



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

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## 2021 General Laws Policy Statement

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1 The basic purpose of local government is to provide essential services and protection for the community that  
2 citizens cannot provide for themselves. Local governments should decide which services and programs are  
3 of primary importance to the community. Virginia's counties, cities and towns need legislation that provides  
4 the maximum opportunity to foster improved quality of life and high-quality growth.

### 5 **I. Effective Government**

#### 6 **Government Structure**

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8  
9 The General Assembly should allow significant diversity among municipal charters and not impose  
10 uniformity.

11  
12 The General Assembly should promote the sharing of the economic, social, cultural, fiscal and educational  
13 benefits and burdens of urbanization among all local governments involved.

14  
15 The addition of sub-state and special district governments should be controlled. New districts should not be  
16 created by the General Assembly unless local governments are unable to furnish services. In addition, no  
17 sub-state districts, including planning district commissions, should be granted real or quasi-legislative  
18 authority to undertake other functions except when expressly directed by their member jurisdictions,  
19 including those towns not directly represented in the entity.

20  
21 VML urges a careful review of the statutes concerning consolidation of local governments to ensure (a) that  
22 citizen-initiated petitions are signed by a reasonable number of affected citizens who reside in the  
23 jurisdiction, and (b) adequate periods of time elapse between consolidation or annexation actions. The  
24 Virginia Municipal League supports the General Assembly's provision of financial incentives to promote  
25 consolidation of local government services and cooperative agreements among local governments.

#### 26 **Intergovernmental Issues**

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28 Local governments have a vital role in the Commonwealth. They must have sufficient powers and flexibility  
29 to meet this role. The General Assembly should adopt legislation to promote and expand, to the extent  
30 necessary, municipal powers, to (a) enhance the ability of local governments to provide services required by  
31 their citizens, and (b) allow local governments to meet their responsibilities in state/local partnerships.

32  
33 VML opposes intrusions into the way local governments conduct their business, including burdensome  
34 regulations relating to:

- 35 1. meetings of governing bodies;
- 36 2. purchasing procedures;
- 37 3. matters that can be enacted by resolution or ordinance;

- 38 4. procedures for adopting ordinances; and  
39 5. procedures for filling vacancies on local governing bodies.

40  
41 State intervention in local affairs is only warranted in significant matters where regional or statewide issues  
42 that are of great importance exist. No changes should be made in the laws or regulations affecting local  
43 government without substantial local input from affected jurisdictions and participation in developing those  
44 changes.

45  
46 VML opposes legislation that:

- 47 1. bars courts from awarding attorney's fees to local governments when a frivolous suit is filed; and  
48 2. eliminates the notice of claim requirement found in Va. Code, § 15.2-209.

49  
50 Membership on all state and regional commissions or committees dealing with matters affecting local  
51 governments must include local officials who represent a demographic and geographic cross-section of  
52 counties, cities, and towns.

53  
54 VML supports legislation to transfer responsibility from local governments to the state government for the  
55 liability, administration, and cost of community service options for persons upon whom court costs and fines  
56 are levied.

### 57 58 **Towns**

59 The General Assembly and the executive branch should recognize towns as essential units of local  
60 government, with important roles in providing services to citizens living in a concentrated environment. As  
61 such, towns with their centrality and economic efficiency represent the future of the urbanizing areas of the  
62 Commonwealth. Towns should have clear and full authority to be formed and to act in a timely manner on  
63 matters which protect public health, safety, and welfare.

64  
65 The General Assembly should respect and support the sovereignty, utility, and urban powers of towns. No  
66 legislation should be enacted that allows counties to usurp or diminish the authorities of towns. Excise taxes  
67 that counties are authorized to levy generally must not apply within towns without the explicit approval by  
68 the town's governing body.

69  
70 The General Assembly should scrutinize bills dealing with laws of general applications to local governments,  
71 to avoid enacting any laws that could be sources of possible conflicts between counties and towns. The  
72 following list provides examples of conflicts between towns and counties exacerbated by legislative action:

- 73 1. taxation of town residents by county governments at the same rate as that applied to those living in  
74 the county's unincorporated areas, when comparable benefits and services are not provided;  
75 2. county imposition of a merchants' capital tax on businesses located within the town at the same rate  
76 as that applied to businesses located in unincorporated areas of the county, when the town levies a  
77 business, professional and occupational license tax;  
78 3. unequal town zoning and planning authority for land straddling or abutting town corporate  
79 boundaries and unincorporated county areas;  
80 4. funding of county sheriffs' and deputy sheriffs' salaries by the State Compensation Board and other  
81 state-funded amenities not provided to town police departments; and  
82 5. unequal statutory authority of towns in relationship to that of cities and counties.

83  
84 The General Assembly should recognize the unintended consequences of inadvertently omitting towns or  
85 cities or counties from legislation. The state laws on local taxes must allow towns to determine how tax  
86 dollars collected from residents and businesses of the town will be used.

88 Towns should retain the right to annex lands and otherwise expand their boundaries. Towns over 5,000  
89 population should have the right to become independent cities; and cities should have the right to revert to  
90 town status.

91  
92 **Election Laws**

93 **Redistricting.** VML recognizes that while redistricting is a political process, the process should be  
94 conducted with the end goals of ensuring a strong and responsive representative form of government that  
95 enables citizens with communities of like interest to influence election outcomes through participation in the  
96 political process.

97  
98 VML supports redistricting reform, including the use of a non-partisan independent commission to draw  
99 state legislative and Congressional lines based on specified and consistent criteria, including insofar as  
100 possible preservation of the integrity of existing city, town, county and precinct lines.

101  
102 **Non-partisan local elections.** VML opposes attempts to require that candidates nominated by political  
103 parties for local elections be identified by party labels on ballots.

104  
105 Non-partisan elections at the municipal level are an outgrowth of the municipal reform movement that began  
106 developing at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in reaction to corruption at the local level. Another outgrowth of  
107 the excesses of local political machines was the development of the council-manager form of government  
108 and the development of a civil service personnel system. Nationwide, about 75 percent of municipalities  
109 have non-partisan elections. Virginia is not unique in this regard.

110  
111 There is not a partisan way of responding to public safety, street improvements, enforcing the codes, or  
112 taxation required for the various services that the state requires localities to offer (and to pay for). The result  
113 of requiring party identification will be increased partisanship at the local level, which will not improve local  
114 governance.

115 In addition, requiring party identification will hinder the ability of Federal Employees including our Military  
116 to participate as local elected officials.

117  
118 **Administration of election laws.** Cities and counties have very little control over the administration of  
119 elections, yet pay the majority of costs, including office overhead, voting equipment, equipment storage and  
120 security maintenance, training of staff, safety of staff and printing of ballots. Cities and counties also pay a  
121 portion of the costs of the salaries for registrars and members of electoral boards, to include salaries for staff  
122 other than the registrar, but have no direct connection to the appointment of these officials. The state should  
123 provide an adequate level of funding for local election administration that is commensurate with the State's  
124 extensive control of the process. The General Assembly should not increase the cost of election  
125 administration without providing state funding to pay for the increased expenditures.

126  
127 Localities often use schools as polling places and support the continuation of schools as polling places.

128  
129 **Timing of municipal elections.** VML opposes legislative attempts to require that municipal elections be  
130 held in November. Localities should continue to retain the ability to determine if their municipal elections  
131 are held in May or November.

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133 **Liberty Amendments Day**

134 VML supports the establishment and recognition of a Liberty Amendments Day in the Commonwealth to  
135 recognize the significance of the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 19<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and our  
136 continuing efforts to form a more perfect union. These amendments expand and reinforce the rights of all  
137 citizens to vote and participate in the governance of their local, state, and national governments. Unlike July  
138 4<sup>th</sup>, Bill of Rights Day, and Juneteenth, these Constitutional amendments currently have no one day as a

139 focus because they were ratified at different times in our nation’s history, but like these other properly  
140 recognized days, they represent basic rights and freedoms deserving of remembrance, honor, and reflection  
141 now and into the future.

142

### 143 **State and Federal Mandates**

144 The state and federal governments must provide adequate funding for any local programs or responsibilities  
145 that are mandated or expanded by state and federal laws or regulations.

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147 The federal and state governments should not use project funding as a means of forcing local land use  
148 decisions in contravention to local land use plans. These actions violate the principles of local authority and  
149 weaken the local tax base.

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151 Federal and state mandates must be reduced when funding is reduced, so that localities are not required to  
152 spend additional local dollars to comply with the mandates. Further, funds should be distributed in the most  
153 efficient way possible with the least regulatory control.

154

155 The Governor and General Assembly should promote state-local partnerships by requiring:

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157 1. A review of mandates in specific program areas to (a) establish the full cost to local governments of  
158 implementing mandates and (b) develop an equitable basis for determining state-local funding  
responsibilities.

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160 2. Completion of cost estimates for proposed legislation prior to its first full review by a legislative  
161 committee, with legislation negatively affecting local governments’ revenue-raising ability being  
submitted to the Commission on Local Government “COLG” for a fiscal impact analysis.

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163 3. Use of a performance-based approach to mandates that (a) focuses on outcomes, (b) offers incentives  
164 for achieving state objectives, and (c) gives local governments autonomy to determine the best way to  
achieve the desired result.

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166 4. Simplification of state reporting requirements associated with mandates, greater efficiency and  
coordination, and making better use of reporting technology.

167

168 The alarming tendency of state and federal agencies to treat guidelines authorized by enabling legislation as  
169 having the stature of law itself must cease. In addition, the state should avoid unessential and arbitrary  
170 implementation of federal regulations.

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### 172 **State and Local Responsibilities**

173 The state requires local governments to provide certain services, such as education, corrections, social  
174 services, health, and community mental health. The local government does not have the option of not being  
175 the state’s service provider in these areas. “State aid” to localities is the state’s payment for the implicit  
176 contractual arrangement for this assignment of duties. In addition, local governments must contribute local  
177 funding to these services.

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179 In addition to the state-mandated services, localities provide other services that are either necessary (water  
180 and sewer, police and fire protection, etc.) or desired by residents (parks and recreation, cultural activities,  
181 etc.). Local governments need the flexibility and resources to collect revenues to meet all their  
182 responsibilities.

183

184 Two fundamental problems in Virginia’s intergovernmental structure are first, the state does not fund at  
185 adequate levels, existing services, particularly education and law enforcement, that it requires local  
186 governments to provide; and second, local officials have very limited revenue options, which forces them to  
187 rely heavily on real estate, personal property taxes and other local revenue sources to pay for services.

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188 Further, to improve the relationship of the state and local governments, the state should:

189

189 1. Not restrict the taxing authority and revenue sources of local governments without local concurrence.

2. Strengthen the partnership of the state with local governments by granting local government full authority to deal effectively with issues affecting their own locality.
3. Participate as a financial partner with local governments in the costs of education, including school construction and renovation, and, as an active partner, fully fund the state's fair share of the costs of education.
4. Follow specific procurement procedures before purchasing property, including adequate inquiry into the purchase, public hearings and notice, and notice of intent to settle sent to the locality. In addition, the state should consider remuneration to the locality for the loss of real estate taxes as well as any loss in economic development potential.

## **Freedom of Information**

VML strongly supports the free flow of information to citizens and the media through the conduct of governmental affairs at all levels in the open, in good faith compliance with the Freedom of Information Act. VML also supports efforts to educate local government officials about the Act, and the importance of extensive and accurate reporting of government affairs.

Any proposed FOIA legislation should be reviewed by the FOIA Council prior to being enacted.

The use of electronic meetings should be allowed during a state of emergency when social distancing is a necessity and electronic meetings should be studied by the FOIA Council for use at other specified times.

VML supports legislation reviewed by the FOIA Council that allows flexibility in the number of meetings a member of a governing body may participate in electronically due to a personal matter as defined in the electronic meeting policy adopted by the governing body.

Citizens have the right to have personal information protected. Government also must be able to control its work processes so that public business can be conducted. It is in the public's interest to conduct some matters outside public view prior to official action. Accordingly, VML strongly opposes extending limitations on closed meetings and exempt records, which would upset the Act's careful balance among a fully informed public, the protection of individuals' privacy, the ability of government to conduct its work and those matters for which the premature release would not be in the best interest of the locality or its citizens.

In addition, localities should be able to continue charging reasonable fees for any and all records, including for research time and for computer records that must be provided under the Act to avoid shifting the cost of copying from the requestor to the general taxpayers. The Act should continue to limit rights to documents to citizens of the Commonwealth and news organizations that publish here.

VML opposes legislation that would require localities to record closed session in any manner.

VML opposes legislation that would control the time allotted for public comment at public meetings. While VML supports public comment, localities should have the discretion to determine procedures for when public comment should be taken.

VML opposes legislation to limit the use of any legitimate means of communications from one elected official to others, including letters, emails, and conversation. The General Assembly should not exempt itself from anything that it imposes on a locality.

State policy must assist local governments to contact and notify their citizens in the most efficient and cost-effective manners possible. Ads required by the *Code of Virginia* are increasingly more expensive to run in the newspaper and often are only seen by a decreasing number of citizens. The current trend is for local

241 newspapers to reduce the number of times they are published weekly and/or going to an online platform.  
242 This has resulted in localities needing to meet certain advertising requirements with only expensive  
243 newspapers available for legal notices.

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245 A locality's internet presence, social media, local cable access channels, local radio and TV provide  
246 alternative methods to contact the citizens much more broadly and effectively than newspaper ads in many  
247 areas of the Commonwealth. In addition, the cost of contacting the citizens through new technology can be  
248 much lower than advertising in the newspaper. The state code should be amended to allow local  
249 governments electronic and other alternative means of communicating with their citizens when providing  
250 required legal notices.

251  
252 In addition, small towns should be allowed to use first class mail instead of newspaper advertising to notify  
253 the citizens of government actions such as advertising a budget hearing or advertising a land use hearing to  
254 save the citizens money and to communicate more effectively with the citizens.

### 255 **Governmental & Municipal Official Liability**

256 VML calls upon Virginia's congressional delegation to support legislation to restore suits brought under 42  
257 U.S.C. Section 1983 to traditional civil rights actions, and to preclude the award of damages if the court finds  
258 that the government or its officials were acting in good faith.

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260  
261 Expanding liability and eroding immunities at the state level across the nation have had a chilling effect on  
262 the actions of local government officials contributing to local government insurance problems, creating  
263 immense financial risks (particularly for legal costs), and posing a substantial obstacle to the provision of  
264 needed public services.

265  
266 The Virginia General Assembly should strengthen and must maintain the principles of sovereign immunity  
267 for local governments and their officials.

268  
269 VML strongly opposes bringing local governments under the Virginia Tort Claims Act. This action would  
270 seriously erode the sovereign immunity doctrine and lead to a substantial increase in frivolous suits.

271  
272 The tort reparations system in the U.S. creates many difficulties in the administration of justice. VML  
273 supports efforts at the national and state levels to address tort reform, such as limitations on the tort liability  
274 of local governments in areas where local governments do not enjoy sovereign immunity.

275  
276 The General Assembly should adopt legislation to codify the proposition that real property of local  
277 governments shall be exempt from liens created by statute or otherwise. This proposition has already been  
278 recognized by the Virginia Supreme Court for mechanics liens.

### 279 **Personnel**

280 Management has the responsibility to ensure that employment, training, and promotional opportunities are  
281 provided without regard to any unlawful discriminatory factor, qualified persons with disabilities or any  
282 other factors not related to job performance.

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285 VML supports:

- 286 1. the current injury by accident definition in the Virginia Workers' Compensation Act.
- 287 2. the current Workers' Compensation Act provisions for use of an employer selected panel of  
288 physicians to treat injured workers.
- 289 3. maintenance of the exclusive remedy provisions of the Virginia Workers' Compensation Act.
- 290 4. local governments' authority to establish hours of work, salaries and working conditions for local  
291 employees.

292 5. VML continues to support the current rules for work-related disability benefits.

293  
294 VML opposes:

- 295 1. Any attempt to impose collective bargaining or ‘meet and confer’ requirements for public employers
- 296 or employees; and
- 297 2. Any attempt by the federal government to stipulate grievance procedures for state and local
- 298 employees, such as the police officers bill of rights.

### 300 **Line of Duty Act**

301 The cost of the current Line of Duty Act is not sustainable for either the state or local governments.

302  
303 VML supports recommendations and options made by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission  
304 for the Line of Duty Act program that would ensure the fiscal sustainability of the program and ensure that  
305 the benefits are available to those who need and deserve them. Further, VML supports a new, dedicated  
306 funding source to pay for LODA benefits, but opposes any funding approach that would rely on or adversely  
307 affect existing local revenue sources.

### 309 **Telecommunications and Broadband – Local Government Principles**

310 VML sets forth the following principles to guide any federal or state legislative action regarding  
311 telecommunications issues.

312  
313 VML supports legislation that promotes and protects the ability of localities to establish, operate, and  
314 maintain sustainable broadband authorities to provide essential broadband to all communities throughout the  
315 Commonwealth of Virginia.

- 316 1. **Public Rights-of-Way.** Local rights-of-way are public property. The rights-of-way contain  
317 numerous utility and other facilities. Proper management and maintenance of rights-of-way are  
318 essential to ensure public safety, to protect the integrity of the property, to guarantee the safety of  
319 workers and to maintain the efficiency of local streets, utility systems and transportation facilities and  
320 networks. Private use of public rights-of-way significantly increases management responsibilities  
321 and maintenance costs. Any private use of public rights-of-way should be valued at fair market  
322 value.
- 323 2. **Franchise authority.** Neither the federal government nor the state should enact any laws to shift the  
324 award of franchises to use the public rights of way from the local governing body to any state or  
325 federal agency. Individuals and businesses in the community help to buy and maintain rights-of-way  
326 through their taxes. Rights-of-way should not be used for private purposes without approval by and  
327 compensation to the local government for the right to use the space, and local governments must have  
328 authority to control the rights-of-way.
- 329 3. **Equitable Taxation.** Telecommunications providers are valued members of our corporate  
330 community. All members of the corporate community must pay taxes on an equitable basis, as  
331 appropriately determined by the local government. No legislation should restrict the ability of local  
332 governments to impose equitable taxes on telecommunications providers.
- 333 4. **Universal Service and Consumer Access.** Important educational and community services are  
334 provided via telecommunications. Telecommunications providers must be responsive to citizen needs  
335 and concerns and provide appropriate customer services to all segments of our community so that  
336 disparities due to income or geographic location affecting citizen access to new technology are  
337 minimized.
- 338 5. **Competition.** Local governments are interested in healthy competition in the field of  
339 telecommunications. To ensure a competitively neutral and non-discriminatory market, all service  
340 providers must pay fair compensation for the use of public property. Governments should not be  
341 forced to subsidize some participants in this free-market competition through lower-than-fair-market  
342 charges or any other means.

- 343 6. **Local Government as Customers.** Local governments are important consumers of  
344 telecommunications services. In many communities, the local government is the single largest  
345 customers of telecommunications services through its government offices, education facilities and  
346 emergency communications. As valuable customers, local governments should be treated equitably.
- 347 7. **Private Equipment Placed on Public Facilities.** Local governments should continue to have the  
348 authority to approve the location and fees for any attachment or co-location of communications  
349 infrastructure on local government buildings and facilities.
- 350 8. **Broadband and Local Governments.** VML appreciates Governor Ralph Northam's efforts to make  
351 broadband access available to all Virginians within a decade. VML believes there are several ways to  
352 achieve this goal and no one technology or method of delivery should be chosen as the answer for our  
353 geographically diverse states. While public-private partnerships between a local government and a  
354 broadband provider may be the right approach for some communities, a municipal government  
355 broadband authority owning and operating a new project may be better for others. State grants  
356 should allow localities, groups of localities, municipal broadband authorities, and public-private  
357 partnerships to submit applications for state grants without prejudice to the applicant.
- 358 9. **5G.** The current 5G statutes have eroded the authority of localities to charge fair market value, add  
359 appropriate screening, and control placement of these facilities along with added undue burdens in  
360 the form of shot clocks and limited review of applications. VML supports the ability of localities to  
361 ensure that their communities retain their unique character to include regulating these structures,  
362 particularly in historic areas.

### 363 **Technology**

364 State law should allow all counties, cities, and towns to make full and appropriate use of modern technology  
365 to promote public safety. Localities should have maximum flexibility to contract with the private sector to  
366 implement all aspects of such technology.  
367 Next Generation 911 is vital to public safety in the Commonwealth; we support this technology as a funded  
368 mandate.  
369

370  
371 Local governments should have authority to regulate the use of unmanned aerial vehicles in their  
372 jurisdictions insofar as is consistent with FAA regulations. Especially when such systems are utilized to  
373 support a local governing body or authority authorized under title 15.2 for purposes of inspecting their own  
374 facilities, assessing damage caused by natural or manmade disasters, and by fire and rescue personnel for  
375 purposes of assessing an emergency to which they are responding.

### 376 **Utilities**

377 Fundamental policies should be honored by the state in promoting the delivery of utility services by local  
378 governments and the authorities they create:

- 380 1. Each provider of service must be free to set its rates without interference from other local  
381 governments or the state.
- 382 2. Each local government providing utility services must be able to compete fairly with any other  
383 providers without state interference.
- 384 3. Each local government that provides utility services must be able to manage its revenues and  
385 expenditures related to the services without state interference.

386  
387 Virginia's localities and water and sewer authorities must retain the ability to enforce liens against landlords'  
388 properties for the unpaid water and sewer bills of their tenants to have the ability to collect monies owed. No  
389 further limits should be placed on this authority.

390  
391 Municipal utility systems must continue to have the authority to set their own rates. Any attempt by the  
392 State Corporation Commission to regulate rates for utility services furnished by local governments would  
393 violate the Virginia Constitution.



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Local governments that provide utility services must continue to have the authority to negotiate the rates, terms, and conditions for any attachments to or joint use of municipally-owned utility infrastructure. The safe and efficient operation of the municipal utility requires that final approval for any joint use or co-location on its facilities remain with the locality.

The State Corporation Commission should develop a structure to ensure that the amounts that utilities can charge localities and other entities for placing electric utility lines and other facilities underground are based on the most cost-effective, competitive, yet safe methods.

## **II. Public Safety**

VML supports legislation that preserves law and order and promotes the safety, quality of life and administration of justice within our communities. The Commonwealth should provide funding for programs that prepare our youth to be productive, responsible, self-reliant members of society by enhancing its efforts to prevent juvenile crime, minimize violence in the and reducing the formation and operation of gangs.

The state should continue to assist localities in their efforts to coordinate public safety activities including emergency services.

VML supports legislation that will clearly establish the relationships between State and localities to assure efficient and appropriate command, control, and communications during local emergencies.

Greater latitude should be given to localities in encouraging innovative methods of combating traffic violations and crime.

VML supports local jurisdictions efforts to maintain animal shelters in a fiscally responsible manner and does not support any state or federal mandate that would provide a financial burden on local animal shelters.

### **Community Corrections**

VML requests both increased funding and an equitable distribution formula for services provided under the Comprehensive Community Corrections Act (CCCA) and the Pre-Trial Services Act (PSA). Since the advent of these programs in 1995, caseloads have effectively doubled at the local level, while state resources have failed to meet the caseload increases. These resources are allocated to localities on a discretionary grant basis. Given the statewide character of this program, it is now time to allocate these funds through an equitable formula that recognizes regional costs and benefits of these services.

### **Court Fees**

A user of the court system should not force increased costs on the general population. VML supports legislation to increase court fees to pay for courthouse maintenance, security, renovation and construction and other court-related projects.

### **Court Security**

The General Assembly should adopt legislation making it clear that local judges do not have the authority to order localities to fund more deputy positions for court security than are provided for in the State Code and Appropriations Act.

441 **Internal Affairs Investigations**

442 Legislation should be enacted to restrict the use, in civil matters, of information gathered in internal  
443 investigations.

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445 **Overcrowding/State Support**

446 The state should live up to its commitment to remove state prisoners from local jails.

447 The state should fully fund the per diem reimbursement for all state prisoners.

448  
449 Jails built by a single large locality should be made eligible for the same state reimbursement rate for  
450 construction as a regional jail facility.

451  
452 Local governments should not be forced to pay for state prisoners. The state reimbursement rate must be  
453 restored to an amount that is fair to localities reflecting actual costs.

454  
455 **Training Academies**

456 The state should fully fund all mandated criminal justice training provided through certified academies.

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458 **Violence / Terrorism**

459 The General Assembly should enable localities to help communities deal with criminal issues by:

- 460 1. expanding state and local cooperative efforts in neighborhoods and localities,  
461 2. promoting additional prevention and intervention programs to deal with youth who may adopt a  
462 violent way of life,  
463 3. and granting localities more flexibility to handle problems of abandoned and blighted structures.