

Governor Presents Proposed Amendments to Biennium Budget



Governor Youngkin presented his proposed amendments to the 2024-2026 biennium budget to the “money committees” on December 18, telling legislators that “Virginia is roaring,” with a healthy economy that supports an upward adjustment to the revenue forecast. The Governor touted a series of achievements, thanked the legislature for its partnership, and encouraged members to build on recent efforts to reduce taxes and invest in critical needs. The Governor’s “Keep Virginia Winning” budget expects \$2.1 billion in additional revenue in FY 2025 and \$1.1 billion in FY 2026, relative to revenues assumed in the current biennium budget, which was built around a December 2023 forecast that expected a mild recession. The revised forecast presented on Wednesday projects 4.1 percent General Fund revenue growth in FY 2025 and 2.5 percent growth in FY 2026.

Tax relief is again a key focus of the Governor’s proposed budget, as the Governor encouraged legislators to continue to work to lower the cost of living, with a proposal to establish a car tax credit (discussed further below) as the centerpiece of his tax reform package. Additional tax policy proposals include exempting cash tips (cash payments and electronic tips) from state income taxes; making current levels of Virginia’s standard deduction for income taxes permanent (the increases enacted in recent years are scheduled to expire on January 1, 2026, absent legislative action); and allowing market-based sourcing for the attribution of income for purposes of corporate income taxes for service sector companies that operate in multiple states.

VACo staff are reviewing the introduced budget and will provide a detailed analysis soon. Following is a preliminary, high-level overview of major items of interest:

Car tax credit

- Deposits \$1.1 billion in FY 2025 to fund a new Car Tax Credit, a refundable income tax credit for taxable years beginning January 1, 2025. The credit would be available to an individual whose federal adjusted gross income does not exceed \$50,000, or to married persons filing a joint return whose federal adjusted gross income does not exceed \$100,000. The credit is capped at \$150 for single filers and \$300 for married persons, or the amount actually paid in personal property tax on qualifying vehicles, whichever is less. If a locality increases its personal property tax rate on qualifying vehicles by more than 2.5 percent above the rate it imposed the prior year, taxpayers in that locality do not qualify for the credit. The \$1.1 billion deposit would fund the credits for taxable years beginning January 1, 2025 and before January 1, 2028.

School capital

- Increases funding for the School Construction Assistance Program by \$290 million over the biennium (\$140 million over the biennium from expected gaming revenues and \$150 million in FY 2025 from the Literary Fund).

K-12

- Does not include additional funding for recommendations from JLARC's 2023 study of K-12 funding.
- Includes a series of technical amendments to capture updates in average daily membership, categorical and incentive program costs, English language learner data, Lottery proceeds, participation in certain programs, and sales tax distribution.
- Provides \$61 million in FY 2025 and \$5 million in FY 2026 for a new student assessment contract, pending a report on the planned cost.
- Provides \$50 million in FY 2025 for infrastructure, technical training, and evidence-based supports for schools identified as "needing intensive support" or "off track" under the Board of Education's School Performance and Support Framework. Also provides \$250,000 in FY 2025 and \$1 million in FY 2026 for regional support specialists focused on math, literacy, and science to assist schools so identified.
- Establishes the Virginia Opportunity Scholarship Program with \$50 million in FY 2026; the Program will provide grant awards for qualified students to support certain expenses of attending an accredited private school in the Commonwealth.
- Deposits \$25 million in FY 2025 to the College Partnership Laboratory School Fund for the design, launch, and operation of college partnership laboratory schools established by a Historically Black College or University in Virginia.

Compensation

- Retains across-the-board compensation actions in the 2024 Appropriation Act (3 percent salary increases in each year of the biennium for state employees, state-supported local employees, and SOQ-recognized instructional and support staff).
- Provides additional funding of \$130,716 in FY 2026 for salary increases due to population increases in certain Constitutional offices.
- Provides \$1.4 million in FY 2026 for an additional 9.3 percent salary increase for all Sheriff's dispatch positions, effective July 1, 2025.

Early Childhood

- Eliminates the current cap on the Local Composite Index of 0.5 for the Virginia Preschool Initiative, effective July 1, 2025. This proposal, which was also proposed in the Governor's introduced budget in December 2023, but not adopted by the legislature, would mean that the local share would increase for this program for localities with LCIs above 0.5.
- Provides \$15 million in FY 2025 to establish an early learning capital supply-building fund to make competitive grants to increase the supply of quality early learning spaces in childcare and early learning deserts; eliminates the \$1 million included in the 2024 Appropriation Act for a Memorandum of Understanding with Reynolds Community College to establish a child care facility near Richmond for the benefit of state employees and appears to redirect this funding to the new building fund.

Commerce and Trade

- Provides an additional \$50 million for the Virginia Business Ready Sites Program Fund in FY 2026.
- Establishes the Disaster Assistance Fund, to be used to address life, safety, and housing costs not covered by federal assistance, private donations, or insurance, and deposits \$25 million from the General Fund in FY 2025 for this purpose; directs the deposit of proceeds from the December 2023 Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative auction into the Fund (the Governor indicated in his remarks that this action would provide an additional \$100 million).
- Moves \$10 million in Virginia Telecommunication Initiative funding from FY 2026 to FY 2025.
- Moves \$69.1 million provided for biotechnology research initiatives in the 2024 Appropriation Act from FY 2026 to FY 2025, and provides an additional \$35 million in FY 2025 for investments in identified regional innovation clusters. Directs the Virginia Innovation Partnership Authority to convene a task force to review and recommend investments in regional initiatives.

Children's Services Act

- Provides \$37 million in FY 2025 and \$68.3 million in FY 2026 to fund program growth. Includes language capping the state's contribution to the program by stipulating that the rate of state reimbursement to localities for private day educational services for services provided on or after July 1, 2025, may not increase more than 2.5 percent over the rates for such services provided the previous year.

Other Human Services

- Provides \$632.2 million over the biennium for forecasted growth in Medicaid.
- Includes funding and authorization for the Department of Medical Assistance Services to add coverage for services provided to Medicaid beneficiaries during short-term stays for acute care in psychiatric hospitals or residential treatment settings that qualify as Institutes of Mental Disease (such as crisis stabilization units) through a Medicaid waiver.
- Provides \$35.2 million in FY 2026 for contracts with private hospitals or other qualified agencies to hire Special Conservators of the Peace to maintain custody of individuals under emergency custody orders or temporary detention orders until the individual is ready for transportation to the bed of temporary detention or is released.
- Provides \$3.5 million in FY 2026 to reimburse local law enforcement agencies for time spent transporting an individual under an emergency custody order or temporary detention order. Stipulates priority for reimbursement for agencies within specified Virginia State Police divisions and agencies who must travel substantial distances to state facilities.

Natural and Historic Resources

- Deposits \$26.3 million in FY 2025 from FY 2024 surplus revenues to the Water Quality Improvement Fund and the Virginia Natural Resources Commitment Fund.
- Deposits \$17.4 million in FY 2025 from FY 2024 surplus revenues to the Water Quality Improvement Fund to support the Enhanced Nutrient Removal Certainty Program.

Public Safety and Homeland Security

- Includes \$2.5 million in FY 2025 for competitive grants to localities for the purchase of public safety radio and communications infrastructure equipment. Grants are to be prioritized for localities with above average or high fiscal stress and that are double-distressed according to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and that demonstrate need.
- Provides an additional \$6.8 million in FY 2025 for the School Resource Officer Incentive Grants Fund.
- Provides \$5 million in FY 2026 for grants to localities to purchase protective equipment for firefighters. Grants are to be prioritized for localities with above average or high fiscal stress and that are double-distressed according to the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, and that demonstrate need.
- Includes language providing for withholding of HB 599 funding or jail per diem payments from a locality if an official in charge of a jail does not comply with lawful U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detainers and does not provide at least 48 hour pre-release notification to ICE, or if an official in charge of a jail or local law enforcement agency or sheriff's office prohibits or impedes communication or cooperation with ICE pursuant to adoption of a local ordinance, procedure, policy, or custom.

Transportation

- Appropriates \$175 million in FY 2025 in FY 2024 surplus revenues to the I-81 Corridor Improvement Program, as required by the 2024 Appropriation Act.
- Moves \$84.5 million in support for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority from FY 2026 to FY 2025; reduces funding in FY 2025 by \$11.1 million.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)



Visit Prince Edward County and the Prince Edward County Historic Courthouse

Location: 124 North Main Street / High Street

Built: 1939 – 1940

Style: Colonial Revival

Architect: Hinnant & Smith

Contractor: Farmville Manufacturing Company

Description: The building faces northwest and is a three story red colored brick and concrete structure. The building is located on landscaped grounds in the center of Farmville. The northwest front has a large portico in the center supported by four large columns with pediment above. On the center of the flat roof is a high narrow white colored cupola with green colored dome. The building houses the County Circuit Court, County General District Court and County Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court of the 10th Judicial Circuit. On the southeast side is the modern four story red colored brick and concrete addition at 111 South Street constructed from 1997 to 1999. The architect was Faubert Architects and the contractor was Kenbridge Construction Company Inc.

Note: The Old Clerk's Office built by Guthrey and Thackston in 1855 is located at 6383 Farmville Road to the south along Highway 15 at Worsham site of the first county seat.

History: The county was created in 1752 and Worsham was selected as the county seat in 1754. The first courthouse was built in 1832. The Clerk's Office was built in 1855. The county seat was moved to Farmville in 1871. The second courthouse was a two story red colored brick structure built in 1872. The third and present courthouse was constructed in 1939 to 1940.

SOURCE: [American Courthouses](#)

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





The VA250 Mobile Museum: A Classroom on Wheels

Get ready to bring Virginia's history to life! The VA250 Mobile Museum Experience, a hands-on, interactive, and immersive museum on wheels, is coming early 2025. This unique experience will transport students back in time, exploring key stories from every region of the state.

Perfect for:

- **Schools:** Enhance your curriculum with a memorable field trip.
- **Community organizations:** Host a unique event for all ages.
- **Local festivals:** Attract visitors with a fascinating historical exhibit.

Book the museum for your school or community event today! Visit [the VA250 website](#) for more information and to schedule a visit.



PRESS RELEASE – For Immediate Release



December 13, 2024

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY ANNOUNCES PROMOTION OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

ROCKINGHAM, VA, JULY 2024 – Rockingham County announces the promotion of Casey Armstrong to the position of County Administrator, effective January 11, 2025. Armstrong succeeds Stephen King, who is retiring from service to the County.

Since joining Rockingham County in September 2006 as an Erosion and Sediment Control Inspector, Armstrong has been promoted over the years to positions of increasing scope and responsibility, which include serving as the Director of Community Development and the Director of Economic Development. He has served as Assistant County Administrator since May 2018. Over his 18 years of service, Armstrong has helped oversee a number of strategic projects that have contributed to the sustainable growth and development of the County's resources.

County Administrator, Stephen King commented, "This promotion is a culmination of Casey's strong leadership in a series of challenging roles. His successes include critical infrastructure projects, such as the construction of a flood control basin to help flood-prone neighborhoods and his ability to foster relationships that attract businesses to the County, like Negroni, that brought a \$200 million investment and 175 new jobs to our community. With his experience, energy and dedication to Rockingham County, Casey is uniquely qualified to assume the role of County Administrator and he has my unreserved support and endorsement."

Casey Armstrong commented, "I am honored and excited to have this opportunity to serve Rockingham County and I'm grateful to the Board of Supervisors for the trust and confidence that they have placed in me."



Meet the Man Behind the Santa in Botetourt County....



It's the holiday season in Botetourt County which means we all look for opportunities to spread cheer, sprinkle kindness, and have a little bit of that Christmas Magic. Part of the magic of this time of year is a visit from a jolly old elf from the North Pole. We will get to that story in just a minute.... But first, we want you to meet a man that you see quite often but you might not know much about.

During his day job, County Administrator Gary Larrowe is working to serve the Botetourt community. Whether it's working with county staff on Economic Development initiatives, focusing time on bringing industries and jobs to the county, or working with the Board of Supervisors to enhance the quality of life for our BOCO residents, businesses, and visitors, Gary always gives 110%. He and his family moved to the county in 2016 and ever since he has been making it his mission to make Botetourt County the crown jewel of the Commonwealth and he is succeeding! Gary also has a few other titles that he holds even more dear: Husband, Dad, and Pops to his almost 2-year-old grandson who he loves babysitting and teaching him about classic trucks at his Buchanan home. But did you know that during December, while he's still keeping Botetourt County moving, he also has one more title?

More on Next Page

We want to introduce you to “The Man Behind the Santa.”

Since 2021, Gary and his wife Alice have been volunteering their time to spread cheer by taking on the personas of Santa and Mrs. Claus. Gary stepped into the red suit when the Botetourt County Chamber of Commerce asked him to play Santa during the very popular and ever-growing Tinsel Trail that is held in the Town of Fincastle each year. Since his inaugural Santa stint, Gary and Alice have been invited to events at our local libraries, Carrington Place, and other corporate events around the Roanoke Valley.

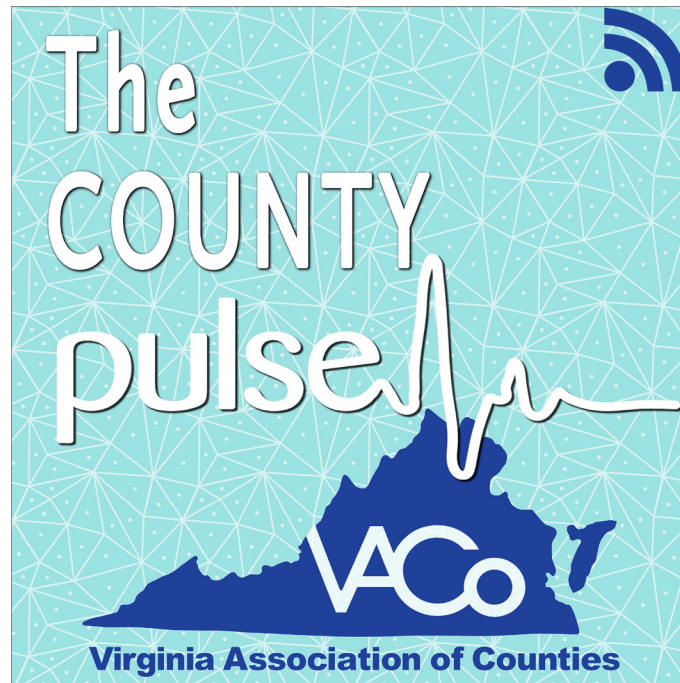
When asked why this dedicated family decided to volunteer during this busy time of year the answer was simple. “We LOVE kids, and this is a chance for us to see kids’ excitement and joyful reactions when they see Santa,” says Larrowe. “One of our favorite memories has been having special needs children and adults stop by to see Santa and Mrs. Claus. We have had children bring us gifts that they have made which has truly been special and makes us remember what Christmas is all about and that’s the joy of family, friends, and fellowship.”

When asked if Santa Gary could grant one wish this holiday season, his answer was really quite simple. “If Santa could bring one thing to Botetourt County, it would be to return to the concept of unconditional love of family, friends, neighbors, and citizens instead of developing unneeded divides. Our county is better than that and my wish is that in 2025 we will all return to being exceptionally kind and united. We are all on this big ‘ol planet together and we all love Botetourt County. I hope that Christmas joy can continue far past December.”

Happy Holidays, Larrowe family and Gary, thank you from the bottom of all of our hearts for stepping in and being the ***“man behind the Santa.”***

- ***Written by: Tiffany Bradbury, Director of Communications for Botetourt County***





Season 4

Energy Landscape of Virginia Series with Joe Lerch

Energy Landscape of Virginia Episode 7 | "Data Centers in Virginia" JLARC Report – Interview with Mark Gribbin



[Listen to the Podcast.](#)

"Data Centers in Virginia" JLARC Report – Interview with Mark Gribbin.

In this episode we sit down with Mark Gribbin, Chief Legislative Analyst with the Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission (JLARC). He is the project leader for JLARC's "Data Centers in Virginia" report, which was released December 9th. We go over a summary of the report's findings regarding the economic benefits to Virginia, as well as what challenges lay ahead in regard to meeting the escalating energy demand from the continued growth of the industry. We also discuss the report's legislative recommendations and policy options, some of which include expressly authorizing local governments to address issues related to water usage and noise.

RESOURCES

- [JLARC "Data Centers in Virginia" Report](#)
- [Electric Utilities and Data Center Load Growth – Case Summary for SCC PUR-2024-00144](#)

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

January 23, 2025 | Omni Richmond Hotel



VACo COUNTY GOVERNMENT DAY

Thursday, January 23, 2025 | [Omni Richmond Hotel](#)

Virginia Association of Counties invites all County Supervisors to the County Government Day. This is the day when all counties come together and advocate on behalf of our communities. Join us for County Government Day at the General Assembly!

Date: Thursday, January 23, 2025

Reserve a Room: [Omni Richmond Hotel Room Link](#)

Who should attend: ALL County Supervisors and staff are encouraged to register and attend.

Registration Fee

- **\$100** | Includes Day Briefing (Noon – 2pm) and Reception (430 – 630pm)

Agenda

- **9am** | VACo Board of Directors Meeting
- **10am** | Registration
- **1130am** | Lunch
- **Noon** | VACo County Government Day
- **Afternoon** | Visit the Capitol to speak with legislators
- **430-630pm** | VACo Legislative Reception | Omni Richmond Hotel
Sponsored by Berkley Group

Please email Valerie Russell at vrussell@vaco.org with questions.

REGISTER TODAY!

2025 VACo Chairpersons' Institute

Friday, January 24 & Saturday, January 25, 2025

[Omni Richmond Hotel](#) and VACo Headquarters

Virginia Association of Counties invites all County Chairs and Vice Chairs for specific training related to leading a County Board of Supervisors. The Chairpersons' Institute is newly designed to focus on duties and skills needed to be effective Chairs and Vice Chairs.

Dates: Friday, January 24 and Saturday, January 25

Reserve a Room: [Omni Richmond Hotel Room Link](#)

Who should attend: ALL County Chairs and Vice Chairs

Registration Fee

- \$350 | Includes Meals and Materials
- \$175 for Guest

Agenda (Coming Soon)

Friday

- **Early Morning** | Breakfast
- **9am** | Welcome and Introductions
- **9am-Noon** | Collaborative and Peer-to-Peer Training
- **Noon** | Lunch
- **1pm-430pm** | Collaborative and Peer-to-Peer Training
- **Evening** | Dinner with fellow Chairs and Vice Chairs

Saturday

- **Early Morning** | Breakfast
- **9am-1pm** | Collaborative and Peer-to-Peer Training
- **1pm** | Adjournment and Box Lunch to Go

Please email Valerie Russell at vrussell@vaco.org with questions.

And email Karie Walker at kwalker@vaco.org for sponsorship opportunities.



REGISTER TODAY!

The Virginia Certified County Supervisors' Program



MODULE 1 – BUDGETING

January 31 – March 21

COST – \$450

INSTRUCTOR: [Jay A. Brown](#)

The VACo Virginia Certified County Supervisors' Program begins with the Budgeting module, and we can't wait to share the experience with you. The 3-course program spans one year, so sign up now to be in The Class of 2025!

Open to all county supervisors, this exciting course comprises an opening class session, virtual cohort meetings, and a closing class session. As one of the three courses within VACo's Virginia Certified County Supervisors' Program, this course tackles the tough topic of county budgeting led by Class Manager Jay Brown. Don't miss this opportunity to build relationships with your fellow supervisors, learn from some of Virginia's most experienced local officials, and engage through meaningful discussions and learning materials.

Contact Karie Walker at kwalker@vaco.org with questions or for more information.

REGISTER TODAY!

Final Meeting of Joint Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Funding for 2024



Challenges Facing K-12 Education Funding in Virginia



DID YOU KNOW?

1. STATE UNDERFUNDING

Virginia's school divisions receive less funding per student than neighboring states, such as West Virginia and Kentucky.

Local governments cover more than half the cost of K-12 education, most contributing more than the state-mandated minimum required local effort.

The state currently recognizes only 2/3 of K-12 staff actually employed, leaving localities to cover the remaining 1/3 entirely on their own.

2. IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

Staffing Shortages: Localities are forced to employ essential staff like teacher aides without adequate state support.

Teacher Salaries: The state's formula to calculate teacher salaries fails to account for actual local salary needs.

Support Cap: A cap on support positions (e.g., administrative, operational, maintenance staff, etc.) introduced during the Great Recession still restricts state contributions, despite partial restoration.

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS CARRY THE MAJORITY OF THE RESPONSIBILITY

Virginia's funding formula underestimates actual staffing needs and salary costs, forcing local governments to step up and increase funding.

Local governments often fund K-12 Education well above the required effort, struggling to meet rising healthcare, salary, and infrastructure costs.

This makes providing a quality and equitable education to every student across the Commonwealth much more difficult.

DATA & FAST FACTS

Local governments solely fund over 57,000 K-12 staff positions.

State funding formula only recognized 8% of actual instructional aides employed.

Average school division salary is about 5% more than what is calculated by the state formula.

Cost to remove the support cap is approximately \$200 million.

In FY 2021, local governments invested \$6.6 billion more than the state funding formula indicated was needed.



Challenges Facing K-12 Education Funding in Virginia



THE CALL TO ACTION

1. ELIMINATE THE SUPPORT CAP

What's the issue?: The cap limits the number of state recognized support positions (e.g., administrative, operational, maintenance staff, etc.) forcing local governments to cover the shortfall.

Solution: Repeal the cap and other Recession era constraints entirely to ensure proper state funding for all necessary school staff.

2. REVISE THE STATE FORMULA FOR TEACHER SALARIES

What's the issue?: Current methods artificially underestimate actual teacher salary needs.

Solution: The state should calculate salaries based on actual average teacher pay to better align with local divisions' salary structures

3. RECOGNIZE FULL K-12 STAFFING NEEDS

What's the issue?: The state only recognizes two-thirds of the staff currently employed by local school divisions under the Standards of Quality (SOQ).

Solution: Fully recognize and fund all K-12 staff positions to ensure schools are properly equipped to support students.

WHY THE STATE NEEDS TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

A Fair Funding System: Virginia must fund actual staffing levels and the true cost of education, easing the burden on localities.

Competing with Neighboring States: By increasing state funding, Virginia will be better positioned to recruit and retain a quality workforce, ensuring students receive the best education they deserve regardless of where they live.

Contact for the Virginia Association of Counties
Jeremy R. Bennett | jbennett@vaco.org | 804.343.2510

[VACo Letter to General Assembly regarding K-12 Education](#)



The [Joint Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education Funding](#) met for the final time this year on December 9 to review cost updates and near-term recommendations related to the 2023 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report on K-12 education funding as well as strategies for special education. These included further discussion of further funding to erode or fully eliminate the Great Recession-era cap on support positions, providing additional state support for special education funding, and evaluating data and infrastructure needs to support the Joint Subcommittee as it continues its work in 2025. Legislation and budget amendments from Subcommittee members are expected during the upcoming General Assembly session. VACo staff was on hand and testified expressing support for the work of the Joint Subcommittee.

The Top Funding Priority of VACo's 2025 Legislative Program is to support legislative action to implement the recommendations of JLARC's landmark 2023 report on Virginia's K-12 Funding Formula where they coincide with local prevailing practices. In the near term, VACo encourages prioritization of efforts to restore pre-recession era K-12 funding, especially eliminating the cap

on support positions; providing full state support for the actual number of K-12 staff positions employed; and revising the methodology for calculating teacher salaries to more adequately reflect the actual salaries being paid by school divisions. VACo recently sent a [letter](#) and [infographic](#) to all members of the General Assembly and relevant staff expressing support for these actions and demonstrating the need of the Commonwealth to help local governments more equitably share the responsibility of funding K-12 education in Virginia. VACo encourages its members to share these documents with your legislators, school board, and members of your community to help build support for action on these issues.

As previously [reported](#), The work of this subcommittee is critical to moving forward with much needed funding reforms to the way in which the Commonwealth funds public schools. The subcommittee is tasked with providing on-going direction and oversight of the Standards of Quality funding cost policies and to make recommendations to their respective committees. As part of its oversight, the Joint Subcommittee shall: (i) review the recommendations and policy options offered in the JLARC's July 2023 report, "Virginia's K-12 Funding Formula"; (ii) determine the appropriateness of implementing each recommendation or policy option, (iii) propose appropriate amendments to each recommendation or policy option and (iv) develop a long-range plan for the phased implementation of its recommendations. In its deliberations, the Joint Subcommittee shall consider the long-term fiscal implications of each recommendation.

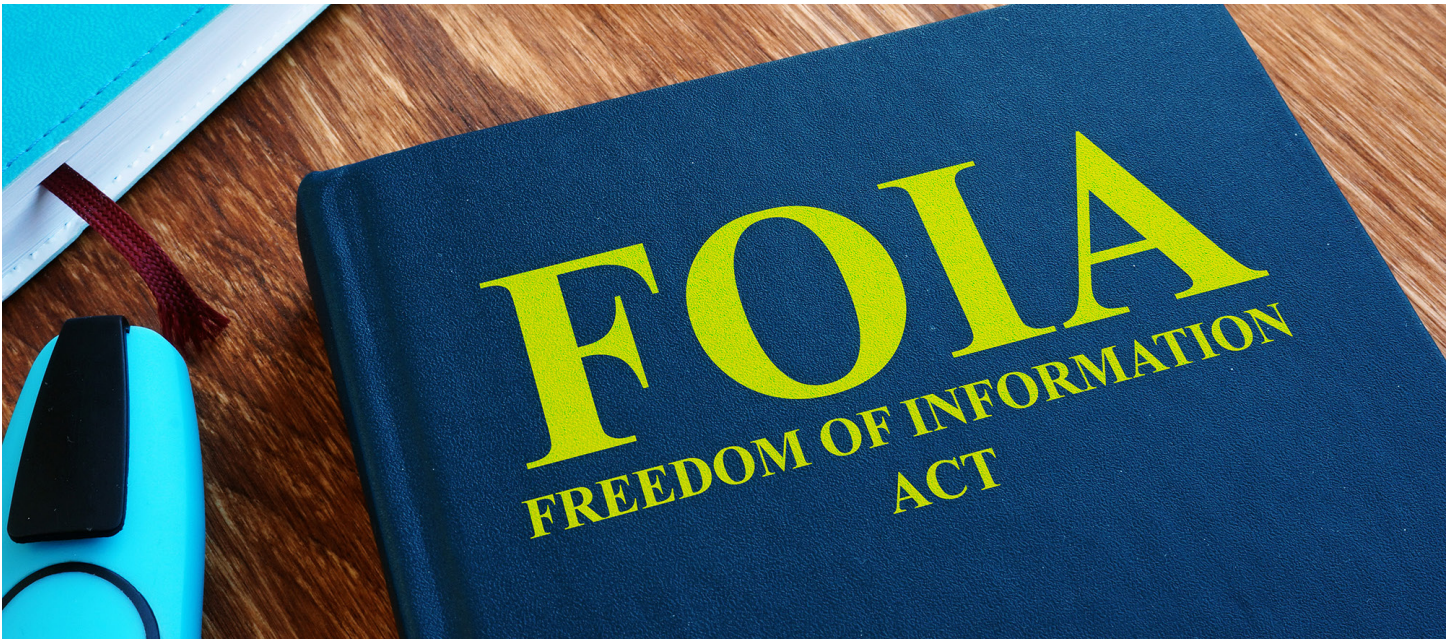
Of note, during the meeting staff from the House Appropriations Committee and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee shared that local revenues covered 69% of the cost of special education in Virginia, with the remaining 19% and 11% being paid by the state and federal government respectively. Furthermore, the current SOQ formula is not aligned with actual practice: the SOQ formula provides state support for only 15% of special education aide positions. Special education students are those identified as having educational or physical disabilities and receiving special education services specified through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This population consists of about 185,000, or 14-15% of K-12 students. The Joint Subcommittee discussed policy recommendations such as a funding add-on that could provide localities with additional state support for this population.

The work of this subcommittee is critical to moving forward with much needed funding reforms to the way in which the Commonwealth funds public schools. VACo will continue to engage and provide updates as needed on the progress of the work, particularly as recommendations are turned into legislation or budget language during the 2025 General Assembly session.

The full agenda and documents from the Joint Subcommittee meeting can be accessed [here](#).

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

VACo Testifies at Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory Council Meeting on Public Safety Issues



At the December 4 [meeting](#) of the Virginia Freedom of Information Advisory (FOIA) Council, VACo staff testified requesting consideration that a workgroup be convened in 2025 to investigate the relationship between FOIA and public safety issues. This issue was brought to VACo's attention at the Board of Directors Meeting at the November Annual Conference by numerous member counties. Several recent public emergencies such as the widespread flooding and damage caused by Hurricane Helene and the recent death in the line of duty by a Loudoun County firefighter. VACo had written a [letter](#) to the Chair of the FOIA Council, Delegate Marcus Simon, prior to the meeting. Though a quorum of Council members was not present, and therefore could not formally vote on items, the Chair indicated that a potential workgroup should be included in the list of items to be discussed at the Spring 2025 meeting of the Council.

The Council also discussed the executive Summary and report concerning the [workgroup](#) created by [SB 324 \(Roem\)](#). As previously [reported](#), the workgroup created by the legislation came to partial consensus on approaches that honor the intent of the legislation but reduce or eliminate potential unfunded mandates to local governments. This includes draft [legislation](#) for the 2025 General Assembly session. As the Council did not have a quorum of members present, no formal action was taken, though VACo expects legislation to be filed by the bill's original patron. The full report of the workgroup can be found [here](#).

VACo is appreciative of the consideration given to our suggestions and concerns by the Council and the workgroup. VACo will continue to engage on these issue and provide feedback and updates going forward.

VACo Contact: [Jeremy R. Bennett](#) and [Phyllis Errico, Esq., CAE](#)

Virginia Minimum Wage Set to Increase January 1, 2025



The Virginia Minimum Wage will increase from \$12.00 per hour to \$12.41 per hour, effective January 1, 2025. This increase ensures compliance with [§ 40.1-28.10\(F\)](#) of the Code of Virginia. The Virginia Department of Labor and Industry ([DOLI](#)) has issued a formal letter to Virginia employers (see [here](#)) and posted notification on their website.

As previously [reported](#), legislation from the 2020 General Assembly session was enacted requiring the state to increase the minimum wage from its then current federally mandated level of \$7.25 per hour to \$9.50 per hour effective May 1, 2021; to \$11.00 per hour effective January 1, 2022; to \$12.00 per hour effective January 1, 2023; to \$13.50 per hour effective January 1, 2025; and to \$15.00 per hour effective January 1, 2026. For January 1, 2027, and thereafter, the annual minimum wage shall be adjusted to reflect increases in the consumer price index.

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

Behavioral Health Commission Adopts Recommendations for 2025 Session



At its final meeting of the year, the Behavioral Health Commission adopted a series of recommendations for legislative and budget action in the upcoming legislative session, while also receiving a series of reports requested during the 2024 session as part of the Commission's monitoring and oversight role. Several adopted recommendations stemmed from studies conducted by Commission staff this year, including a review of the state's Permanent Supportive Housing program and a study of ways to minimize assaults on law enforcement officers and avoidable arrests of individuals in crisis. Several recommendations also revisit proposals from 2024 that were not adopted by the legislature, or reflect work to be conducted by related entities.

Key recommendations adopted by the Commission include:

- Directing the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) to develop a housing benefit for individuals with serious mental illness. Staff found that tenant supports and one-time housing costs have consumed a growing proportion of permanent supportive housing funding; covering these expenses through Medicaid would free up General Fund dollars for rental assistance.
- Directing the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to require screening of patients for permanent supportive housing when discharged from state hospitals. Staff found that only a small percentage of state hospital patients are discharged directly to permanent supportive housing, despite these patients being considered the highest priority for these placements.

- Providing funding for co-response programs for the 13 remaining CSBs with localities required to implement Marcus Alert protocols by 2028.
- Providing funding to private hospitals that agree to increase the percentage of involuntary admissions they accept; this proposal is intended to reduce lengthy wait times for individuals under Temporary Detention Orders, which can increase the risk of assaults on law enforcement officers and hospital staff.
- Clarifying that law enforcement officers have discretion as to whether to arrest someone under an Emergency Custody Order, Temporary Detention Order, or involuntary admission, and requiring additional training for law enforcement on these provisions of law.
- Providing funding to restore the School-Based Mental Health Integration program; this funding was directed to projects with a broader scope in FY 2025.
- Supporting legislation to establish the Autism Advisory Council as a permanent commission and requesting that it undertake reviews of several issues, including the establishment of a continuum of care for individuals with neurocognitive or neurodevelopmental disabilities.
- Directing additional resources to the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority to enhance its capacity to address behavioral health workforce needs, and directing the Virginia Health Workforce Development Authority to establish an incentive program for supervisors of clinical internships.

The Commission also approved its work plan for 2025; [as previously reported](#), this plan includes a review of the implementation of the Marcus Alert initiative, a study of behavioral health services in local and regional jails, and a study of local contributions to Community Services Boards, in addition to the previously-assigned study of the state's civil commitment statutes and the crisis services system.

The Commission received [a series of updates](#), as requested in Appropriation Act language, on improvements to the state's crisis services system; progress toward implementing the Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinic model in Virginia; a needs assessment for full implementation of STEP-VA, as well as updated performance measures for STEP-VA; revisions to CSB performance contracts; CSBs' performance in improving their clients' mental health; and the degree to which CSBs are billing Medicaid for covered services.

The Commission also received [a presentation from the Department of Education](#) on its effort to support school-based mental health services, including lessons from its pilot programs and its plans to provide technical assistance to school divisions, support provision of care through telehealth, and expand staffing.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

Joint Commission on Health Care Concludes 2024 Work, Plots Course for 2025



The Joint Commission on Health Care held its final meeting of 2024 on December 17, discussing and voting on policy options from staff studies on [expanding access to sickle cell disease treatment](#) and [strengthening the anesthesia workforce](#), as well as finalizing recommendations from staff's study of extending health care to vulnerable populations and adopting a workplan for 2025.

As part of the study of extending care to vulnerable populations, Commission staff were directed to evaluate alternative models for delivering health care (such as community paramedicine, home visiting, mobile health clinics, telehealth, and community health workers); identify alternative models in peer states; and develop policy options for effective expansion of access to care. Staff briefed members on their findings in October; VACo submitted comments on several areas that are addressed in its legislative program, including home visiting and telehealth. The Commission reviewed public comments at its November meeting and took action on the majority of the extensive list of recommendations, deferring action on two items until the December meeting.

Key recommendations from this study approved by the Commission include:

- Direct the Board of Pharmacy to work with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to develop a process to allow dispensing of opioid use disorder treatment medications from mobile units.
- Provide \$1.8 million to establish a pilot program to provide funding to local governments to support community paramedicine and mobile integrated healthcare programs.

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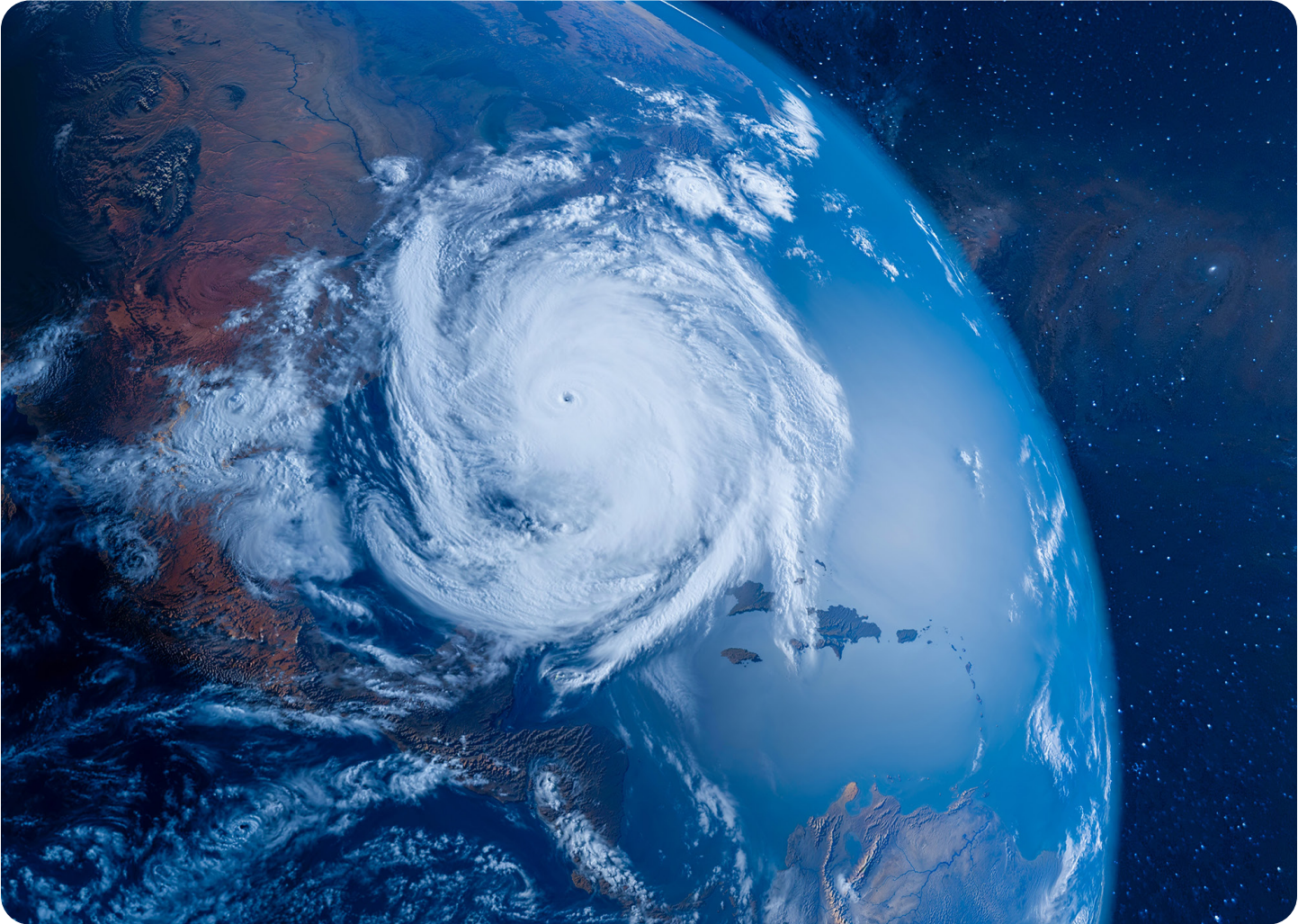
- Direct the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) to develop a plan for Medicaid coverage of community paramedicine and mobile integrated healthcare services.
- Direct DMAS to develop a plan to cover certain voluntary home visiting services through Medicaid.
- Fund a telehealth coordinator position at the Virginia Department of Health.
- Improve training on best practices for providers conducting telehealth visits with persons with disabilities.
- Require local school boards to consider establishing policies to facilitate students' access to telehealth services during the school day, which may include designating private spaces for appointments. The original version of this recommendation would have required these policies to be established, to include the designation of private spaces; VACo had suggested that further information be gathered about the feasibility of such a requirement before proceeding, due to concerns about space constraints and school capital needs.
- Enhance Medicaid coverage for certain telehealth services.
- Increase funding for the Virginia Telemental Health Initiative.
- Direct the Department of Corrections and the Virginia Board of Local and Regional Jails to provide an update to the Commission by October 1, 2025, on the status of telehealth policies within DOC facilities and local and regional jails, opportunities to expand telehealth programs, and recommended strategies to reduce gaps or barriers to telehealth service delivery. Similar to the recommendation regarding telehealth services in schools, this recommendation originally would have directed the establishment of policies to accommodate telehealth appointments for inmates, including designating a private space for such appointments, and VACo submitted similar comments, suggesting that space limitations and other barriers be ascertained before requiring the establishment of policies.

Staff's report is available at [this link](#).

The Commission's adopted workplan for 2025 includes three studies: a legislatively-directed study of policy solutions to the fentanyl crisis; an analysis of transportation-related barriers to health care; and a study of access to pharmacy services.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

VDOT Updates on Hurricane Helene Recovery



During the Commonwealth Transportation Board (CTB) meeting on December 4, 2024, VDOT staff gave a presentation outlining the details and path of Hurricane Helene, how the agency prepared for the storm, the aftermath of the storm and the ongoing response and recovery effort.

Hurricane Helene caused extensive damage in Southwest Virginia. This is portrayed, not only through the disturbing images of the damage throughout the presentation, but through VDOT's reporting and statistics on the storm's aftermath.

VDOT reports that:

- At the peak, there were 414 roads and 99 structures closed
 - o Currently, there are only 7 roadways closed
- 511,000 cubic yards of debris was dispersed
 - o 110,000 cubic yards have been collected
 - o Contractors have collected 6,000 cubic yards (ongoing)

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- \$22 million dollars have been spent since November 20th
 - o \$17 million in Bristol District alone
- 2500 VDOT staff engaged in initial response
 - o Teams from Fredericksburg, Northern Virginia, Richmond, Hampton Roads and Staunton helped with the initial response showing that a statewide effort was needed.
- 7 locality requests for assistance were fulfilled

Response activities that are ongoing include:

- Clearing downed trees from roadways
- Cleaning ditches and structures of debris
- Closing and monitoring overtopped roads and establishing detours
- Inspecting roads and structures for damage
- Making emergency repairs to roadways, where possible
- Communicating road closures and priorities to the public
- Staffing Virginia Emergency Operations Center and VDEM Regional Coordination Center

As for the long-term recovery after the storm, VDOT staff estimates that a total cost of the damage from Hurricane Helene is \$132 million. VDOT expects it will take 12 months to rebuild damaged roads and structures that were impacted by the storm with the funding coming from maintenance and operations programs. The agency will seek FEMA and FHWA reimbursement and are hoping to get highly reimbursed (75% to 100% the total cost) for this unforeseen expense. VDOT is aware of the fact it may take up to three years to receive all federal reimbursements. As for the debris, the agency estimates it will take 3-6 months to collect all debris which includes collecting debris in lakes, hazardous materials in streams and removing trees and other hazards that pose threats.

VACo is incredibly thankful to VDOT and contract staff for the amazing work being done to help localities and communities' recovery from this awful storm. VACo will be sure to provide updates as they become available on the recovery from this horrible disaster. To view the full presentation given to the CTB, please click [here](#).

VACo Contact: [James Hutzler](#)

Comprehensive JLARC Study on Data Centers Highlights Positive Impacts to Virginia Economy, But Forecasted Demand to Provide Electricity will be Difficult to Meet



74,000 jobs, \$5.5 billion in labor income, \$9.1 billion in annual GDP, these are the findings in a recently released Joint Legislative Audit Review Commission (JLARC) report [“Data Centers in Virginia.”](#) The majority of this economic activity is derived from the construction phase rather than in ongoing operations, and with more data centers being planned it is expected this trend will continue into the foreseeable future. Another key finding is the staggering amount of electricity required for their operation. Currently, 5 gigawatts (GW) of electric generating capacity are needed to power the Commonwealth’s approximately 340 data center buildings, and it is expected this demand will double over the next 15 years. To put this in perspective, in 2023 the [U.S. Energy Information Administration](#) (EIA) reported 29 GW of nameplate generating capacity from all of Virginia’s electric power plants, with the significant caveat that intermittent sources of renewable energy, such as solar (approximately 3.6 GW of this total), only produce at about 23 percent of their full capacity. In addition to the generation needed to power the industry, significant improvements to high voltage transmission will be necessary.

Other key findings of the report include the following:

- Data centers can generate substantial local tax revenues for localities that have them;
- Building enough infrastructure for unconstrained data center demand will be very difficult and meeting half that demand is still difficult;

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- Existing electric utility requirements and processes help limit risks associated with system capacity and reliability;
- Data centers are currently paying their full cost of service, but growing energy demand is likely to increase other customers' costs;
- Data center backup generators emit pollutants, but their use is minimal, and existing regulations largely curb adverse impacts;
- Data center water use is currently sustainable, but use is growing and could be better managed;
- Localities have allowed data centers to be built near neighborhoods, but some localities are taking steps to minimize residential impacts;
- Data center noise near residential areas presents unique challenges, and some localities are unsure about their authority to address it; and
- Changes to the state's data center sales tax exemption could address some policy concerns related to the industry.

In light of these findings, the report makes the following legislative recommendations:

- Clarify that electric utilities have the authority to delay, but not deny, service to customers when the addition of customer load cannot be supported;
- Direct Dominion Energy to develop a plan for addressing the risk of infrastructure costs being stranded with existing customers, and file that plan with the State Corporation Commission;
- Expressly authorize local governments to require and consider water use estimates for proposed data center developments;
- Expressly authorize local governments to require sound modeling studies for proposed data center developments; and
- Expressly authorize local governments to establish and enforce maximum allowable sound levels for operational data center facilities using alternative low frequency metrics and zoning ordinances.

While not a legislative recommendation, the report lays out several policy options for the legislature to consider regarding the state's retail sales and use tax 100% exemption on data center equipment. The exemption, in place since 2010 and set to expire in 2035, is a significant factor leading to the explosive growth of data centers in the Commonwealth. These options include (1) extending the exemption to maintain industry growth; (2) allowing the exemption to expire to reduce industry growth and associated energy impacts; and (3) adjust the exemption to balance industry growth and energy impacts.

To learn more about the report, listen to the latest episode the VACo County Pulse Podcast [Energy Landscape of Virginia Episode 7 | "Data Centers in Virginia" JLARC Report - Interview with Mark Gribbin](#)

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


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OAA Announces over \$900,000 in Grant Awards to Cities and Counties

On December 6, 2024, the Virginia Opioid Abatement Authority (OAA) approved **\$902,376** in grants to three Virginia communities for new or expanded opioid abatement and remediation efforts:

- **City of Lynchburg**

- Awarded **\$193,421** to fund a partnership with “Roads to Recovery” to provide evidence-based peer and social supports for the delivery of detoxification services in a safe and supportive environment for an estimated 400 adults per year.

- **City of Virginia Beach**

- Awarded a total of **\$636,105** for **six** projects focusing on youth-related substance use prevention and recovery.
 - Hiring a certified youth peer support specialist
 - Establishing an opioid prevention and treatment program at the City’s juvenile detention center
 - Implementing the Law Enforcement Against Drugs (LEAD) program in schools and after-school settings
 - Providing an online substance use education and prevention program in schools
 - Launching a teen-focused social media campaign
 - Developing an education and prevention program that will be integrated into the city’s youth-oriented parks and recreation programs.

- **Warren County**

- Awarded **\$72,850** to expand youth services at the Raymond E. Santmyers Student Union and Activity Center. Funding will expand substance use prevention and abatement activities to all youth in Warren County between the ages of 13 to 18 in grades 8-12.



“We continue to see tremendous efforts by local governments to tackle the opioid and substance use crisis impacting communities,” said Senator Todd Pillion, Chair of the OAA Board of Directors. “The programs in this latest round of awards are great examples of how opioid settlement funds are being used to save lives.”

For more information on the awards, [click here to view the full press release](#).



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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.



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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



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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).





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VACo's lobbying efforts have helped stem the tide of unfunded mandates and have saved Counties millions of dollars every year.



EDUCATION

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



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

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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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