



2024

Richmond
LEGISLATIVE
PROGRAM

FOR THE 2024

VIRGINIA
GENERAL
ASSEMBLY
LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Presented December 6, 2023
Library of Virginia



Richmond City Council

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Richmond, Virginia



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The Voice of the People

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City of Richmond FINAL Draft Legislative Program for the 2024 General Assembly

Budget Requests:

Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) - \$300,000,000

The City requests \$100 million appropriation in FY 2024 (caboose budget); \$100 million in FY 2025; \$100 million FY 2026. These amounts would constitute 60% of the approximately \$650 million estimated as needed to begin construction on the Final Plan for CSO remediation. The entire amount must be on hand by FY 28 for construction to begin in FY 29 as required to meet the statutory mandate for completing construction by 2035.

Early Childhood Education- TBD

The city requests state funding to continue program funding and expanded eligibility for Richmond's participation in Virginia's mixed delivery Child Care Subsidy Program. Federal funding for this program of more than \$24 billion, issued as part of the American Rescue Plan, was the largest investment in childcare ever. That funding expired on September 30, 2023. The Child Care Subsidy Program is a proven program to lift children out of poverty, to reduce child maltreatment, and to prepare children for success in school and in life. This program has been a game changer for the City of Richmond. From May of 2021 to September 2023, there has been a 147% increase in the number of children accessing care with the subsidy. And, importantly, the Richmond Department of Social Services has not had a waitlist for the CCSP since October 2020. These results must continue.

K-12 Teacher Residency Programs- \$590,000

The city requests additional state funding to support twenty five (25) Richmond Teacher Residency (RTR) stipends. The RTR is a proven pipeline for RPS to employ qualified, highly trained, and effective teachers that work and stay in the RPS system. We have a significant teacher shortage in Richmond. Having enough, high quality teachers is among the most important factors necessary for a quality education system. Teachers who use direct pathways to become a fully licensed teacher are better prepared for the classroom and tend to stay in the school system.

Requests for Legislation:

- 1. Make the Possession and Use of Semi-Automatic Switches Illegal Under Virginia Law**
Switches are illegal under federal law, but not illegal under Virginia law, meaning that if Virginia local law enforcement officers come upon a suspect with a switch, they do not have the authority to arrest the person. Switches are small, cheap devices that can be added to a semi-automatic weapon to make it automatic. Local law enforcement can refer the case to federal authorities, but this is cumbersome and has the potential to lead to the person who has the switch getting away without consequence and the switch still being “on the street.” (Administration/Chief Edwards)
- 2. Pedestrian/Public Safety Urban Institutions of Higher Education**
Amend § 46.2-873, Maximum speed limits at school crossings, to include “students” in the definition of “school crossing zone” so that institutions of higher education (VCU/VUU) may be included in the areas where photo speed monitoring devices may be used.
- 3. Charter Changes**
Items of mutual agreement (City Council and Administration) would be included.
- 4. Long Term Owner Occupancy Program (LOOP)**
Amend the Constitution of Virginia to give local governments control over property tax exemptions and tools to combat gentrification – Create a Long- Term Owner Occupancy Program.
- 5. Include the city in §15.2-2304 Affordable Dwelling Unit Ordinances in Certain Localities.**
As a high growth locality facing inordinate pressures on housing access and affordability, the City requests to be included with the other seven Virginia localities able to use mandatory inclusionary zoning tools.
- 6. Give City Ability to Assess a Civil Penalty for Unauthorized, Non-Permitted Demolition.**
Consistent with *Richmond 300*, Richmond’s award-winning Comprehensive Plan, the City needs state legislation to develop stronger code enforcement tools for violations in City-designated, state-designated Old & Historic Districts non-permitted demolition of buildings and structures. The City requests that §15.2-819 be amended to include Richmond.

POLICY STATEMENTS

Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO)

The city opposes any attempt to accelerate the current statutory Richmond CSO project completion timeline ahead of 2035.

K-12 Education & Funding Support

The city supports full state funding for public education as recommended by the Board of Education and, most recently, by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC). Many of the recommendations in the two most recent JLARC in depth studies (K-12 Funding and Virginia's Teacher Pipeline) are particularly germane to the city. Virginia K-12 funding formulas have exacerbated the problems in our inner-city, high poverty school division. For these reasons, the City of Richmond supports the following near term goals that will be most impactful to Richmond Public Schools, including:

- Consolidating the At-Risk Add-On program and the Prevention, Intervention, Remediation program to create a new At-Risk Program under the Standards of Quality;
- Implementing an LCI calculation using a three-year average. Specifically, the JLARC option to weigh population equally with ADM would better reflect overall local budget expenditures, not just school expenditures. For the city of Richmond, it is estimated that this alone would shift approximately \$4.3 million from the city to the state.

The city supports the state providing consistent annual funding for the school construction grant program from the state's general fund until such time as the Virginia Gaming Proceeds Fund, or a like-dedicated school construction fund, is up, running, and sufficiently funded.

The city supports adding Richmond (and any Virginia local government) to the list of localities that can hold a referendum to ask voters to increase the sales tax by 1% to raise money for school construction and modernization.

The city supports a full and fair K-12 rebenchmarking of updated cost estimates for the 2024-2026 Biennial Budget. Further the city supports hold harmless funding if the city is at risk of receiving less state funding for Basic Aid than in the previous biennium.

Early Childhood Education

The city supports an additional \$250-\$350 million in annual state funding to support Virginia's mixed delivery Child Care Subsidy Program in order to extend the expanded eligibility and continued program funding. Issued as part of the American Rescue Plan, and the largest investment in childcare ever, some \$24 billion in federal funding expired on September 30, 2023. The fiscal cliff for the Commonwealth of Virginia's investment in early childhood education is set to expire on June 30, 2024. The Child Care Subsidy Program is a proven program to lift children out of poverty, to reduce child maltreatment, and to prepare children for success in school and in life. This program has been a game changer for the City of Richmond. From May of 2021 to September 2023, there has been a 147% increase in the number of children accessing care with the subsidy. And, importantly, the Richmond Department of Social Services has not had a waitlist for the CCSP since October 2020. These results must continue.

Housing

Citizens in metro-Richmond are paying more than 30% of their income toward housing costs. Additionally, the metro-Richmond area has a 23,320 housing unit shortage. The housing crisis cuts across all demographics but is hitting our senior citizens extremely hard. The Mayor and the City Council unanimously declared that a housing crisis exists in the city of Richmond (Resolution 2023-R019) and will support a broad approach to addressing this crisis in the City and in the Commonwealth. The following proactive steps have been identified to help with the housing crisis in Richmond:

- The city supports legislative and budgetary tools to increase the availability and funds for Low Income Housing Tax Credits and the Communities of Opportunity Program (intended to decentralize poverty by enhancing low-income Virginians access to affordable housing units in higher-income area). While the real estate market in the Richmond area is robust, the city believes there are reasons for concern and policy areas that need reinforcement.
- The city supports efforts to improve the ability of non-profit entities to support the development of affordable housing options.
- The issue of blight and out-of-state landlord's failure to properly maintain their investment is a growing concern in the city. The city supports more legislation to make more tools available to gain the compliance of absentee or uninvolved real estate owners for cleanup and getting blighted investment property back on the tax rolls and available for purchase or rent. For example, the General Assembly is requested to remove the cap on additional taxes qualifying localities (fiscal stress of 100+) may levy on blighted and derelict properties. § 58.1-3221.6. This additional taxation authority would be an extremely valuable tool to encourage proper maintenance of properties and compliance with state and local building regulations.
- The city supports legislation that would grant them authority to require the registration of any building that had been vacant for a period of 12 months or more. Vacant, unmonitored houses are inherently a public safety problem – not structurally (i.e., derelict) but due to potential criminal activity.
- The city opposes any state legislative action that would have the effect of preempting recently enacted City legislation that allow accessory dwelling units (ADUs) by-right and maintain the primary residency requirement for short-term rentals in residential areas. These City Council actions were specific recommendations to lessen the effects of the current housing crisis that the city is experiencing, specifically, the lack of housing access and affordability.

Human Services

Mental Health Funding and Efforts to Decriminalize the Mental Health Crisis in Richmond

- The city supports additional state funding for our local Community Service Boards (CSBs) and other critical community supports, like the Marcus Alert. The Commonwealth of Virginia faces an unprecedented mental health crisis among people of all ages. Two out of five adults report symptoms of anxiety or depression. Our youth have been particularly impacted as losses from COVID and disruptions in routines and relationships have led to increased social isolation, anxiety, and learning loss. The FY 2024 state budget made great strides in funding for mental health and pandemic-related learning loss, but we urge the Commonwealth to do more to support our citizens struggling with addiction and mental health issues and to treat the actual crisis without criminalizing the crisis.

Opioid Crisis

- The city supports additional state funding to address the opioid crisis especially the disparate impact on communities of color.

Tenant's Right to an Attorney

- The city supports efforts to ensure that tenants have a right to an attorney if they are facing eviction.

Equitable Support Services for Children in Foster Care Through the Age of Maturity

- The city supports a budget amendment to recognize foster care enhanced payment beyond the child's age of 13. Additionally, the city supports cost of living increases to these enhanced payments. Virginia's foster care system provides maintenance payments to assist in meeting the basic needs of a child in the system. Enhanced maintenance payments are available when a child has a clearly defined need that requires the parent to provide increased support and supervision due to the child's behavioral, emotional, or physical/personal care requirements. Under the current system, as soon as a child in foster care reaches the age of thirteen, the stipend disappears. The trauma and emotional needs of the thirteen year old + does not disappear.

Public Safety

HB 599 Aid to Local Police Funding

- The city joins its local government partners, Virginia First Cities and the Virginia Municipal League, in supporting increased funding for HB 599, Aid to Local Police. 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. The state must be held to a standard of upholding this contract and funding aid to our city police, especially for our city that is not able to grow.

Public Defenders

- The city supports additional state funding to increase the salaries and benefits of the city's public defenders.

First Responders

- The city supports additional state funding to increase the salaries and benefits of the city's public defenders. Additionally, the city supports state efforts to improve incentives for the retention of first responders.

Lead Service Line Replacement Program

- The city supports efforts to allow Richmond to tap into federal dollars for the critical program.

Tax Policy

Governor's Motion Picture Opportunity and Tax Credit Fund

The city supports efforts to sufficiently fund the Governor's Motion Picture Opportunity Fund and the Governor's Motion Picture Tax Credit Fund. The film, television, and streaming industry has experienced exponential growth and innovation over the past decade, with demand for content seeing a monumental upward trend despite the economic uncertainty that has shaken other industries. It is now recognized as an industry that continues to grow and adapt at breakneck speed, one that uniquely touches technology, tourism, and traditional economic development, while simultaneously providing high-wage career pathways

that are of great interest to our existing and emerging workforce. The City of Richmond has benefited significantly from the location shooting of many different projects. This industry benefits businesses large & small during filming, and for years after in the emerging sector of film tourism and has proven to be very resilient, providing crucial support to sectors impacted the most by the economic shutdown, such as hospitality and brick-and-mortar retail

Transportation

The city supports increasing the availability of funds for street maintenance. The 2022 General Assembly tasked the Virginia Department of Transportation to study the formula and methodology for city street maintenance funding. The report found that an additional \$51 million in state funding is needed to meet the needs in Virginia.

Economic Development

The city supports increased state funding to further support the work of the city's Office of Community Wealth Building.

Social Policy

The City of Richmond will continue to oppose any state policies or regulations that attempt to roll back or reverse discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, or race. Likewise, any state attempts to regulate the placement or banning of books or otherwise whitewash the nation and Commonwealth's history is to be opposed.