



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

## 2026 DRAFT Human Development & Education Policy Statement

### I. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The strength of our communities determines the strength of our democracy. Emotional, social, and economic poverty weakens the fabric of our society and threatens our democracy. Policy leaders must ensure access to opportunities and invest the proper resources necessary for all children to grow up in nurturing surroundings, and to reconnect and strengthen the bonds of individuals and institutions in communities so that they thrive and favorably compete in the global economy.

#### A PLATFORM FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

VML endorses the National League of Cities' Platform for Children and Families which recognizes that strong communities are built on a foundation of strong families and neighborhoods. VML supports and encourages efforts by our communities and the state that emphasize:

- Opportunities to learn and grow: family literacy programs, quality out-of-school time programs and early childhood programs;
- Safe neighborhoods to call home: sufficient state support for local law enforcement, juvenile justice, and re-entry programs;
- Healthy lifestyles and environment: improving access to healthy foods, physical activity, and recreation programs; and
- Financially resilient families: workforce development, curbing predatory lending, and increasing access to mainstream banking and financial services and other resources to advance their economic mobility.

VML supports approaches (such as the Virginia Grocery Incentive Fund) to provide financial and technical support for businesses to expand and ensure greater access to healthy food for residents of the state as well as improving people's ability to get to grocery stores and community gardens.

#### INTERGOVERNMENTAL ISSUES & FUNDING

Federal, state, and local governments share the same citizens and same taxpayers. Local governments request a restoration of a meaningful and fiscally balanced intergovernmental partnership in human services and education.

## **A working partnership.**

- The federal and state governments should allow local governments maximum flexibility in developing and funding public/private partnerships to address human service needs.
- Local government must be a partner with the state and federal government in the process of developing regulations, policies, and funding allocation methods.
- The State should require interagency review of regulations to reconcile conflicts and to avoid duplication among agencies.
- The State should share data with communities and build a comprehensive human services database to promote greater planning coordination and evaluation of services.

**Funding commitments.** Human services funding formulae should reflect identified needs, adequate resources to meet those needs, and not pit localities against each other. Equity in funding cannot be achieved by simply redistributing insufficient state aid among jurisdictions.

**Cost shifting and unfunded mandates.** VML opposes the imposition of new federal or state requirements without the funding to pay for them. If the state reduces its funding and assistance to localities, it must ease or eliminate requirements it is unwilling to support. In the case of federal mandates, the state must at the very least maintain its share of responsibility for program supervision and funding. For example:

- funding the administration of the FAMIS eligibility and case management;
- paying the cost of federal penalties when the state does not meet its obligations for human services programs, including adequate administrative funding, technology, training, and technical assistance necessary to properly do the job;
- maintaining state funding for the costs for federally mandated and state-supervised programs such as adoption assistance, and
- upholding the state funding ratio for local welfare administrative costs, in which the state pays 80 percent, and the localities pay 20 percent.

## **WORKFORCE NEEDS**

VML recognizes the challenges faced by localities in attracting and retaining employees in the human services arena, including public health, social services, behavioral health, and juvenile justice, as well as the public pre-K-12 system. Local governments support efforts in cooperation with state and private partners and the K-12 and higher educational system to create more comprehensive and supportive career paths for this vital workforce.

## **ADULT SERVICES**

**Community programs.** As alternatives to institutionalized care wherever appropriate, the state should develop Medicaid waivers or otherwise fully fund community-based programs like companion services, respite care, homemaker services, and adult day programs.

**Housing.** The state should support policies that increase the affordability and availability of senior housing throughout the Commonwealth.

## **OPIOIDS, HEROIN, SYNTHETIC DRUGS**

VML supports an intergovernmental and interdisciplinary partnership to address the epidemic of opioid (including fentanyl) and heroin overdoses and deaths in Virginia. Further, VML urges federal and state action to address the public health threats posed by any emerging synthetic drugs that pose a similar threat.

VML supports a statewide policy framework that targets the following:

- prevention - tracking and reduction of the supply of illegal opiates such as heroin and synthetic substances; continuing efforts with the medical community to limit use/prescribing of opioid medications; and educating vulnerable communities and populations about the risks of these drugs;
- harm reduction – active intervention until treatment is available and accepted;
- treatment – for those who are addicted, and support/recovery resources for family members of people in treatment; and
- culture change - discourage use/overuse of legal opioids and remove stigma regarding addiction treatment and recovery for individuals of all ages and their families.

## **BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**

### **Planning for the future of the community & facility system.**

Any plan for the publicly funded behavioral health and developmental services system should include adequate state funding for:

- A community-based, comprehensive system of care;
- Crisis intervention teams and centers to ensure that adults and children experiencing a mental health crisis can obtain timely evaluation and assistance as close to their home community as possible;
- A robust statewide system of alternative transportation and custody options to help individuals in crisis get to evaluation services and treatment and eliminates the reliance on local law enforcement for extended transportation and custody services;
- Accessibility to inpatient beds and crisis services on a regional basis, including public-private partnerships, to decrease long-distance transports for critical care;
- Comprehensive services and support for people returning to the community from any type of state facilities (public safety as well as behavioral health), as well as for people diverted from state facilities.
- Children’s mental health services, including community-based early interventions and the Mental Health Initiative;
- Medicaid waivers to eliminate service waiting lists; and
- Availability of services for individuals voluntarily seeking treatment services, regardless of their ability to pay.

Private and federal grant opportunities (including SAMHSA funds) and robust state revenues offer an opportunity for the state to make new investments in the community-based system of care (which includes public and private service providers) and to state hospitals to maintain vital services.

Investments must go to both build the community network of care and assist state hospitals to mend the safety-net and create the infrastructure necessary to serve Virginians of all ages. This

cannot be a zero-sum funding situation whether one part of the system benefits at the cost of the parts of the system.

VML supports Community Services Boards (CSBs) as the single point-of-entry into the publicly funded system of care and as a choice for services to individuals and families.

Any restructuring plan should assure the following:

- Local flexibility in planning and service provision, particularly for local-only funds;
- No changes in the local match that would increase the burden on local budgets or shift local-only funds to other localities;
- Meaningful consultation with local officials and community services boards regarding strategies and funding proposals for publicly funded services;
- Sufficient time and opportunity for public comment on legislative proposals;
- Strategies to discourage the concentration of consumers in facility communities; and
- State facilities are not so drastically reduced that the potential for inpatient care is effectively eliminated.

**Crisis response and Marcus Alert.** Successful implementation of the crisis response component of the STEP-VA program and the Marcus Alert program and protocols requires sufficient and sustained state funding and technical assistance to communities- along with continuing review of program data and community experiences to gauge progress and determine where funding and assistance is needed to ensure greater success. State program funding should not come at the expense of other community-based service initiatives and requirements; nor should the burden of funding these initiatives be shifted to local governments.

**Part C early intervention.** VML urges the General Assembly to assure full state funding for infants and toddlers eligible for therapeutic services under Part C of IDEA to improve their school readiness and quality of life.

**Behavioral health services for youth.** The state should build upon its funding and seek federal-state funded waivers to provide behavioral health services, in particular, prevention services for youth. VML supports greater state funding to the Mental Health Initiative and other community-based initiatives to diagnose and serve children with behavioral health needs early, to prevent more complex, costly, and restrictive interventions.

**Treatment beds.** The state has greatly decreased state facility beds and state-funded services for children, including those with long-term or hard-to-treat conditions, and those in the state and local juvenile detention system. VML urges the state to continue its support of the Commonwealth Center for Children and Adolescents as a part of the array of behavioral health services, and to fund treatment beds for those committed to the juvenile justice system. Further, the state should fund supportive services for children leaving treatment and their families to further stabilize their living situations and allow for recovery.

**Mental health parity.** The Federal Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act of 2008 (MHPAEA) generally provides that financial requirements - such as co-pays and coinsurance - and treatment limitation - such as visit limits - imposed on mental health or substance use

disorders (MH/SUD) cannot be more restrictive than those applied to substantially all medical/surgical benefits.

For Virginia, failure of insurance plans to adhere to federal and state standards can shift the burden of costs to the public system (such as CSA and CSBs), often at the point when an individual requires more intensive services.

VML supports the 2020 recommendations of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to strengthen and expand the Virginia Bureau of Insurance oversight of insurance plans and compliance with federal and state mental health parity requirements.

**Mental health service access for community college students.** VML supports efforts by the Virginia Community College System to seek state funding to address the mental health needs of students through partnerships with community services boards to support and keep adult learners in school and on track to meet career goals and greater financial independence. Such partnerships with CSBs should be separate from the local match for CSB services.

## **CHILDREN’S SERVICES ACT**

When the CSA was developed in the early 1990s, the plan called for comprehensive prevention programs for at risk youth and families. Unless the state commits to developing and funding services that address the root issues that bring children and families into CSA, the CSA program will continue as an expensive “catch-up” approach to addressing the complex needs of children and families.

**CSA state and local funding partnership.** Local governments administer the Children’s Services Act (CSA) program on behalf of the state, and local governments share in the funding responsibilities with the state. Local governments have consistently supported efforts to contain costs for the program, particularly the private special education program. VML adamantly opposes the capping of state funding responsibility for any component of the CSA program, which simply shifts the funding burden onto local governments. *(new language to address state budget actions to cap state reimbursements for private special education day programs.)*

**Administrative funding.** VML supports greater funding from the state to support the program’s substantial administrative requirements carried out at the local level.

**Base-budget funding.** The costs of CSA should be fully funded in the state’s base budget.

**Expansion of the mandated population.** VML opposes attempts to expand the CSA mandated population. VML also opposes efforts to expand local responsibility for Medicaid match to new categories of individuals, or to require localities to pay the educational costs for children placed in residential treatment outside of the local FAPT process.

**Incentive funding.** The CSA funding formula should include an incentive component that rewards those local governments implementing innovative and cost-effective interventions.

1 **State agency policy coordination.** The State Executive Council must ensure that the  
2 administrative and policy requirements of the state agencies involved in the CSA are consistent  
3 with one another and consistently applied to local governments.  
4

5 **Service coordination.** State and local governments should work together to ensure the greatest  
6 degree of coordination between Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and CSA service plans.  
7

8 **Sum sufficiency.** CSA serves many children who are entitled to sum sufficient services; the  
9 state must keep its commitment to fund its share of services costs for this population.  
10

11 **Utilization review.** Local governments must maintain the flexibility to develop utilization  
12 management processes that are approved by the State Executive Council.  
13

14 **Fair rates and statewide contracts.** VML supports state oversight of special education private  
15 day and residential program rates. VML supports state contracts that localities may use to  
16 procure such services.  
17

## 18 **FACILITIES FOR ADULTS AND YOUTH**

19 **Auxiliary grant program.** The state should assume full responsibility for the cost of the  
20 auxiliary grant program.  
21

22 **Licensure and regulation of group homes.** VML urges the state to continue to work with local  
23 governments to assure adequate licensure and regulatory requirements to meet resident and  
24 community needs.  
25

## 26 **HOMELESSNESS**

27 VML supports measures to prevent homelessness in Virginia and to assist the chronic homeless,  
28 including veterans, in obtaining appropriate rehabilitative and recovery services, job training and  
29 support, and affordable and appropriate housing. VML urges further state support for the housing  
30 trust fund to help communities develop and support housing for this population.  
31

## 32 **LOCAL AND REGIONAL JAILS**

33 **Jail per diems.** There is no requirement in the Code of Virginia to adjust per diem rates to keep  
34 pace with actual costs. VML requests that the Code of Virginia be amended to require that jail  
35 per diem rates for all offenders held in a local or regional jail, including those awaiting  
36 sentencing or serving (tier I) and state-responsible offenders (tier II) be regularly adjusted for  
37 inflation in line with the Consumer Price Index so that per diem payments keep pace with actual  
38 costs, such as is done with other areas of the budget (e.g., Standards of Quality).  
39

40 **State-responsible inmates in local/regional jails.** Local and regional jails should have a choice  
41 as to whether they will keep state-responsible inmates (tier II) in their facility after the 60-days  
42 from the date of the final sentencing order. Willing facilities could contract with the state to  
43 keep such inmates past the 60-day period; those jails unable to keep state-responsible inmates  
44 due to space or resource limitations should not be compelled to keep state inmates past the 60-  
45 day period.  
46

**Behavioral health regulations for jails.** The 2019 General Assembly approved legislation directing the Board of Local and Regional Jails to draft standards for new regulations to address health and behavioral health service needs in local and regional jails, as well as discharge planning for inmates with behavioral health needs. VML supports sufficient and sustained state funding to meet these new requirements including enhanced per diem payments and otherwise funding new positions and associated costs through the Compensation Board for newly required services.

**Substance abuse and behavioral health needs in the justice system.** VML supports the creation of state-funded programs and facilities, and funding of current programs, such as drug courts and day reporting centers, to divert individuals with mental illness and substance use disorders from jails and juvenile detention into appropriate community-based or in-patient treatment programs. VML supports state funding for programs in local and regional jails to address mental health and substance use disorder issues among inmates and connect individuals with continued assistance upon release but opposes changes in state funding formulae to turn local and regional jails into in-patient behavioral health treatment centers.

**Waiver for behavioral health-substance use medication services.** VML supports efforts by the Virginia Department of Medical Assistance Services to apply for a 1115 demonstration waiver from the Centers for Medicare/Medicaid. This waiver, approved in nine states and pending in 11 states and the District of Columbia, allows correctional facilities to better respond to the behavioral health/substance use disorder medical needs of incarcerated individuals up to 90 days before they re-enter the community. In Virginia, it would help our local and regional jails pay for medication services for incarcerated individuals with behavioral health or substance use disorders that could help lead to better outcomes when these individuals return home to their communities.

## **JUVENILE JUSTICE PROGRAMS**

**Local and regional juvenile detention facilities.** Local and regional juvenile detention facilities are an integral part of the continuum of Virginia's juvenile justice system. Local governments pay a large share of operational as well as capital costs for these facilities, and the staff are local employees. As facility populations have decreased over time from licensed capacity levels, facilities have reduced operational beds and staffing.

A major consideration in maintaining a system of local and regional detention facilities is to serve youth closer to their communities, to their families, to the courts with which they are involved, and the legal counsel assisting them.

Imposing state pressure to consolidate and close facilities affects everyone involved: youth are moved farther from their community, family, their legal counsel, and the court with which they are involved; families must travel farther and incur greater expense to visit and participate in sessions at the center; and the facilities and law enforcement incur greater costs for transporting youth greater distances.

Any state-level discussion of local and regional detention facilities must include the major stakeholders involved in the system, including the judiciary, the detention facility managers, and

youth/family advocates. Discussions should also include the need for localities/region to open a detention facility to serve the needs of their communities instead of having to send youth long distances for a bed.

Such discussion should also look at ways to improve facilities by updating key infrastructure; to find ways to address state requirements for education in facilities; and to better address the behavioral health needs of youth to ensure better outcomes when they return to their communities.

**Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA).** The Virginia Municipal League urges the General Assembly to restore the 71 percent funding reduction taken in the early 2000s to the Virginia Juvenile Community Crime Control Act (VJCCCA) program, and to support an equitable and stable funding allocation process for the program.

The VJCCCA directs localities, in cooperation with judges, court-services unit directors, and Community Policy and Management Teams under the Children’s Services Act to implement programs that divert youth from state or local confinement or help ensure the success of those re-entering the community from confinement. Every city and county participate in the program.

VJCCCA gives judges the ability to order first-time and less serious offenders to services such as electronic monitoring, intensive individual or family counseling, and group homes. Such appropriate services reduce costlier and less suitable placements in local secure detention or state prisons. It also serves non-mandated youth under the Children’s Services Act.

VML opposes any effort to divert existing VJCCCA funds for other purposes; any new populations proposed for services under this program must be accompanied by additional state funding.

**System transformation.** VML supports juvenile justice system transformation that:

- Gives juvenile detention centers flexibility, not mandates, to contract with the state to house lower-risk offenders from state facilities;
- Pays juvenile detention facilities the actual costs for housing and serving lower-risk offenders from the state; and
- Allows the Department to reinvest savings or otherwise provides sufficient, stable funding to implement a treatment continuum with more service and treatment options and support to ensure better outcomes and lower recidivism.

## **SOCIAL SERVICES**

**Family First Prevention Services Act.** Approved by Congress in 2018, the FFPS Act is the first major revision of the title IV-E foster care program since the early 1980s. Changes in the program’s requirements and allowable services require cooperation between the state, local governments, and private service providers to ensure successful implementation. VML supports this cooperative effort but opposes any proposal to impose new local match requirements to this program.



1 **Child and family services program improvement plan.** The state must fund the technology  
2 and systems to improve the quality of all casework activities related to child welfare services  
3 (prevention of child abuse/neglect; prevention foster care, foster care, and adoption).  
4

5 **Childcare.** Affordable, high-quality childcare is crucial to parents in the Temporary Assistance  
6 to Needy Families (TANF) program and to low-income parents whose wages cannot cover  
7 childcare costs. The state must help fund childcare costs to help these families. The state should  
8 consider ways to ensure safe, affordable childcare, such as grants for nonprofit or public  
9 organizations offering childcare, and employer incentives to provide child care centers or other  
10 assistance for their employees.  
11

12 **TANF Expanded Program Funding.** As balances in the Temporary Assistance to Needy  
13 Families (TANF) program diminish, VML supports recommendations of a Virginia Department  
14 of Social Services block grant workgroup (2023) that focus on ensuring structural balance;  
15 evaluating grantee performance data in furthering the statutory purposes of the TANF program  
16 (e.g., promoting job preparation/work and formation and maintenance of two-parent families;  
17 assisting needy families so that children can be cared for at home); and determining what other  
18 resources, if any, such programs receive. If TANF balances are insufficient to fund programs  
19 with promising or proven results, the state should continue to support them using state general  
20 funds.  
21

22 **Social Services Block Grant.** Virginia uses Title XX-Social Services Block Grant (SSBG)  
23 funding for a variety of non-cash-assistance services, including in-home services for the elderly,  
24 child and adult abuse investigators, and domestic abuse and family preservation services.  
25 Congress has consistently underfunded the SSBG at the levels authorized in the 1996 federal  
26 welfare reform law. VML urges Congress to live up to its commitment to fully fund the SSBG.  
27 Until the federal budget fully funds SSBG, VML urges the General Assembly to continue to first  
28 use any Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) balances to replace SSBG funds.  
29

## 30 **PARKS & RECREATION**

31 **Recreational programs.** Local parks and recreation departments offer a variety of affordable  
32 activities and programs for children, teenagers, and adults. These programs abide by local  
33 health, safety, and risk-management requirements and are ultimately accountable to the local  
34 governing body. Efforts to categorize these programs as childcare are inappropriate, and such  
35 recreation programs should not be subject to duplicative state agency regulation and oversight.  
36

## 37 **HEALTH**

38 **Cooperative health budget.** The General Assembly should provide sufficient funding to local  
39 health departments. VML opposes any efforts by the state to impose new local funding  
40 requirements on local health departments.  
41

42 **Local flexibility.** District health offices should be locally controlled to the maximum extent  
43 consistent with protecting public health.  
44

**Emergency-related infrastructure and needs.** Sufficient state funds should be provided for public health emergency services to enable the state and local health departments and stakeholders to better prepare for and respond to public health emergencies, such as a pandemic.

**Health IT needs.** Increased investment is needed for public health information technology and staff so that critical, timely information about public health emergencies is made available to policy makers, first responders, and the public.

## **HEALTH CARE REFORM**

VML supports continued state funding for Medicaid eligibility determination services.

## **HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

VML supports the state's efforts to address human trafficking, including the appointment of a sex trafficking response coordinator at the Department of Criminal Justice Services and the proposed development of much-needed public outreach, education, and treatment services. Outreach efforts and avenues for reporting trafficking must address language barriers for those reporting and those seeking rescue from trafficking. Since human trafficking also includes labor trafficking and affects a wide range of ages, all types of trafficking situations should ultimately be addressed in Virginia's response plan.

## **II. EDUCATION**

The Virginia Municipal League supports the goal of ensuring quality, well-funded and effective teaching in every classroom in the Commonwealth. Localities have greatly exceeded their responsibilities for K-12 education funding. It is essential for the state to fully meet its responsibilities to fund education.

### **VISION**

A strong public education system is the pillar of American society and a passport to the future. Our country cannot be strong without an excellent education system that prepares students for the future with the critical thinking skills that will enable them to be productive citizens. A solid foundation of learning is essential for our communities, state, and country. A strong public school system is essential to economic development and prosperity.

A strong educational system requires accountability; parental, community and business involvement; and the wise and efficient use of resources. Standards are an essential part of the accountability system but cannot be measured simply by standardized tests. Students need to learn not only facts and figures, but also those critical learning skills that will enable them to leave high school prepared for either the workplace or higher education.

Students, parents, school administrators and teachers all have roles in the educational system and must be part of that accountability system. Parents should be involved with their children's education, but support for parents is essential, particularly for those whose children have behavioral health issues, physical disabilities, substance abuse disorders or bullying problems.

1 Students across the economic spectrum should have equitable opportunities to learn in a variety  
2 of settings, including vocational and career preparation programs as well as in four-year  
3 university programs.

4  
5 A sound education system puts resources where they can be most effective, includes  
6 collaboration between school boards and local governing bodies, uses technology effectively,  
7 embraces innovation and regional opportunities and focuses on early intervention to tackle  
8 problems at the earliest time possible.

## 9 10 **STANDARDS OF QUALITY**

11 The SOQ should be broad enough to include the major components of what is required for a  
12 quality educational program.

13 The current SOQ does not reflect the actual cost of a sound public education system. These  
14 standards are not based on prevailing practices, nor do they reflect the cost of meeting state  
15 accountability standards. Because of this disconnect between the accountability standards and the  
16 SOQ, the cost that the state recognizes in its funding formulas is too low, and too much of the  
17 burden of funding public education falls on local governments.

18  
19 The state and local governments should partner to determine the minimum funding levels  
20 necessary to sustain high quality services for schools and other local government operations  
21 while also addressing capital and maintenance needs.

22  
23 VML supports the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission findings to determine how  
24 the SOQ may be revised and adequately funded to meet the requirements contained in the  
25 Standards of Learning and Standards of Accreditation. VML also supports the implementation  
26 of JLARC recommendations included in the recent study to promote overall academic  
27 performance.

## 28 29 **SOQ FUNDING**

30 VML supports full funding of the state's share of the actual costs of the SOQ based on prevailing  
31 practices, and full funding of the state's share of categorical educational mandates in areas such  
32 as special education, alternative education, and gifted education.

33  
34 The state should fully recognize and fund the costs of rebenchmarking of the various educational  
35 programs including the Standards of Quality, incentive, categorical, and school facilities  
36 programs. Changing the process of rebenchmarking to artificially lower recognized costs does  
37 not change what it actually costs to provide education. Instead, it simply transfers additional  
38 costs to local governments, and ultimately to the local real estate tax base.

39  
40 The state must be a reliable funding partner in accordance with the Virginia Constitution and  
41 state statutes. The Standards of Quality should recognize resources, including positions, required  
42 for a high-quality public education system.

43  
44 The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) completed a two-year study in  
45 July 2023 regarding the cost of education in Virginia and making an accurate assessment of the  
46 costs of the Standards of Quality (SOQ). JLARC made several recommendations to update the

1 SOQ in the short and long term. The recommendations included items VML has long supported,  
2 including the elimination of the support cap and providing additional staff and funding for staff.

3  
4 VML supports the findings and recommendations of the 2023 JLARC study and encourages the  
5 General Assembly to implement these recommendations to ensure the overall success of students  
6 across the Commonwealth.

7  
8 Funding for the SOQ should include:

- 9 1. Establishment of a new, predictable, and meaningful source of funding for construction,  
10 including funding for new construction, renovation, maintenance, and land purchase. The  
11 Literary Fund and the Virginia Public School Authority are not sufficient means for the  
12 state to help localities pay for capital needs and should be expanded.
- 13 2. VML supports the statewide authority for local governments to impose a one percent  
14 sales tax to help raise funds for school construction and renovation. For those already  
15 imposing an approved one percent sales tax for local or regional special funding needs,  
16 an additional one percent for school infrastructure funding should be authorized for  
17 school construction and renovation purposes. Options could include creating a two-year  
18 pilot program of competitive grants using funds from the Virginia Public Building  
19 Authority to offset new construction or renovation costs for publicly owned and operated  
20 K-12 schools in fiscally stressed communities as defined by the Virginia Commission on  
21 Local Government.
- 22 3. A predictable and reliable source of funding for technology infrastructure and personnel  
23 costs.
- 24 4. Realistic state funding for salary increases for professional and non-professional school  
25 employees. Salary increases should be funded for a full year starting July 1, the start of  
26 the fiscal year.
- 27 5. State funding to meet the goal of the Commonwealth (VA Code §22.1-289.1) that teacher  
28 compensation be competitive; at a minimum, at or above national average teacher  
29 compensation, provided that the true costs of meeting the SOQ are funded by the state.
- 30 6. Funding to initiate and continue to enable school systems to address school safety issues.
- 31 7. Recognition of adequate support costs based on realistic measures of the importance of  
32 support positions to achievement on state accountability standards. Current state funding  
33 for support positions is not based on prevailing practices or on any scientifically derived  
34 staffing ratios.
- 35 8. Flexibility where possible in areas such as funding of student health services.
- 36 9. Support for funding of recommendations made by JLARC to promote reading by grade  
37 level by the third grade.
- 38 10. Development of realistic cost estimates that are based on prevailing practices and not on  
39 the availability of state funding.
- 40 11. Review by JLARC in order that data and information can be provided to the State Board  
41 of Education on the cost of meeting the SOQ, SOLs and SOAs.
- 42 12. Lottery funds are distributed to localities without a corresponding reduction in direct aid.
- 43 13. Assessing school construction maintenance needs.

44  
45 The state should not require any maintenance of local effort other than that associated with the  
46 SOQ. A maintenance of effort requirement that is not connected to the SOQ will punish those

1 localities that voluntarily spent beyond the required minimum in an effort to achieve a high-  
2 quality system of education. Further, it will simply perpetuate the current mismatch in state-local  
3 funding for education.

4  
5 The General Assembly should recognize that local governments traditionally have funded their  
6 share of costs of meeting the SOQ and, in fact, most have funded education beyond their  
7 required share in efforts to provide quality education. These higher funding levels have meant  
8 that localities have had to raise local taxes and fees and defer spending on other important local  
9 priorities including public safety.

10  
11 The local composite index (LCI) is a crude and often inaccurate proxy for determining the ability  
12 of each locality to pay its share of K-12 expenses as defined by the SOQ. The Commonwealth's  
13 education funding formulae (SOQ and LCI) are more sensitive to the state's revenue situation  
14 than the educational needs of Virginia's students. VML supports a JLARC or other state study  
15 that examines the ways other states fund education and whether the Commonwealth should use a  
16 funding strategy that establishes a more realistic base foundation amount per pupil – plus add-on  
17 funding to reflect higher costs for educating at-risk, disabled, ESL, and gifted students, etc.

18  
19 Because spending increases alone may not produce desired levels of student achievement, the  
20 State Board of Education and other responsible bodies are urged to develop measures of results  
21 to determine the actual effectiveness of expenditures on education. VML supports the use of  
22 school efficiency reviews to help determine ways to ensure that public funds are spent as  
23 effectively and efficiently as possible.

24  
25 VML believes that the methodology for costing the SOQ does not consider the differences in  
26 costs in the state's various regions, nor does it adequately address unique local conditions such as  
27 small, large, declining, or diverse student populations.

- 28
- 29 1. The methodology artificially lowers the state average salary by using the "L-estimator"  
30 instead of average salary figures.
  - 31 2. The L-estimator is based on dated information that does not reflect current salary levels.
  - 32 3. The methodology uses an artificially low limit on the number of professionals per 1,000  
33 pupils for which state aid is given.
  - 34 4. the methodology does not address the differences in providing education to students with  
35 special needs or the heavy additional cost of educating English as Second Language  
36 students. The add-on funding for at-risk students is a start toward meeting unique local  
37 circumstances and should be increased.

38  
39 The first priority for the use of a state surplus should be the funding of mandated educational  
40 programs.

41  
42 Disparity should not be addressed by simply redistributing existing state aid among jurisdictions.

## **LOCAL AUTONOMY**

Because public education should be as close as possible to the people, local school decisions cannot and should not be made by the state. Local school boards should be responsible for the direct supervision and management of local schools.

The state should not take any actions that limit authority of local school boards and local governing bodies to finance and manage local schools. Otherwise, decisions that affect the funding of public schools potentially could be made by a statewide, appointed body that has no direct connection to the council or board of supervisors.

**Authority over local school funding** VML supports the codified practice as of July 1, 2024, whereby local school boards may keep any unexpended funds at the end of the fiscal year as approved by its local governing body. VML supports maintaining the authority of local governing bodies to make this determination because they are responsible for raising the revenue that comprises the local share of funding appropriated to a school board to support K-12 public education in the community. VML encourages local governments to work cooperatively with their school boards on these issues.

## **COLLEGE LABORATORY SCHOOLS**

Local school boards should retain the responsibility for approving applications for charter or college partnership lab schools. VML opposes any diversion of state funds or other resources intended for local public schools to fund lab schools or state directives to shift local funding or resources for those schools.

If the state officials or boards proceed down the path to expanding the size and scope of state government by creating new types of “public” school systems that use public funds but are not supervised by a local school board, any group proposing to operate such schools should be required to demonstrate that their systems address diversity and equity in admissions and meet the same requirements imposed on local school systems.

## **SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION**

The School Construction Grant Fund was created by the General Assembly to provide funding assistance to localities for school construction and maintenance needs. Localities may receive grants from this fund based on a point system created by the General Assembly to be calculated and awarded by the Board of Education. In the 2022-2024 biennium the state provided \$450 million for the program because the intended source of revenue, the Gaming Proceeds Fund, lacked sufficient resources to fund this initiative.

The School Construction Grant Fund should continue to be funded by the State at the current rate of \$450 million annually or higher until the Gaming Proceeds Fund has sufficient resources to ensure any locality with enough points to qualify may receive a grant. Further, revenue in the Gaming Proceeds Fund should be used for the School Construction Grant Fund consistent with the Code of Virginia.

## **ALTERNATIVE AND SECONDARY EDUCATION NEEDS**

**Alternative Education:** Traditional approaches to discipline—long-term suspensions and expulsions—transfer the problems of the student from the school division to the general government. There should continue to be school alternatives to the traditional school environment for students who do not behave appropriately or otherwise do not thrive in traditional school environments. The state should develop and fund alternatives, including workforce development grants, for students suspended and expelled from school, such as programs designed to encourage obtainment of GEDs, career education, job skills, self-control training and drug and substance prevention. Finally, there is little effective enforcement of truancy laws for students who are over 16 years of age. Some of these students have full-time jobs and school divisions have difficulty in locating them. VML encourages the development of initiatives to better enable schools to track these older students, or otherwise determine if changes are needed to truancy laws.

**Secondary Education.** VML supports the implementation of policy approved previously by the State Board of Education regarding advanced diploma requirements. *(Added by the committee to address issue with advanced diploma requirements and IB and JROTC programs.)*

## **EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION**

Research has shown that the early childhood years (from infancy to age five) are critical years for brain development. These early years are also critical for establishing healthy lifestyles – eating nutritious foods, engaging in activities and exercise (i.e., playing), and learning basic health and safety practices.

Children who are regularly read to and gain basic language skills, who participate in healthy activities and learning experiences, and who learn basic social skills are more likely to enter kindergarten ready to learn. They are also more likely to read at grade level by the third grade. This early progress can lead to continued success in school and ultimately in the workforce.

VML supports state and local policies and initiatives that spotlight and encourage greater early learning opportunities for children, along with access to information and resources that will help parents and caregivers give young children the greatest chances to learn and grow in healthy ways. This will ensure a better economic future for families and communities.

VML supports increased state funding for pre-kindergarten students to ensure that all children entering the public system have the social and intellectual skills necessary to be successful students.

## **LIBRARIES**

VML supports state funding to help local and regional public library systems remain robust and prepared to meet the growing needs of their communities.

## **HIGHER EDUCATION**

Currently, community colleges are required to offer reduced tuition for high school students. Local schools, however, are required to make up for the difference in tuition. This clearly is an unfunded mandate. The state should find other resources within its higher education budget to

1 pay for the tuition for these students or assist institutions of higher education in finding resources  
2 to help offset the cost of tuition.

3  
4 **WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

5 VML supports innovative approaches, including creation of satellite campuses, to ensure that  
6 training and certification programs are widely available to high school students, GED candidates,  
7 returning veterans, and other residents, particularly those representing underserved and at-risk  
8 populations. Such programs are vital to prepare Virginians for careers important to Virginia's  
9 economic prosperity.