

2025



Legislative Program

BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

Dear Legislator:

In 2025, the Virginia Municipal League (VML) will celebrate 120 years of service to Virginia local governments. VML serves as a voice for Virginia local governments in Richmond; it also offers member local governments information and training opportunities to help local officials meet the ever-growing needs of their communities.

Virginia's hometowns are the center of economic growth and services for the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth's economic development success depends on the strength of its local governments to provide the services, infrastructure, and amenities that attract and retain businesses and residents.

VML's 38 cities, 170 towns, and eight counties support legislation and budget initiatives that support basic services – public education, human services, public safety, economic development and infrastructure – that are vital for the Commonwealth's future well-being.

Our members and staff look forward to working with you in the coming weeks and months. We are here to help answer questions and give you information about local government operations, authority, and the potential impact of legislative and budget related initiatives. Please email, text, or call us if you have questions.

Thank you for your service to Virginia.

Sincerely,



Steven Trivett
VML President
Mayor, Town of Ashland

About VML

The Virginia Municipal League is a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan association of city, town and county governments established in 1905 to improve and assist local governments through legislative advocacy, research, education and other services. The membership includes 38 cities in the state, 170 towns and eight counties. VML is governed by a Board of Directors made up of local government officials. The Board of Directors is elected by the league membership at the annual conference each October. It provides overall guidance to the league staff.



P.O. Box 12164 Richmond, VA 23241 • 804/649-8471 • www.vml.org

2025 VML Legislative Program

As approved by the VML Membership on October 14, 2024.

Guiding Principle: Local Authority

VML supports expanded local government authority and opposes any erosion of local authority.

Legislative Priorities

Support for Public Education

A General Assembly joint subcommittee is addressing recommendations from the 2023 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report on the Standards of Quality (SOQ). JLARC's report recommendations about updating the SOQ in the short and long term included items VML has long supported, such as the elimination of the support cap and providing additional staff and funding for staff.

VML encourages the General Assembly to expeditiously implement and fund the JLARC recommendations to more equitably share the costs of education with local governments and to ensure the overall success of students across the Commonwealth.

VML supports state funding and statewide authority to address school construction and renovation needs in our communities estimated at \$25.0 billion.

Finally, while VML supports innovation in public schools, we oppose efforts that limit local authority or divert state funds from the public education system.

Funding of Community Services Boards and Behavioral Health Needs

VML supports sufficient and sustained state funding and technical assistance for community services boards/behavioral health authorities to implement STEP-VA requirements and to support the planning and implementation of Marcus Alert protocols. This funding should not come at the expense of other community-based service initiatives and requirements; nor should funding of state initiatives be shifted to local governments.

Robust state revenues offer an opportunity for the state to build on investments in the community network and state system. Funding through other federal and nonprofit grants should also be pursued as appropriate.

VML supports state efforts to apply for a Medicaid Reentry Section 1115 Demonstration Waiver to help local and regional jails address certain behavioral health and substance use conditions of inmates prior to release and to help improve their transition into the community.

State Assistance to Local Police Departments (HB 599)

Almost 70 percent of Virginians live in communities served by police departments. The State created a program of financial assistance to local police departments (HB 599) when it imposed an annexation moratorium on cities more than 30 years ago. It has increasingly de-emphasized this funding obligation as a priority but has never compromised on the annexation moratorium.

VML calls for the state to honor its commitment to local governments and public safety by funding the program as stipulated in the Code of Virginia or lift the moratorium on annexation.

Land Use Control

Localities must maintain control of local land use decisions. Neither the state nor the federal government should usurp or pre-empt a locality's authority to make such decisions; nor should they impose requirements that weaken planning and land use functions. This includes all types of housing including but not limited to short-term rentals.

VML also supports local government authority to promote affordable and mixed income housing as well as the required infrastructure to facilitate in-fill development, redevelopment and mixing of uses. Any mandate from the state should include full funding for the locality.

Legislative Program Items

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

Localities should retain local land use control when regulating accessory dwelling units.

Consumer Disclosure in Noise Contour Zones Around Airports

VML supports efforts to increase consumer disclosure in noise contour zones established in and around airports.

Local and Regional Juvenile Detention Facilities

Local and regional juvenile detention facilities play an integral role in the continuum of Virginia's juvenile justice system. A major consideration in maintaining the system of local and regional detention facilities is to serve youth closer to their families, their communities, the courts with which they are involved, and their legal counsel.

Any state-level discussion of the future of this system, including efforts involving closures or consolidations, must involve the major stakeholders involved in the system,

such as members of the juvenile and domestic relations courts system, detention facility managers, and youth/family advocates.

Discussions should also consider regions looking to open facilities to serve their communities and avoid sending youth long distances for placement; include examination of ways the state can improve investments in facilities to update key infrastructure; address behavioral health needs of youth and their families to improve outcomes; and find ways to effectively address state requirements for educational services.

Local Excise Taxes

VML supports the statewide authority for local governments to establish an excise tax on the sale of vaping products. VML also supports the statewide authority for local governments to establish an excise tax on the sale of cannabis products.

Local Referenda, Land Use, and Revenue Authority Regarding Cannabis Retail Sales

VML urges the Virginia General Assembly to authorize local governments - cities, towns, and counties - to regulate land use and zoning, hold a referendum on retail sales, and tax recreational cannabis retailers.

Local Revenue Authority or Share of State Revenue from Skill Games

VML supports a local tax or portion of the tax revenue from Skill Games to go to localities. Local governments would prefer flexibility in directing any tax revenues to meet local needs.

Photo Speed Enforcement

VML supports expanded legalization of speed cameras if the area in which they are to be placed has been documented as an area of concern through speed studies, crash data, or engineering studies.

Referendum Authority for Towns

Towns should be included in any legislation authorizing referenda by local governments, including but not limited to skill games legislation.

Sovereign Immunity

Expanding liability and eroding immunities at state levels across the nation have had a chilling effect on the actions of local government officials contributing to local government insurance problems, creating immense financial risks (particularly for legal costs), and posing a substantial obstacle to the provision of needed public services. The Virginia General Assembly should strengthen and must maintain the principles of sovereign immunity for local governments and their officials.

State-mandated Tax Policy Changes and Local Revenues

Locally elected officials understand the needs of their community as well as the burden of taxation on their constituents. The Commonwealth should refrain from encroaching upon the responsibility of local officials by imposing additional exemptions from locally generated revenues or imposing additional red tape that make it more difficult to raise revenue in their communities.

Further, VML opposes any state-mandated exemptions to the local option sales tax or to the real estate tax unless the General Assembly can establish a viable revenue replacement to local governments.

Stormwater Local Assistance Funding (SLAF) and Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF)

VML supports the addition of \$50.0 million to the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF) in Fiscal Year 2025 to meet documented needs. VML supports continued full state funding for the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF).

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VML Policy Team

Michelle Gowdy, mgowdy@vml.org

FOIA/COIA | Community & Economic

Development | Land Use |

Local Government Committees

Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Health & Human Services | Budget |

Public Safety (jails and juvenile justice)

Joe Flores, jflores@vml.org

Budget | Taxes

Josette Bulova, jbulova@vml.org

K-12 Education and Funding | Elections | VRS

Mitchell Smiley, msmiley@vml.org

Environment & Natural Resources |

Transportation | Marijuana

Mark Flynn, markkflynn@gmail.com

Commerce & Labor | Elections | Public Safety