



News

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JANUARY 16, 2015

The newsletter
of the Virginia
Municipal League

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General Assembly 2015 links

Look up a bill online:
<http://1.usa.gov/1xxkDW7>

2015 Calendar:
<http://1.usa.gov/1Dpx32T>

House members:
<http://bit.ly/1mCMoFb>

Senate members:
<http://1.usa.gov/1nT7Hnt>

House and Senate Committee lists:
<http://1.usa.gov/13Td282>

Reminder

Register now for VML Day at the Capitol on Jan. 28.

<http://www.vml.org/node/703>

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House committee sets stage to duck redistricting initiative

THE CHAIRMAN OF the House committee that considers constitutional amendments has spelled out a set of procedures the panel will follow this session that appears designed to kill redistricting reform – without taking recorded votes.

Del. Mark Cole, chairman of the [House Privileges & Elections Committee](#), said Wednesday that the constitutional amendments subcommittee of the Privileges & Elections Committee will be limited to passing no more than five constitutional amendments. In addition, he said that none of the amendments may be voted on until all of them have been considered.

Since proposed constitutional amendments have been filed on numerous topics other than redistricting, it is entirely possible that the committee would vote to forward a batch of five amendments, none dealing with redistricting. In that case the redistricting amendments would never be voted on.

In addition to proposed constitutional amendments dealing with redistricting, several bills have been filed to improve the redistricting process. Cole said that since the General Assembly has six years to act on redistricting, he directed the subcommittee to take up the redistricting bills last, and only if there is time in the short session.

VML urges its members to put pressure on the committee and subcommittee members to tackle redistricting reform. A number of redistricting bills and proposed constitutional amendments have been introduced, but some of them have not yet been referred to committee.



Talking points:

- Redistricting should be done objectively with boundaries drawn on the basis of legal, demographic and commonsense criteria that ignore the political interests of incumbents or political parties.
- The current redistricting process is inherently unethical because it allows legislators to protect their incumbency in “safe” districts by often avoiding meaningful challenges.
- Voters should choose their legislators instead of legislators choosing their voters.

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General Assembly



Redistricting continued ...

Please call or email these subcommittee members in support of the panel seriously considering redistricting reform:

David Ramadan: <http://bit.ly/1E6TGcG>

Jackson Miller: <http://bit.ly/1yr3XyH>

Steven Landes: <http://bit.ly/1Cvhsy9>

Timothy Hugo: <http://bit.ly/1KPYIPs>

Nick Rush: <http://bit.ly/1u8JKiA>

Johnny Joannou: <http://bit.ly/1IHhwP4>

Joseph Lindsey: <http://bit.ly/1x9jhgM>

Mark Cole: <http://bit.ly/1IQjLgV>

The subcommittee meets Monday mornings at 8 a.m., although it is not clear at this point, if the bills and resolutions will be heard at all.

Staff contacts: Mark Flynn, mflynn@vml.org;
Mary Jo Fields, mfields@vml.org.

Education

Decreased per-pupil state funding, higher standards confronting K-12

VIRGINIA BOARD OF Education President Christian Braunlich reviewed educational challenges facing Virginia schools at a meeting of the Education Subcommittee of Senate Finance on Jan. 15. Braunlich presented statistics showing that:

While Virginia students outperform those in other states on national math and English tests, the gaps between economically disadvantaged students and their wealthier peers has grown by as much as 35 percentage points.

The number of economically disadvantaged students in public schools has grown over the last five years, with 41 percent of students meeting the definition.

The number of English language learners has increased by 15 percent.

While the number of students needing special education services has declined, the number of students most expensive to serve (autism and other health impairments) has increased by 23 percent.

Since 2008, K-12 education staffing has been reduced by 5,000 positions, while enrollment has

increased by 2.3 percent.

Braunlich's presentation is posted here: <http://1.usa.gov/1IHakIV>. He also authored an op-ed piece in the Jan. 3 issue of the Richmond Times-Dispatch detailing the failure of state K-12 education to keep pace with education needs. The op-ed column here: <http://bit.ly/1ApohRM>.

In a follow-up presentation at the same meeting, Superintendent of Public Instruction Steve Staples presented information showing that in fiscal year 2014, state general fund direct aid to public education was \$308 million less than it was in fiscal year 2007.

Further, the number of schools not fully accredited dipped to 19 in 2010-2011. Over the next four years, following the implementation of higher educational standards, the number of schools not fully accredited rose to 567 in the current fiscal year.

The short story: the state has decreased its support for public education while at the same making it more difficult for schools to be accredited. Stapleton referenced the late Dr. William Boshier, who said that just as schools would see the finish line, the line would be moved.

Stapleton's presentation is posted here: <http://1.usa.gov/1AnbjkL>.

Benefits

Bill codifying, amending Line of Duty Act introduced

ADMINISTRATION OF THE Line of Duty Act Program would be shifted from the Department of Accounts to the Virginia Retirement System under [HB 2204](#) (Jones). The bill also transfers administration of health insurance benefits to the state Department of Human Resource Management, and establishes an administrative appeal process for persons, including employers, aggrieved by the decision.

The bill modifies and codifies language on LODA that currently is in the Appropriation Act.

In December, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission was presented a lengthy presentation on LODA. The bill follows some of the recommendations made in that report, but does not tackle the thornier issues of modifying benefits or narrowing eligibility as a way to contain costs.

The cost of the program has skyrocketed since it was expanded in 2002 to provide health insurance

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General Assembly



Line of Duty continued ...

coverage and when the program was expanded to cover permanent disability by “direct and proximate cause” and permanent disability under the heart/lung/cancer presumption. Virginia’s benefit is the most generous in the nation, according to JLARC.

VML will analyze the bill in more detail. It has not yet been referred, but is likely to be assigned to the [House Appropriations Committee](#), which Jones chairs, and which typically hears retirement and benefit bills. The bill has a delayed effect date of July, 2016.

Staff contact: Mary Jo Fields, mfields@vml.org.

Human Services

Bills would expand scope of CSA

HB 2083 (Peace) and SB 1041 (Hanger) would require localities to establish a process for parents and guardians to directly refer children in their care to local Family Assessment and Planning Teams (FAPTs). A children’s advocacy group, Voices for Virginia’s Children, asked for the bills.

HB 2083 has not yet been referred to a committee; SB 1041 has been referred to the Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services Committee.

Currently, children are referred to a FAPT by an agency represented on the FAPT (CSB, DSS, etc.) that is working with the child and family. Some localities allow parents to make a direct referral as well, and some have processes by which they get a child referred to an agency for assessment and possible referral. In other words, the flexibility to determine whether local coordinators and teams can take on additional work (with no additional state administrative dollars to help with the process or extra work).

VML is inquiring into fiscal impact information regarding this initiative.

Staff contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Public Safety

Bill would cut state assistance for construction, expansion of regional jails

SB1049 (McDougle) reduces the state share of costs for construction, renovation, or expansion of a regional jail from 50 percent to 25 percent. The bill has been referred to the Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services Committee. There is also a budget amendment in the Governor’s introduced budget that does the same thing.

VML opposes the bill and the budget amendment. The regional jail program was initiated by the state as a way to create greater efficiencies in funding and staffing of jails, and it has been a success that has been verified by studies. Reducing state support does not make sense, and would cost taxpayers more dollars and cents in the long run.

Staff contact: Janet Areson, jareson@vml.org

Sheriffs’ bill raises ruckus across state

POLICE CHIEFS AND city officials are raising a stir over a bill that designates the sheriff as the chief law enforcement officer, regardless of whether the locality has an appointed police chief.

[HB 1670](#) (Berg) states that funding for the office would be as designated in the Appropriation Act; a concern is that HB 599 funds currently going to cities and to counties that have a police department would instead be used to support the sheriffs’ department.

A Jan. 15 article in *The Winchester Star* quotes an aide to the bill’s sponsor as saying that the impetus for the legislation is that the most responsible law enforcement is one that is directly accountable to the people, and that sheriffs are elected, unlike police chiefs.

The bill is in the House Appropriations Committee.

Staff contact: Kimberly Pollard, kpollard@vml.org

General Assembly



Other bills being tracked ...

Police transport

Summary: HB 1520 (Lindsey) requires sheriffs, local police forces, and the State Police to transport and provide security for government officials, members of civic organizations, and other dignitaries.

Action: The bill is in subcommittee #3 of House Militia, Police and Public Safety, which meets Monday at 4 p.m. VML opposes this unfunded mandate.

Staff contact: Kimberly Pollard, kpollard@vml.org

Electronic records study

Summary: HJ 582 (Surovell) establishes a 12-member joint subcommittee to evaluate the feasibility of authenticating electronic government records that are made available online.

Action: This study has not yet been assigned to a committee. VML supports this study.

Staff contact: Kimberly Pollard, kpollard@vml.org

Tax reform study

Summary: HJ 505 (Cole) establishes a joint subcommittee to study reforming Virginia's tax structure, including the feasibility of adopting a flat tax or a fair tax.

Action: The study has been referred to House Rules.

Staff contact: Kimberly Pollard, kpollard@vml.org

Local fiscal impact

Summary: SB 1140 (Garrett)/ HB 1865 (Kilgore) requires local fiscal impact bills to be introduced no later than the first day of the regular session of the General Assembly.

Action: This bills are in the Senate and House Rules committees. VML supports the bills.

Staff contact: Kimberly Pollard, kpollard@vml.org

Reminder: VML Day at the Capitol is Jan. 28

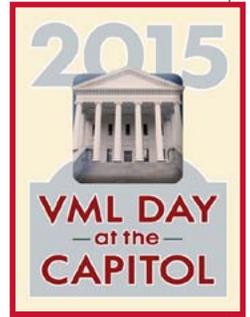
ONE OF THE most vital roles a local government official can perform during the General Assembly session is to attend VML Day at the Capitol, which will be held this year beginning at 3 p.m. Jan. 28 at the Library of Virginia. And as part of that event, we've put together some tips on meeting with your legislators during your visit to Richmond.

First, please encourage your legislator to attend the outstanding reception we will hold this year from 5:30-7 p.m. in the library's foyer. All legislators were sent invitations to their home and Richmond offices. (More information and register at <http://www.vml.org/node/703>).

You may wish to set up a dinner with your legislators after the reception as well. Some localities do this as a region. If you do that, make sure to find out how many will be in attendance and make a dinner reservation, preferably before you arrive in Richmond or as soon as possible on the day of your visit. Richmond has many excellent restaurants downtown.

If you intend to call on a legislator while in Richmond, contact their office at least a week before your visit to let them know that you are coming to town. Ask what the legislator's schedule looks like for the day you are visiting. By calling members in advance, you can get an idea of how to map out your visits to all of your delegation members. You might also want to catch a quick breakfast at the sixth floor cafeteria in the General Assembly Building with a legislator if they do not have an early meeting committee meeting. Also, you may want to see a legislator in action at one of their committee meetings. If a meeting ends with a little time before members have to go into caucus, legislators sometimes meet with their visitors right there in the committee room.

A member's schedule, however, can change quickly. By calling early you can formulate a tentative meeting time and place, and then follow up with the member's office the afternoon before your visit to confirm, or make a change in plans if something has come up. If you do get bumped, try to get a commitment from the member to allow you to meet with the legislative aide. This person will make sure that your concerns and information reach the member. ☺





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