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Oppose Mandatory Shift from May to November Elections for Virginia Localities

Issue Brief

Across Virginia, 44 percent of cities and 57 percent of towns hold their local elections in May, rather than November. These localities choose to separate their elections from those for state and federal offices for a variety of reasons – doing so keeps the focus of local elections on local issues and keeps the cost of campaigning more accessible for new candidates. The option to hold elections in May gives localities the flexibility they need to best meet the needs of their communities.

[SB1157 \(Spruill\)](#) proposes to mandate that all localities, with the exception of the City of Norfolk, hold their elections in November.

Concerns

The coincidence of local elections with those at the state and federal level inherently raises the level of partisanship of all elections, regardless of whether candidates are running without any party affiliation. By the same token, it introduces partisan politics to nonpartisan local issues; political parties make little difference when it comes to community projects like paving roads and keeping the streetlights on.

To that end, running local, state, and federal elections simultaneously makes it more difficult to keep voters informed. Media attention leading up to November becomes more focused on statewide and national issues, leaving less time and space for discussion of local candidates and issues. This also raises the cost of campaigning for local candidates – especially for candidates new to the field – who have to compete for name recognition from the bottom of an even longer ballot.

Join VML in opposing SB1157 and reach out to senators both in your community and on the Senate Committee on Local Government.

Forcing localities to combine local, state, and federal elections

- Inserts partisanship into the discussion of nonpartisan local issues;
- Draws attention away from local issues in favor of state and federal campaign positions;
- Makes it harder for voters to stay informed; and
- Increases costs for citizen candidates who want to get more involved in local government.