

2026



Legislative Program

BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

Dear Legislator:

Since 1905, the nonprofit, nonpartisan Virginia Municipal League (VML) has worked on behalf of Virginia's local governments. VML strives to keep local elected and appointed staff informed of current and emerging issues at the state level, offers educational materials and conferences, and gives local officials opportunities to network and work with one another on issues of mutual concern for the benefit of their communities.

VML's membership consists of 37 cities, 170 towns, and nine counties. These communities are the places many of you call home. They are also your partners in administering and funding a wide range of public services benefiting Virginia residents, including public education, public safety, environmental protection, transportation, and human services.

This brochure features our 2026 Legislative Program which draws upon the policy statements developed by our members to identify the issues of greatest importance to communities across Virginia. As you address the challenges facing the Commonwealth, we ask that you keep these issues in mind.

Our member local governments and the league staff look forward to working with you during the 2026 General Assembly Session. We are here to help answer questions and provide information you need about local government operations, authority, and the potential impact of legislative and budget-related initiatives the come forward during the Session. Please email, text, or call us if you have questions. We can meet with you virtually or in person as best suits you.

Thank you for your service to Virginia.

Sincerely,



Dwayne Tuggle
President, Virginia Municipal League
Mayor, Town of Amherst

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.



2026 VML Legislative Program

As approved by the VML Membership on October 13, 2025.

Guiding Principle: Local Authority

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

Legislative Priorities

Local Land Use

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 infill development, redevelopment, and mixing of uses. Any mandate from the state should include full funding for the locality.

Local Revenue Sources

Local tax revenues are primarily derived from real estate, personal property (i.e., car tax), local sales and uses, Business, Professional, Occupational Licensing (BPOL), meals and transient occupancy taxes. These revenues are used to fund each locality's priorities that tend to focus on K-12 education and public safety. VML cannot support initiatives that phase out or eliminate sources of revenue to cities, counties, and towns without a firm commitment of ongoing general fund resources to offset local revenue losses.

Support for Public Education

A General Assembly joint subcommittee continues examining recommendations from the 2023 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) report on the Standards of Quality (SOQ), including recommendations on updating the SOQ in the short- and long-run. VML encourages the General Assembly to expeditiously implement and fund the JLARC recommendations to more equitably share the costs of K-12 public education with local governments and to ensure the overall success of students across the Commonwealth.

VML supports solutions to address school construction and renovation needs (estimated at \$25.0 billion), including statewide local authority for a local one percent sales tax for school construction by referendum.

VML supports innovation in public schools but opposes efforts to limit local authority or to divert state funds from the public education system.

Legislative Program Items

Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

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

Assistance to Local Police Departments (HB 599 Program)

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.

Authority for Retired Law Enforcement to Handle Temporary Detention Orders

Allow retired law enforcement officers to handle Temporary Detention Orders (TDO's).

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

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.

Clarification of Franchise Fees: Non-monetary Benefits

Clarify that the Code of Virginia's prohibition of franchise fees refers only to monetary fees and does not prevent local governments from negotiating for non-monetary benefits.

Compensation for Wrongful Incarceration for Certain Intentional Acts

VML urges the General Assembly to reconsider recent legislation (H.B. 1914, 2025 General Assembly) related to compensation for wrongful incarceration. Specifically, we urge the General Assembly to provide localities with the same discretion given to the Commonwealth regarding compensation in wrongful incarceration cases in which the person has been declared innocent or received an absolute pardon for a crime the person did not commit. We also request removal of language regarding withholding of state funding to a locality in such cases.

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 day special education program. VML adamantly opposes the capping of state funding responsibility for this and any other component of the CSA program, which simply shifts the funding burden for mandated services onto local governments.

Deed Fraud

VML supports legislation that will assist in reducing the number of fraudulent deed transactions in the Commonwealth.

Housing – Tools for Local Communities to Meet Housing Needs

Understanding the Commonwealth-wide need for more attainable, low-income and affordable housing, we support legislation and funding that enables localities to better meet their housing needs while respecting the critical role that local context and decision-making must play in development and planning.

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 community support systems, 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.

Referendum Authority for Towns

VML supports inclusion of towns in any legislation authorizing referenda by local governments, including but not limited to skill games legislation.

Sovereign Immunity

Expanding liability and eroding immunities at the state level 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 million to the Stormwater Local Assistance Fund (SLAF) in Fiscal Year 2026 to meet documented needs. VML Supports continued full state funding for the Water Quality Improvement Fund (WQIF).

Study of Mandatory Property Tax Exemptions

Real property tax revenues are the mainstay of local government budgets, and state mandates that reduce these revenues place pressure on other local government budget priorities, such as property tax relief for the elderly and disabled, funding for K-12 education, and the appropriate level of taxation for each locality. VML supports the Commonwealth convening a work group (i.e., JLARC or TAX) to analyze the rising cost of mandatory property tax exemptions for disabled veterans and their families, which has increased from \$8 million in 2011 to an estimated \$284 million in 2025, and make recommendations to address the loss of local revenue.

The Changing Federal Funding Situation

As the federal government fundamentally changes its funding relationship with states, localities, and organizations that serve communities, VML asks that the state prioritize its resources for vital services to help protect and serve children, families, and the most vulnerable in our communities.

VML Board of Directors



D. Dwayne Tuggle
President
Mayor, Town of Amherst



Michelle Davis-Younger
At-Large Member
Mayor,
City of Manassas



Curtis Bethany
Vice President
Vice Mayor,
City of Newport News



Becky Nave
At-Large Member
Mayor,
City of Bristol



Kelly Burk
President-Elect
Mayor, Town of Leesburg



Letty Hardi
At-Large Member
Mayor,
City of Falls Church



Steve Trivett
Immediate Past President
Mayor, Town of Ashland



Dany Fleming
Urban Section Chair
Vice Mayor,
City of Harrisonburg



Dr. Amelia Ross Hammond
At-Large Member
Councilmember,
City of Virginia Beach



Renée Turk
City Section Chair
Mayor,
City of Salem



Anthony Schienschang
At-Large Member
Town Manager,
Town of Gordonsville



Michael Stovall
Town Section Chair
Councilmember,
Town of Vinton



Robert Wood
At-Large Member
Town Manager,
Town of Rocky Mount

VML Legislative Committee

Chair: James Gray, Mayor, City of Hampton

Vice Chair: Brian Vincent, Mayor, Town of Farmville

Sarah Bagley, Vice Mayor, City of Alexandria

Leroy Bennett, Council Member, City of Suffolk

Curtis Bethany, Vice Mayor, City of Newport News

Joseph Cobb, Mayor, City of Roanoke

Maureen Coffey, Board Member, County of Arlington

Linda Jane Colbert, Mayor, Town of Vienna

Marybeth Connelly, Council Member, City of Falls Church

Zach Cummings, Council Member, Town of Leesburg

W. Pat Dent, Vice Mayor, City of Williamsburg

Dany Fleming, Vice Mayor, City of Harrisonburg

Frank Friedman, Mayor, City of Lexington

Shannon Glover, Mayor, City of Portsmouth

Keith Harless, Town Manager, Town of Pennington Gap

Jacob Holmes, Vice Mayor, City of Bristol

Alonzo Jones, Mayor, City of Danville

Bridge Littleton, Mayor, Town of Middleburg

Terry Short Jr., Councilman, City of Waynesboro

Lloyd Snook, City Councilor, City of Charlottesville

Vernon Tillage, Council Member, City of Portsmouth

Renée Turk, Mayor, City of Salem

Jason Tyree, City Manager, City of Buena Vista

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