments of social services account for 21 percent of all admissions over the last two fiscal years, and account for 30 to 35 percent of all bed days. He offered several recommendations for alternative placement options, including creation of a new child and adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit in Southwest Virginia; creation of a specialized neurobehavioral unit; enhancement of specialized crisis services for children and youth; enhancement of specialized group homes; improving capacity in psychiatric residential treatment facilities; expansion of intensive community treatment options; and additional support for youth in foster care.

The Commission's next meeting is scheduled for December 10.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

Regions 6 & 7 Members Outline Their Legislative Priorities at Meeting

On September 23, VACo held a regional meeting for counties in VACo Regions 6 and 7. This meeting was done virtually, and it was lovely to have such a great turnout and hear the conversations among VACo staff, local leaders, members of the Virginia General Assembly and our federal partners.

The meeting began with Virginia General Assembly members and staff sharing updates on their priorities. Delegate Delores Oates and Delegate Bill Wiley discussed some issues they are looking into for the 2025 General Assembly Session, including healthcare, transportation upgrades and water issues stemming from reoccurring drought in their area of the Commonwealth. Senator Jeremy McPike discussed the need for school capital funding and affordable housing, as well as energy issues, noting that a JLARC report on data centers is to be released in December. Aubrey Hobby from Delegate Amy Laufer's office said the Delegate is looking into how to balance energy issues with agricultural interests. All General Assembly Members relayed that their respective legislative programs for 2025 are under development and in the meantime, they are listening to constituent concerns to give them insight to the issues Virginians face. All legislators were appreciative of this forum and respected the insight county members had to say. Natalie Stewart from Congresswoman Abigail Spanberger's office outlined the work Rep. Spanberger is doing as her term expires and highlighted some legislation like the [Social Security Fairness Act](#), a [firefighter support bill](#) and [cracking down on fentanyl](#). VACo was also happy to have Cole Kawugule and Isaac Sarver from Senator Mark Warner's office attend the meeting and provide updates on work underway in the Senator's office, including a celebration of reopening of Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park.

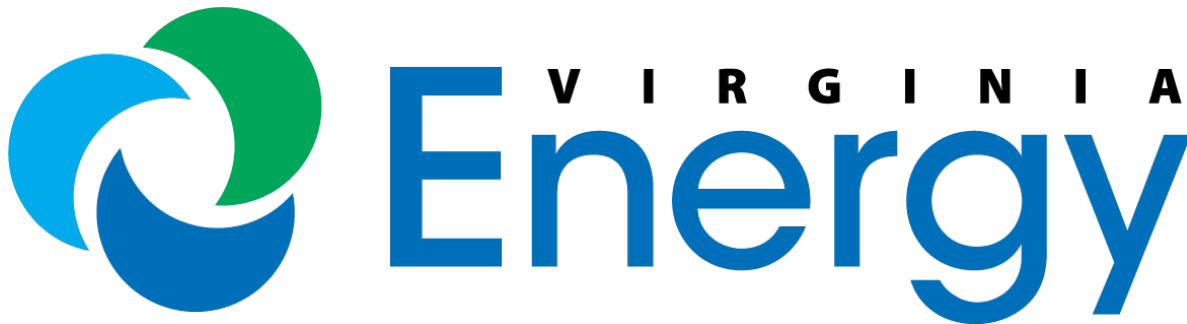
Following the conversation with legislators, Chandler Vaughn and Caroline Luxhoj from the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development provided updates on the deployment of Virginia Telecommunication Initiative and federal Broadband Equity Access and Deployment funding. The meeting concluded with a roundtable discussion with representatives from each county outlining the top issues or legislative priorities in their locality. Local land use authority, balancing growth with conservation, development pressures, K-12 education funding and long term drought planning/assistance were common issues identified by county members.

Counties in the region discussed that they have felt and continue to feel pressure from many different types of development. While conversations surrounding data centers and utility scale solar development are ongoing, VACo believes this decision should remain local, consistent with its longstanding position in support of preserving local authority over land use decisions. VACo Regions 6 and 7 cover a wide area of the Commonwealth and one that is very agricultural in nature. Long term drought and water conservation planning is something VACo is interested in moving forward as this industry is vital not only to Virginia but the nation.

VACo is grateful to the regional members, General Assembly members, congressional staffers and business partners who participated in the meeting.

VACo Staff: [James Hutzler](#)

Counties eligible for federal funds to implement energy efficiency programs – December 6 Deadline to Apply



The Virginia Department of Energy (Virginia Energy) is offering subgrants to eligible local governments for the marketing, education, and outreach of energy efficiency and conservation programs for residential energy consumers and contractors. **The application deadline has been extended to Friday, December 6, 2024.**

Through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) funding, Virginia Energy is offering competitive grants for the 85 Virginia Counties that did not receive EECBG direct funding allocations. (NOTE: 10 counties that received direct funding, and therefore not eligible for these subgrants, include Albemarle, Arlington, Chesterfield, Fairfax, Hanover, Henrico, Loudoun, Prince William, Spotsylvania, and Stafford).

Eligible counties can compete for Marketing, Education, and Outreach (MEO) sub-grants ranging from \$10k-\$100k by submitting projects that meet the criteria outlined in the [Notice of Funding Opportunity \(NOFO\)](#). Examples include but are not limited to: offering free energy audits to promote interest, providing energy auditor education and certification to increase the number of contractors in your area who can offer this service, supporting staff capacity for conducting MEO (e.g. hiring/training an energy coach or outreach coordinator), holding workshops/trainings for the public education of residents and contractors, or partnering with local non-profits/community-based organizations to support MEO activities focused on weatherization, energy efficiency retrofits, and efficient technology installations.

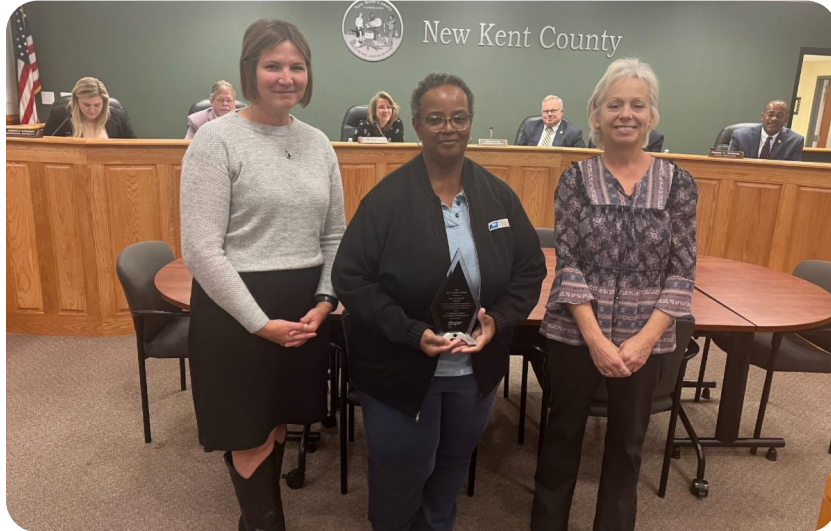
There is also the option to do pay for service provided by Virginia Energy's contracted MEO vendor for the One Stop Shop. This could look like having them create website content, emails, social media posts, digital ads, mailers, and public signs to inform the community about incentives, rebates, and technology available to improve their home/building's comfort while reducing energy bills. They could also help you market free home energy audits or the energy auditor education/certification program if applicable.

Counties can partner together on a project to braid funding or partner with local non-profits or community-based organizations for support with MEO activities.

Applications will be accepted until all funding has been awarded or until 11:59 pm on December 6, 2024. Details, support materials, and the application can be found [here](#). For questions and more information contact Jessica Greene, at jessica.greene@energy.virginia.gov.

VACo Contact: [Joe Lerch, AICP](#)

Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions Names Dixon Award Winner



The Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions (VAPDC) has announced **Ms. Patricia Paige** as the winner of its **2024 Gordon N. Dixon Award**. The award was presented posthumously at a recent meeting of the New Kent County Board of Supervisors, of which Ms. Paige was a member until her death in November 2023. The Dixon Award recognizes an executive director, VAPDC commissioner, or PDC commissioner who has provided leadership and made outstanding contributions to promote the concept of regionalism in Virginia.

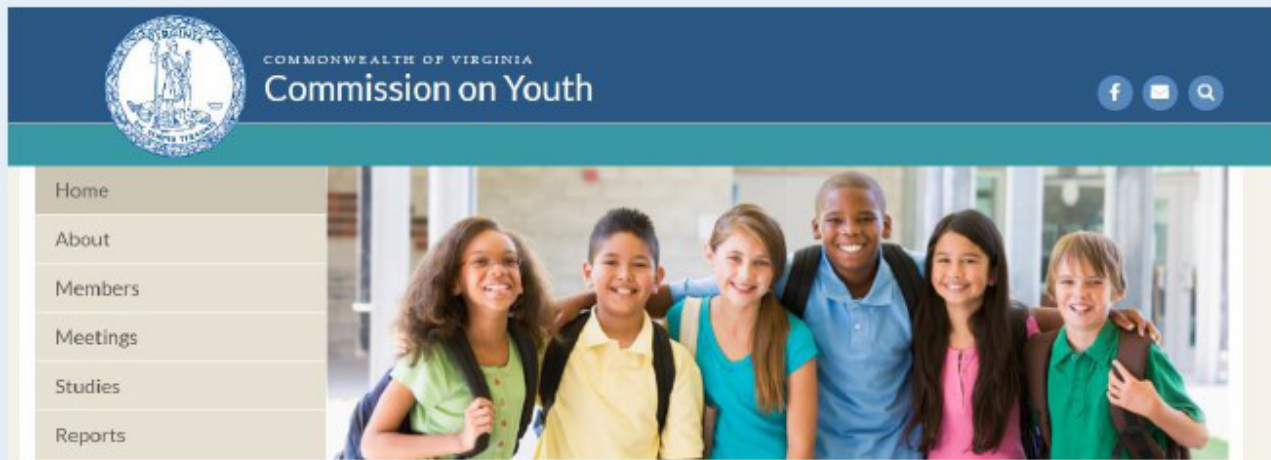
Ms. Paige was first elected to the New Kent County Board of Supervisors in 2015 and served as the District 3 representative for nearly eight years. Ms. Paige promoted regionalism through her service and leadership on the Richmond Regional Planning District Commission (PlanRVA), the Richmond Regional Transportation Planning Organization Policy Board, the Central Virginia Waste Management Authority, and the Richmond Region Tourism Board of Directors. She also served on the Central Virginia Transportation Authority from its inception in 2020. "Ms. Paige commanded respect and admiration from her peers, transcending political divides with a vision focused solely on the betterment of our community," said PlanRVA Executive Director Martha Shickle. "Her ability to unite, to find common ground, and to bridge gaps made her a beacon of hope in the boardroom and out in the community."

For 16 years, Gordon N. Dixon was an outstanding example of a regional leader while serving as Executive Director for two planning district commissions--the New River Valley and the Fifth Planning District Commission. He sincerely believed in regional planning and community development. Following his death, the VAPDC established the Dixon Award to recognize executive directors and commissioners who display exceptional dedication to the regional planning vision for Virginia.

Planning District Commissions were enabled by state legislation in 1968, and most were established the following year. There are 21 PDCs and Regional Commissions in Virginia made up of elected officials and citizens appointed by local governments. The purpose of Planning District Commissions is to encourage and facilitate regional solutions to problems of area-wide significance. This is done by promoting the efficient development of the physical, social, and economic policies of all districts by assisting local governments to plan for the future. The PDCs of Virginia joined together to create the Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions in 1987 to share best practices and further regionalism across the Commonwealth.

Pictured above are: PlanRVA Executive Director Martha Shickle; Sandi Paige Godwin, Sister of Patricia Paige; PlanRVA Board Relations Manager Janice Scott

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**Share your experience with dispute resolution
by filling out this survey!**



The Commission on Youth (<https://vcov.virginia.gov/>), a bipartisan legislative commission of the Virginia General Assembly, is conducting a study on how to improve Virginia's special education dispute resolution system. The Commission retained the services of Special Education Solutions, LLC (SES) (<https://spedsolutions.com/>), a leading expert in special education compliance, training, and dispute resolution to assist with this study and survey.

Your perspective as a parent, agency professional, attorney, advocate, teacher, or other role will be crucial as the Commission begins to develop recommendations for this study. The Commission is eager to hear from you.

Linked here is the [Special Education Dispute Resolution Process Survey](#). This survey uses Google Forms. Some workplaces may not allow access to Google Forms. If that is the case, the survey respondent may need to access the survey from a home computer, library computer, or cell phone. The Commission encourages groups with members who have vision impairments or need a translation to assist those members in completing the survey.

The survey is estimated to take 10-25 minutes to complete, depending on the number of questions you choose to answer. The survey will close on Friday, November 22, 2024 at 3:00 p.m.

If you have any issues accessing the survey, please direct those questions to Deusededi Merced, Managing Member, SES, dmerced@spedsolutions.com. Your responses to the survey questions are completely confidential.

Survey link:

<https://tinyurl.com/mja3398x>



Application Development Workshop Save the Date and Policy Notices Released



Office of Broadband



The [Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development \(DHCD\)](#) will host an application development workshop to further prepare broadband providers for the application phase of broadband deployment programs under [Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment Program \(BEAD\)](#) in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

This workshop will include an in-depth review of the BEAD program design, an overview of the application process for deployment projects, evaluation criteria and narrative response requirements, as well required applicant certifications and supporting documentation.

While this 2-day workshop will include some of the content previously provided at the May 15th BEAD How-to-Apply workshop, it will not only offer an in-depth preview to the full application process and requirements, but also includes a **PREVIEW** of the ZCTA application submission portal.

The 2-day workshop will be held on **Tuesday, December 3 from 1 - 4 PM and Wednesday, December 4 from 9AM - 12 PM**. DHCD strongly encourages broadband providers interested in participating in the BEAD program to attend in-person. The workshop will be held at the **Library of Virginia 800 E Broad St. Richmond, VA 23219**. A virtual option will be made available via Microsoft Teams if demand for a virtual option is demonstrated.

To assist prospective applicants with staying up to date on evolving NTIA guidance, as well as to further explain some of the more complex points of the BEAD program to promote an open, fair, and transparent subgrantee selection process, the Virginia Office of Broadband has published [BEAD Policy Notices on DHCD BEAD website](#). See below for a list of Virginia BEAD Policy Notices posted as of November 1, 2024. Additional Virginia BEAD Policy Notices may be posted prior to and during the 90-day application window of the BEAD subgrantee selection process. Prospective applicants are **strongly encouraged** to frequently check for updates at dhcd.virginia.gov/bead.

BEAD Policy Notices, as of November 1, 2024:

- Declining High-Scoring Awards, in Whole or In-Part based on Technical Capability
- Handling of Missing, Incomplete, or Non-Compliant Application Information
- Identification and De-Obligation of Non-BSLs
- Notification of Provisionally Selected Awardees
- Technical Assistance, Stakeholder Engagement, and Communications

If you have any questions, contact Deserae Saunders-Austin at (804) 840-4101 or email broadband@dhcd.virginia.gov.

[**REGISTER**](#)



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.

Congratulations!

We love presenting Achievement Awards
at Board of Supervisors Meetings



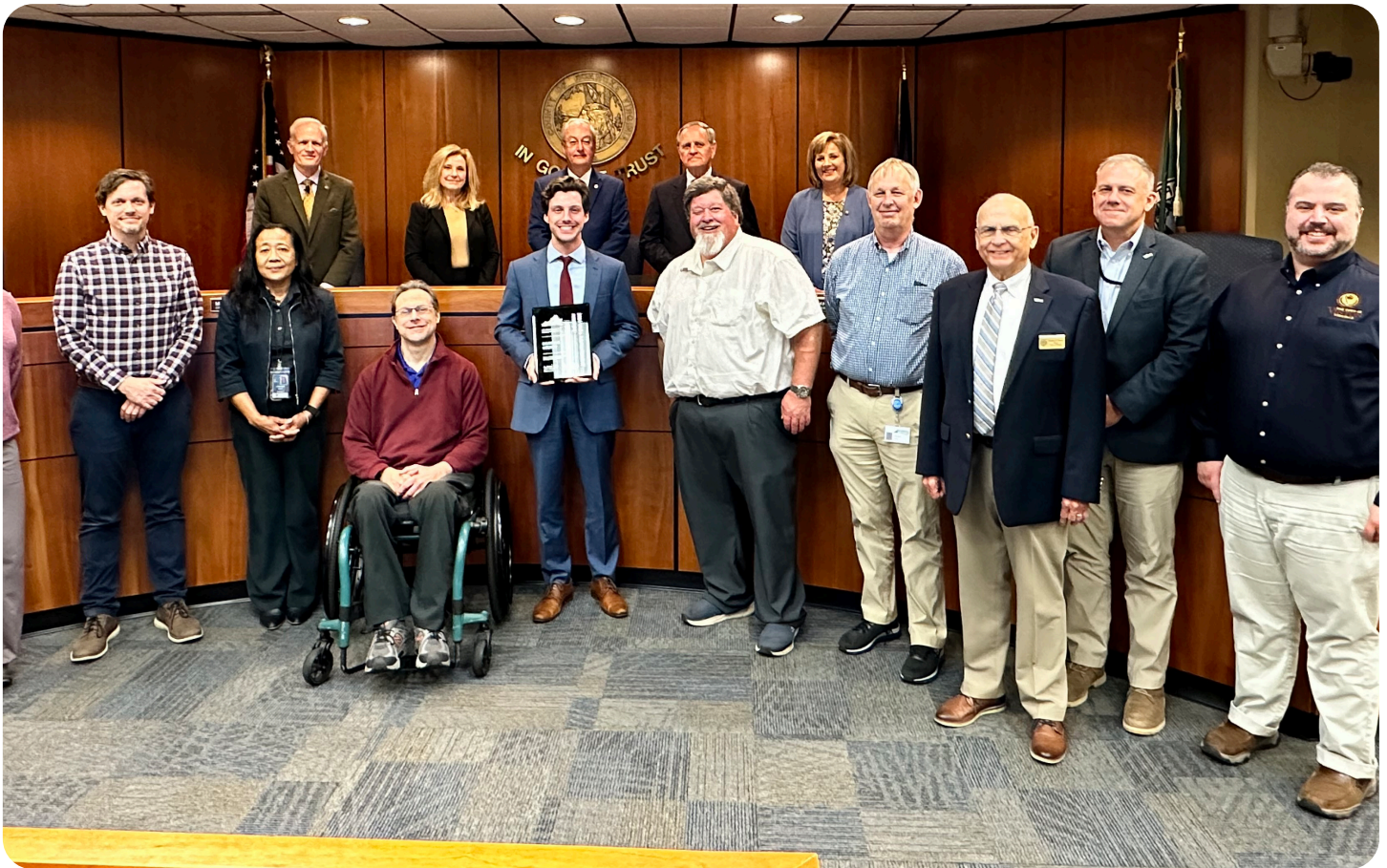
Congratulations Gloucester County!

The Gloucester County Community Engagement & Public Information Department was recognized in front of the Board of Supervisors for winning a 2024 VACo Achievement Award. The department won for its efforts in revamping The Beehive publication to a community magazine. From Gloucester County Facebook - "These awards are extremely competitive, and we are honored to receive one!"

James Hutzler, VACo Government Relations Associate, center, presented the award to Savannah Haugdahl, left, Gloucester's Public Communications and Media Specialist and Quinton Sheppard, the department's director.

Congratulations!

We love presenting Achievement Awards
at Board of Supervisors Meetings



Congratulations Roanoke County!

Congratulations Roanoke County for winning its 19th Achievement Award! Here's a description of this year's award winning program.

The Town of Vinton's Stormwater and Outfall Management Application solution, created in cooperation with Roanoke County's Information Technology GIS Team, effectively allows the Town's field personnel to move away from time-consuming paper document entry to a dynamic FieldMaps application using web services to collect data. This innovative application was created using the Esri ArcGIS for Enterprise platform and ArcGIS Online services for the customized web template and local proprietary information. Using a cellular-connected tablet or phone to access web services makes field data collection easier, faster, and more accurate.

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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.



Equipment Lease-Purchase Financing is a great tool to make your locality's and school division's budget go further!

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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 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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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.

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



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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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