

Capitol Contact

Virginia General Assembly

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Tuesday, January 28, 2025

ACTION ITEM: Oppose Bills Mandating Collective Bargaining and Other Employment Terms for Transportation Services

[SB 919 \(Salim\)](#) / [HB 2619 \(Helmer\)](#) have passed their respective committees and could be heard this week. Both bills are unfunded mandates that infringe on local authority.

ACTION REQUIRED – Contact the [Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee](#) and the [House Labor and Commerce Committee](#) to oppose.

The bills would require the governing body of any county that contracts with a private company to provide transportation services, for the contract to include provisions requiring any employee of the private company be given compensation and benefits that are at a minimum equivalent to the compensation and benefits provided to a public employee.

Furthermore, the bill states that if a county has adopted an ordinance or resolution authorizing collective bargaining by employees of such county, in contracting with a private company for transportation services, the county would require such company to enter and adhere to a collective bargaining agreement.

KEY POINTS

- The bills would mandate collective bargaining within select counties, interfere with the ability for a county to make employment and services delivery decisions, and may have costly unintended consequences.

- The bills include language that could be potentially harmful to counties such as how “transportation services” are constituted. Generally, this means those who operate transit systems but could very likely include mechanics of such systems.
- The bills would almost certainly raise the operating costs of transportation delivery systems at a time when the budgets of these services are very tight as it is.

SB 919 reported from the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee and was re-referred to the [Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee](#).

HB 2619 reported from the House Labor and Commerce Subcommittee #2 by a vote of 6-3 and will be heard in the [House Labor and Commerce Committee](#) on January 28.

VACo Contact: [James Hutzler](#)

VACo Still Opposes Amended Solar Siting Bill

On January 24, the [Senate](#) Commerce and Labor Committee reported a [substitute](#) for [SB 1190 \(Deeds\)](#) by a [vote of 9 to 6](#) and then referred it to the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee for further consideration.

VACo opposes the amended SB 1190. VACo Members – Contact members of the [Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee](#) to oppose.

While the amended bill scales back the preemption of local decisions on siting of solar facilities, VACo’s opposition and concerns are the following:

- Mandates that every locality, no later than July 1, 2029, shall incorporate into its comprehensive plan targets for energy production and energy efficiency based on regional energy plans that planning district commissions are now required to adopt.
- The regional energy plans must be adopted by January 1, 2027 and will include targets for the development of energy efficiency, distributed generation solar energy, shared solar, utility-scale solar, onshore and offshore wind, and battery energy storage.
- These targets will be developed by the Virginia Department of Energy by July 1, 2026. The targets, in total, must meet the requirements of the [Virginia Clean Economy Act of 2020](#) to achieve zero greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector by the middle of this century.

- Prohibits a locality from adopting a comprehensive plan or ordinance that unreasonably restricts or prohibits the development of any renewable energy facility.
- Prohibits a locality from denying any permit or special exception application for a renewable energy facility without a reasonable basis.

Counties should not be required to amend their comprehensive plans to include targets for energy production, including utility-scale solar, which are in effect largescale power plants, many of which may have oversized footprints. For example, a solar facility with a generating capacity of 100 megawatts (MW) can occupy 1,000 acres or more of land.

The state should not require comprehensive plans, ordinances, and local decision made on land use to be judged on what is any “unreasonable” denial or prohibition for renewable energy facilities.

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

RICHMOND TIMES-DISPATCH COMMENTARY: Virginia Must Close the Gap in State Funding for Schools

By Fairfax County Chairman Jeffrey McKay and Fairfax County Supervisor James Walkinshaw

As local elected officials in Fairfax County, we have a front-row seat to the challenges to our public created by Virginia's chronic underinvestment in K-12 public education. A [2023 study](#) by the General Assembly's own experts — the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) — revealed a startling reality: Virginia is \$3.5 billion below the national average in state funding for public education and trails all of our neighboring states, including West Virginia and Kentucky.

While unveiling his amendments to the biennium budget, Governor Glenn Youngkin said that Virginia is “winning.” Well, governor, when it comes to state funding for education, we are losing — badly.

[READ THE REST OF THE COMMENTARY IN THE RTD](#)

ACTION ITEM: Oppose Speed Camera Bills that Preempt Local Authority

There are two problematic transportation bills advancing through the General Assembly – both would preempt local authority in the application of speed cameras and divert funding from localities to the state.

[SB 1209 \(Obenshain\)](#), as substituted, states that all civil penalties collected for the purposes of recording vehicle speed violations shall be paid to the Commonwealth Transportation Board to be used for the Virginia Highway Safety Improvement Program (VHSIP). What this means, in practice, is that for counties who choose to administer a photo speed enforcement program, all funds generated will then be sent to the state.

SB 1209 passed out of the Senate Transportation Committee and was re-referred on a vote of 13-0-1 to the Senate Courts of Justice Committee.

[HB 2041 \(Seibold\)](#) would require civil penalties collected from photo speed cameras, a mandate that preempts local authority, to be used solely for the operating costs of such speed safety cameras, and that any excess fund collected are to be annually deposited in the VHSIP.

HB 2041 reported out of subcommittee by a vote of 5-3 and will be heard by the House Transportation Committee on January 28.

KEY POINTS

- SB 1209 and HB 2041 preempt local authority in the application of speed camera enforcement.
- Keeping these funds at the local level empowers communities to invest in critical programs and infrastructure improvements that directly address their unique needs and priorities.
- VACo urges lawmakers to prioritize local control and flexibility to ensure that resources remain where they are needed most—within our communities

KEY CONTACTS

- **[SENATE COURTS OF JUSTICE COMMITTEE](#)**
- **[HOUSE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE](#)**

VACo Contact: [James Hutzler](#)

VACo Opposes Bill that Preempts Local Authority to Appoint School Boards

On January 23, VACo testified in opposition to [SB 1404 \(Pekarsky\)](#), which requires election as the method of selecting the members of each school board in the Commonwealth and makes several changes to eliminate provisions relating to appointed school boards. Current law requires such members to be appointed but permits their election under certain circumstances. Currently, there are approximately a dozen localities that still opt to appoint their school boards, including the two counties of Hanover and Richmond.

VACo supports local authority to choose the selection process for school board members.

The Senate Education and Health Public Education Subcommittee failed to recommend reporting the legislation on a tie vote of 2-2-2. The bill will likely be heard in full committee this Thursday.

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

Elections Bills of Interest

A variety of bills on election administration are under consideration this session. Although sweeping changes to election administration are unlikely to be enacted this year, several items of note are under consideration.

Election timing: [SJ 253 \(Surovell\)](#) would establish a joint subcommittee of legislators and citizen members to study the consolidation and scheduling of general elections in Virginia, to include potential effects of moving some or all of Virginia's state or local elections to even-numbered years in order to coincide with the federal election cycle. [HB 1794 \(Helmer\)](#)/[SB 1119 \(VanValkenburg\)](#) would require primaries for offices to be filled at the November election in Presidential election years to be held on the date of the presidential primary. SB 1119 has passed the Senate; HB 1794 was heard in a subcommittee of House Privileges and Elections on Monday evening and recommended for reporting. SJ 253 is on the Senate floor.

Specialized ballots: [HB 1566 \(Green\)](#) would have required that any ballot mailed to a voter must be printed on security paper that incorporates a visible watermark that identifies the ballot as an official ballot. VACo and others had expressed concerns to the patron regarding potential compliance costs, and the patron requested that the bill be stricken in subcommittee so that these concerns could be more fully addressed.

Surveillance cameras for drop-off locations: [HB 2478 \(Zehr\)](#) would have required that security standards set by the Department of Elections mandate 24-hour video surveillance of all drop-off locations for absentee ballots. Under current standards, 24-hour video surveillance is required for secured drop boxes, but not for all drop-off locations, which can include polling places on Election Day. Although the bill was intended to codify existing surveillance requirements, as introduced, it would have expanded this requirement to all drop-off locations, potentially imposing substantial costs on localities, as VACo pointed out in speaking to the bill in subcommittee. The bill failed to report from subcommittee.

Party ID on the ballot: [HB 2139 \(Walker\)](#) would have allowed a candidate for local office who has been nominated by a political party or in a primary election to be identified by the name of a political party, at the option of the candidate. This bill was passed by indefinitely in subcommittee.

Limitations on electioneering near polling places: Under current law, a variety of activities are prohibited within 40 feet of a polling place, including distributing campaign materials. [SB 994 \(Williams Graves\)](#) would expand this “prohibited area” to 100 feet. This bill was discussed in Senate Privileges and Elections last week, but a vote was postponed pending further consultation with elected officials, including local elected officials.

Public campaign financing for elected local offices: [HB 1761 \(Simon\)](#) would authorize the governing body of a county or city to establish a system of public campaign financing for elected local offices, with oversight from the State Board of Elections, and to provide for a public election fund, to be administered by the local treasurer. A locality could provide for more stringent regulation of campaign finance activity by participating candidates than otherwise provided, including regulations regarding contributions, expenditures, and reporting requirements, and could impose civil penalties for violations. This bill has not yet been heard.

In-person absentee voting and voter satellite offices: [HB 2056 \(Reaser\)](#) proposes to allow a local governing body to establish the dates and hours of operation for voter satellite offices used for absentee voting in person. Currently, the local governing body may establish the offices, but the dates and hours are set by the local electoral board. This bill was heard in subcommittee on Monday evening and recommended for reporting. [SB 1175 \(Suetterlein\)](#) would have required in-person absentee voting to be available between the hours of 8:00 and 5:00, Monday through Friday each week, and from 8:00-5:00 on the first Saturday, and the second Saturday and Sunday, immediately preceding all elections. Under current law, these offices must be open during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, and may be open on Sundays. The bill failed to report in Senate Privileges and Elections over concerns about imposing a strict requirement for certain hours of operations.

Ranked choice voting: [SB 1009 \(Salim\)](#) is similar to legislation considered last session. The bill would allow elections for any local office to be conducted by ranked choice voting (currently, this methodology is permitted for elections for members of a county board of supervisors or a city council). The bill provides that the decision to conduct an election by ranked-choice voting would remain with the local governing body, subject to a determination of technical feasibility by the State Board of Elections, and retains language requested by VACo last session providing that a county may require a town that opts to conduct a town election by ranked choice voting to reimburse the county for costs associated with conducting the election in this manner. The bill requires the State Board of Elections to provide standards for vote tabulating software; promulgate regulations for the conduct of elections using ranked choice voting; and review the testing and approval framework for voting equipment in the Commonwealth. This bill was reported from the Senate Privileges and Elections Committee and is now before the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee.

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)

General Assembly Convenes, Adopts Schedule for 2025 General Assembly Session

Key dates for the 2025 session, as approved by the General Assembly in its procedural resolution, are as follows:

- **Wednesday, January 8:** General Assembly convenes. Last day to introduce legislation creating or continuing a study, or legislation regarding the Virginia Retirement System
- **Friday, January 10:** Deadline for Senate budget amendments
- **Monday, January 13:** Governor’s State of the Commonwealth Address; last day to pre-file legislation (by 10 a.m.); deadline to submit House budget amendments
- **Friday, January 17:** Last day to file bills, except for bills offered by unanimous consent or bills submitted on behalf of the Governor
- **Sunday, February 2:** “Budget Sunday” deadline for House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Appropriations Committees to report their respective budgets by midnight

- **Tuesday, February 4:** “Crossover” deadline for each chamber to complete work on legislation originating in that chamber (except the budget bill)
- **Thursday, February 6:** Deadline for each chamber to complete work on its budget bill
- **Wednesday, February 12:** Deadline for each chamber to complete consideration of the other chamber’s budget bill and revenue bills
- **Monday, February 17:** Deadline for committee action on legislation by midnight
- **Saturday, February 22:** Scheduled adjournment *sine die*
- **Wednesday, April 2:** Reconvened session for consideration of Governor’s amendments and vetoes

VACo Contact: [Katie Boyle](#)