



Testimony to the Fairfax County General Assembly Delegation
Jan 6, 2024

The League of Women Voters of Fairfax County is a non-partisan volunteer organization with over 300 members. We have been working to support democracy for over 75 years in Fairfax County. We support voter registration and voter education, including holding Candidate Forums and voter registration events, and providing fact-based, nonpartisan materials to Fairfax County residents.

Our League supports the 2024 Fairfax County Legislative Program. As an organization with a mission of supporting voter engagement and civic participation, we are especially supportive of the Board's positions on elections. We also highlight funding for public education, including K-12 and early childhood education and child care. We support initiatives in transportation, affordable housing, public safety, behavioral health and human services.

The following issues are high priorities for the League of Women Voters of the Fairfax Area.

Elections and Election Services

We strongly support legislation to promote equitable and efficient participation in elections, such as continuing to facilitate voting by mail, providing for extended polling hours statewide, extending curbside voting to those with nonphysical disabilities, and expanding the use of drop boxes. Adequate state funding for election administration, voting equipment, and systems modernization and security is essential. We support efforts to provide expanded flexibility during emergencies, allowing local election officials to prevent any potential disruptions to election administration. We oppose any curtailment of the early voting period or the number of early voting sites.

We support legislation and funding to encourage public understanding of the safety and security of the Virginia election process.

Virginia's continued denial of the right to vote to some citizens violates a fundamental premise of democracy. Citizens with prior felony convictions should not be excluded from civic participation by an opaque and arbitrary process of rights restoration that is a remnant of the Jim Crow era. We urge you to pursue legislation to allow automatic restoration of voting rights

We specifically support legislation to change the deadline for local electoral boards to certify elections and submit abstracts, from seven days following the election to ten days following the election. If enacted, this initiative will allow local Offices of Elections the proper time to perform their required duties while protecting the franchise for all Virginia voters.

Education: K-12 and Early Childhood

The League views it as essential that the state fully and appropriately support the education of all of our children. Unfortunately, the gap between state funding and the actual costs of providing a high-quality education, particularly in high cost-of-living jurisdictions like Fairfax County, continues to expand. We must address deficiencies and underfunding, including: 1. Correcting the Virginia Standards of Quality to reflect the true local costs of providing a high-quality public education; 2. Recognizing cost-of-living variations throughout the Commonwealth in state funding formulas, particularly in high cost-of-living areas like Northern Virginia; 3. Increasing state funding support for school divisions with high numbers or concentrations of English learners, students living in economically disadvantaged households, and students receiving special education and mental health services; and, 4. Increasing state resources for early childhood education programs, which help young children enter kindergarten prepared to succeed.

We highlight that education support does not occur exclusively in the K-12 school setting. Early childhood education and youth services must also be supported. We support state child care funding for economically disadvantaged families, and support an increase in child care service rates. Programs providing early childhood care need to be funded and the reimbursement rates need to be updated on a regular basis to reflect the cost of care. These costs should not be deflected to the localities. The state should continue to assess the family copayment scale to support child care access and affordability. This applies to Early Intervention Services for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), and the Children's Services Act (CSA).

Transportation

For our region, transportation services are vital and must have support. To ensure that transportation projects continue to advance in Northern Virginia after decades of state underfunding, the Commonwealth must fully restore the \$102 million of regional funding to the Northern Virginia Transportation Authority (NVTA) that was previously diverted to Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA). The Commonwealth must also provide dedicated and sustainable funding for WMATA – without diverting resources from other transportation needs in Northern Virginia and the Commonwealth

Transportation safety is a critically important issue for all Virginians, and in the last few years the General Assembly provided localities with additional, common-sense tools to help address these issues. However, the law should be clarified to ensure that VDOT implements recent changes the way it was understood they would be when they were being considered by the GA. If enacted, this initiative will provide localities with tools to further improve transportation safety.

Affordable Housing

The League supports state funding and actions to increase the availability of affordable, accessible, integrated housing. To prevent homelessness, we support expanded investments in tools and programs to address affordable housing needs, particularly in high cost-of-living areas like Northern Virginia. We support retaining existing local land use authority, allowing localities to craft solutions that are appropriate for their communities, including innovative ideas and solutions that require the flexibility and agility to respond to changing conditions.

Public Safety

The Fairfax LWV is in agreement with the Virginia League of Women Voters in advocating for assuring gun safety and protection against domestic violence. We support legislation to address gun violence in Virginia through common sense gun safety measures that will help ensure a safe and resilient community, building on the landmark changes enacted in 2020.

We support additional state funding and efforts to increase the capacity for localities to implement culturally specific prevention and intervention services to eliminate domestic and sexual violence, including continued support for evidence-based, quality programs that provide education and rehabilitation for those who cause harm, to help end the cycle of violence and provide victims more choice in addressing safety concerns and housing needs. We also support legislation to strengthen protective orders (POs).

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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