



## **DRAFT VFC LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM – 2019**

### **Long Term Policy Positions**

#### **Community Wealth Building**

Virginia First Cities pioneered funding for the TANF for Employment Grant Program intended to provide aid to local governments to eradicate long term, intractable poverty through workforce/career training and access to holistic wraparound services. Support budget actions to:

- Maintain funding for the current TANF for Employment Grant Programs at \$7.5 million and \$3 million in each FY 2020 and FY 2021.
- Increase support for the Virginia Housing Trust Fund.
- Provide eligible working citizens better access to affordable housing and financing for public housing replacement.

#### **Economic Development/Resiliency/Sustainability**

Virginia First Cities efforts to aid member's access to program funding to restore and replace aging urban infrastructure has been immensely successful and continues to merit state budget dollars so that we revitalize and sustain our cities as vibrant, healthy places to live and work.

- Support \$3 million in FY 2020 and \$3 million in FY 2021 for Brownfields Restoration and Remediation.
- Enterprise Zone Program funding to avoid grant proration to the Real Property Investment Tax Credit.
- Oppose a decrease or further extension of the cap on the Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit.
- Support flood/resilience risk reduction infrastructure projects and aid to localities for grant matching.
- Support maximum funding for the Storm Water Local Assistance Fund (SLAF).

#### **Education**

Virginia First Cities has had a consistent position in support of full funding for K-12 education that has not been funded appropriately since the Great Recession. As VFC policy director, Jim Regimbal, wrote recently, "A quality education is the primary means of breaking the cycle of poverty. Therefore, the question is – what is needed to create a culture of learning in high-poverty communities and provide a quality education to concentrations of economically- disadvantaged students? To break the cycle of poverty, successful schools must have strong leadership, quality teachers, enrichment activities, and a stable, respectful learning environment to achieve these objectives while attracting quality individuals who put extra time and effort in a challenged school environment requires additional amounts of funding."

VFC ongoing initiatives include:

- Increase the At-Risk Add-on from 1% to 14% to 1% to 15% in FY 2020.
- Increase the appropriation to \$1.5 million for Teaching Scholarship Loans in FY 2020.
- Increase the Virginia Preschool Initiative per pupil amount to \$6500 full day and \$3250 for half day in FY 2020.
- Increase funding for the Master Teacher Residency Program to \$3 million in FY 2020.
- Increase the Teacher Improvement Funding Initiative from the current \$15,000 to a meaningful amount to assist at-risk schools.
- Increase funding for recruiting STEM teachers in challenging middle and high schools to \$1.5 million in FY 2020.
- Support new avenues for funding public school construction and renovation costs.
- **Policy Statement:** The state Standards of Quality (SOQ) funding formula for education operating costs breaks down on a statewide level as 55% state/45% local funding. However, the SOQ formula does not recognize the true costs of education, including pupil transportation, school support staff, providing and updating broadband and other technology, and adequate instructional staff salaries. Neither does it recognize most construction and renovation costs. Local governments match double what is required for basic state education dollars, pay the majority of public school capital costs and struggle to find scarce local tax dollars to keep up with the demands for meeting additional and expanding state requirements for creating 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments for our children to master the challenges of tomorrow's workforce, let alone today's. VFC supports actions for the Commonwealth to recognize and fund the true costs of public education.

## Health & Human Services

- Restore funding cuts to Community Services Boards. The FY 2019 and FY 2020 budgets included reductions to CSB funding with the assumption that if the CSBs signed up more clients because of Medicaid expansion, the state would make up the funding. The General Assembly is requested to restore the FY 2019 funding and reexamine the funding for FY 2020.
- Provide full funding for the implementation of the System Transformation, Excellence and Performance in Virginia (STEP-VA) throughout the Commonwealth to ensure that all ten core services are implemented by 2021.

- In keeping with VFC support for prisoner reentry programs, support legislation that would reverse drug distribution or conspiracy to distribute drug felony convictions as a bar to receiving public assistance like TANF, food stamps or housing.

## **Public Safety**

- Fund Aid to Localities with Police Departments according to statute (§9.1-169) with a formula that is responsive to urban police departments.
- Support the General Assembly giving local governments the authority to regulate the possession of firearms on property owned, operated, managed or under the control of the local government.

## **Taxation Issues**

Virginia's cash position will likely be dominated by tax and spending issues, as the state's cash position will be significantly improved over previous years.

- Support increasing the Standard Individual Income Tax Deduction to help lower income filers and expand the state's Earned Income Tax Credit to encourage and support low-wage working families.
- Support the modernization of the Communications and Sales Tax (CSUT) to ensure that it reflects the modern telecommunications landscape, which has evolved since the CSUT took effect in January 2007.

## **Transportation**

Cities have more difficult street maintenance needs considering infrastructure, age, usage levels, the need to modernize aged underground utilities, as well as provide expensive sidewalks and public transit and bike lanes. Several years ago Virginia First Cities identified that our cities were being shortchanged when it came to primary road extensions. Our advocacy has paid off by additional funding through the new paving and state of good repair programs.

We must stay vigilant to ensure this funding continues and is enhanced.

- Support increased funding for statewide transit capital needs.

## New Policy Positions

### **Economic Gardening Initiative/Resiliency/Sustainability**

Economic gardening is an approach to economic development that seeks to grow local economies from within. The premise is that local entrepreneurs in our member cities create the companies that bring new wealth and economic growth to a region in the form of jobs, increased revenues, and a vibrant local business sector. Economic gardening focus is on growing and nurturing local businesses.

- Increase funding for the Community Business Launch Initiative (CBL) at DHCD to \$1 million in FY 2020. CBL helps communities develop an environment that identifies, launches and supports community-based entrepreneurs and small business at all levels of development.
- Increase funding and expand eligibility for the Virginia Main Street Program at DHCD to \$1.5 million in FY 2020.
- Use a portion of the unspent balance of TANF funding to aid public housing replacement.
- Look to an Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit-like program to stimulate public housing and mixed income housing redevelopment.
- Increase funding for the Virginia Removal of Derelict Structures Fund from \$1.5 million to \$3 million in FY 2020 to leverage local and private resources to achieve market driven redevelopment of these structures. This, in turn, will create a catalyst for long-term employment opportunities and on-going physical and economic revitalization.
- Provide \$5 million in FY 2020 for the Urban Public-Private Partnership Redevelopment Fund (§15.2-2415) to provide grants or loans to local governments for assembling, planning, clearing, and preparing sites for redevelopment by private developers.
- Our cities are in dire need of assistance from the state for older neighborhood residential revitalization, as well as residential public housing replacement. VFC asks that the General Assembly establish a State Commission, led by the Virginia Housing Commission, that includes representatives of VHDA and DHCD, local redevelopment and housing authorities, and VFC, to identify financing methods to be developed or employed to assist our cities with transformational, mixed income neighborhoods and resident communication and transitioning resources.

## **Education**

- Support for Virginia Early Childhood Success, to promote a vision for a cohesive early childhood system for Virginia – in statute, as well as demonstration through a funded pilot project initiative.
- Especially for low-income communities, the state should provide seamless, affordable access for the most at-risk families to quality early childhood services – including home visiting, subsidized child care, and preschool. Low-income working families need accommodations for their children for more than the 9:00 am - 2:30 pm, 180 days a year routine for the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). Virginia should ensure affordable access to stable, quality childcare for children (infants, toddlers, and preschoolers) as the best investment in young children and their families.

## **Eviction/Landlord Tenant Issues**

Virginia First Cities has been participating in the Campaign to Reduce Evictions (CARE) Program Services workgroup formed in response to the release of the Princeton University's Eviction Lab data. We have also attended the Virginia Housing Commission's sub/work group on evictions. Based on member feedback, there is dispute with the methodology and data collection used in the Princeton Eviction Lab study. Nonetheless, we feel it important to stress that the issue of ameliorating evictions is a goal shared by all of our cities, and solutions lie in community wealth building, economic gardening, and ensuring access to jobs and careers that lead to sustainability.

## **Blight/Nuisance Tools**

The current Code of Virginia does not give localities express authority to deal with overgrown trees and shrubs on vacant or occupied developed properties. Has this been an issue in your community? Is there another remedy that your local government has used to deal with this issue?

