



2022 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

RESTORATION OF RETURNING CITIZENS VOTING ACCESS

PERMANENT REMOVAL OF THE WITNESS REQUIREMENT

OPPOSITION TO VOUCHERS AND TUITION TAX
CREDITS/OPPOSITION OF ANY ATTEMPTS TO DIVERT FUNDS FROM
PUBLIC EDUCATION TO PRIVATE EDUCATION

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM/DARK MONEY/ HONEST ADS

FLOOD ZONES/FULL DISCLOSURE TO PERSPECTIVE BUYERS OR
RENTERS (BEFORE THEY PURCHASE/RENT THE PROPERTY

WE ARE MONITORING LEGISLATION PERTAINING TO THE
FOLLOWING SUBJECTS

- VOTING ACCESS
- WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH
- INFANT MORTALITY RATE OF BLACK AND BROWN CHILDREN
- AFFORDABLE HOUSING; ENVIRONMENTAL/GUN VIOLENCE
- OTHER LEGISLATION PERTANENT TO THIS ORGANZATION



RESTORATION OF RETURNING CITIZENS VOTING ACCESS

We **SUPPORT Amendment** [SJ1](#) (Locke), [HJ9](#) (Cherry), [HJ28](#) (Herring)

We **SUPPORT Referendum** [SB21](#) (Locke) & [HB130](#) (Cherry), [HB416](#) (Herring)

What is it?

Last year the General Assembly session, took the first step toward passage of a constitutional amendment to restore voting access for all citizens in Virginia, aged 18 and over, who are not currently serving time for a felony conviction. Now is the time to move that amendment to the ballot. The people of Virginia deserve the chance to vote.

Why do we need it?

There are approximately 250,000 people who don't have access to the ballot. 21 states already support the restoration of voting access in line with this Virginia-proposed Constitutional Amendment. 3 states allow felons to vote while in prison. See: [National Conference of State Legislatures felon voting rights](#).

These returning citizens pay taxes, are contributing members of society, and could be your neighbor. They have completed their sentence, have been held accountable for their crime, have been deemed to not be a threat to public safety--and yet been banned from voting for the rest of their lives. It's double jeopardy to punish people for crimes for which they have already paid their debt. The ability to vote is a critical part of reintegration into civic life for returning citizens and empowers them to be productive and active members of their communities. There is also evidence that demonstrates a decrease in recidivism when returning citizens have their voting access restored. It's time we amend the Virginia constitution to ensure that once a person has served their time, they have a path to have their voting access restored regardless of who the sitting Governor is.

What's next?

Restoring voting access isn't a partisan issue – it drew bipartisan support last session and continues to have bipartisan support this session. Lawmakers can bring us a step closer to righting this wrong by voting a second time to pass a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the right to vote for all Virginians 18 and over who are not serving time for a felony conviction. Passing the amendment places the responsibility for this important decision where it should be – with Virginia's voters. Recent polling conducted by the Beacon Research Group showed that 65% of Virginians believe that once a person has served their time, they should have voting access restored. Our democracy is stronger when more people are allowed to participate in it.



PERMANENT REMOVAL OF THE WITNESS REQUIREMENT FOR ABSENTEE BALLOTS

We **SUPPORT** [HB177](#) (Bloxom) and [SB273](#) (Ebbin)

We **OPPOSE** [HB149](#) (Runion)

Voters who live alone, who are medically compromised, or who are disabled, are more likely to have difficulty finding people to witness their ballots.

Witness signatures do not improve the security of the ballot but make it more difficult to cast a secret ballot.

Abundant safeguards are already in place for voting by mail ballots:

- The voter must be registered and must apply for a ballot on a form that requires at least the last four digits of the voter's SSN, the voter's address, and the voter's signed statement.
- The registrar, after checking and accepting the application, mails the ballot to the voter's address in the voter registration database. An intelligent mail barcode associated with the voter tracks the ballot from the registrar's office to the voter and back.
- The voter returns the completed ballot with a signed statement that includes the voter's home address.
- The voter is recorded in the election database, so neither the voter nor anyone else, can cast another ballot in the voter's name.
- The voter signs a statement acknowledging penalties for fraud when they register to vote, apply for an absentee ballot, and return the ballot by mail or drop box.

The process to vote by mail should be no more burdensome than voting early in person.



OPPOSITION TO VOUCHERS & TUITION TAX CREDITS OR ANY DIVERSION OF PUBLIC FUNDS FOR PRIVATE USE

We **OPPOSE** [HB293](#) (Freitas), [HB294](#) (Freitas & Cherry), [HB333](#) (Freitas), [HB344](#) (Davis), [HB784](#) (LaRock), [HB788](#) (LaRock), [HB982](#) (P. Scott), [HB1024](#) (LaRock), [HB1025](#) (LaRock), [SB125](#) (Obenshain), [SB608](#) (Suetterlein), [SB709](#) (DeSteph)

Traditional school vouchers and newer versions such as Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) are mechanisms to send public dollars to families who choose to forgo public K-12 education and pursue private school or home schooling.

K-12 vouchers do not improve student outcomes:

- The Brookings Institution reviewed voucher studies from four states and found that students who took advantage of these programs to attend private schools performed worse on tests than similar students who do not attend private schools.
- The National Bureau of Economic Research found “a large proportion of the most rigorous studies suggest that being awarded a voucher has an effect that is statistically indistinguishable from zero.”
- A 2018 University of Virginia study found no benefit for students attending private schools, including for students from low-income families and urban settings.

Vouchers divert much-needed resources from public schools:

- Virginia already severely underfunds its public schools — ranking 41st in per-student spending out of all states for pre-K-12. Virginia has not fully funded the Standards of Quality. Diverting more funding to private schools will exacerbate financial challenges for public schools.
- Research has found that Wisconsin's K-12 voucher program shortchanged public schools and has created a significant financial threat.

Vouchers increase segregation and discrimination, do not impact satisfaction or safety

Virginia experimented with vouchers during Massive Resistance in an effort to reject school integration efforts. Voucher programs in Indiana have tended to favor higher-income white families, and in Louisiana have led to white families leaving more diverse schools. On average, parents of students who switch to private schools with vouchers do not see a change in satisfaction or sense of school safety. With students and schools still recovering from the setbacks of the pandemic, we can't afford to start shifting investments to unproven voucher programs that have poor track records for improving student outcomes. Research is clear that investing in public schools improves student outcomes, graduation and postsecondary enrollment.



CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

We **SUPPORT** [SB67](#) (Suetterlein), [SB80](#) (Stanley), [SB45](#) (Petersen), [SB222](#) (McPike), [SB233](#) (Suetterlein), [SB318](#) (Favola), [SB463](#) (Bell), [SB568](#) (Stuart)

This will be the first time in Virginia that limitations would be placed on campaign contributions. Such restrictions are important to our Democracy, as unfettered contributions can create the appearance of undue influence on a candidate.

- Providing specific dollar limitations is an important method for eliminating undue influence on candidates.
- Contributions should come only from individuals and candidate committees, not from corporations.
- Public service companies should not be allowed to make campaign contributions to candidates, who, if they win, who would be charged with making laws directly regulating the company making the contribution.
- While Virginia has rightfully limited the receipt of campaign contributions during the regular General Assembly Session, this rule should extend to Special Sessions as well.
- All types of contributions should be disclosed. We especially recognize the importance of disclosing dark money contributions, which are being used more now by campaigns.
- All reports, regardless of office, should be electronic. Technology has developed over the years, making it easier to file electronic reports. Only by having these reports accessible on the internet, can voters have the information they need to understand the contributions made to each candidate.
- We need to better define what is an “electioneering” expenditure and how to apply our rules to referenda elections. These changes better reflect how campaigns are currently financed.
- Virginia’s ethics rules that need improvement. Private funding of election costs should be disallowed.
- The League has long believed that the personal use of campaign contributions should be disallowed—with the exception of child and elder care expenses.
- The General Assembly passed a resolution in the 2021 Session to study campaign finance reform, through a Joint Subcommittee to Study Comprehensive Campaign Finance Reform. HJ 526 (Delegate Bulova) Subcommittee’s report should be finalized and made public.
- The LWV-VA supports official audits of campaign reports and penalties for violations; and disclosure of major donors to organizations that make independent expenditures to influence campaigns.

Passing these bills will start paving a path to greater trust by voters in the integrity of the General Assembly and our representative democracy.

Virginia's campaign finance rules are outdated.

Further, clarification of what kinds of expenditures can be made with campaign funds would reduce risks and promote democracy.

LWV-VA Supports:

- Campaign finance reforms that enhance political equality for candidates, protect representative democracy from distortion, and provide transparency supporting informed voter choices.
- A comprehensive review of Virginia's campaign finance laws will provide recommendations for an updated system reflecting the latest developments and best practices.
- Public financing of campaigns in Virginia, as the ultimate solution which should be included in any comprehensive review.
- Reasonable restrictions on personal use of campaign funds by candidates. (Such restrictions should not include childcare expenses incurred as a direct result of campaign activity.)

Rationale for Reform:

- Virginia's campaign finance laws have been ranked 47th out of 50 states in America because:
 - Virginia is one of only five states that do not limit contributions, either by dollar amount or by type of contributor.
 - Virginia does not prohibit candidates from using campaign and political action funds for personal use while they are actively campaigning.
 - The Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council and other state entities do not have authority to enforce any violations of the law.
 - Public financing has been adopted in 14 other states. This precedent provides a range of models and results to inform reforms in Virginia.

Virginia is one of only five states without restrictions on campaign contributions – National Conference of State Legislatures. <https://www.ncsl.org/Portals/1/Documents/Elections/Contribution-Limits-to-Candidates-2019-2020.pdf?ver=2019-10-02-132802-117>



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We **SUPPORT** [SJ1](#) (amendment) and [SB21](#) Referendum

We **SUPPORT** [HJ9/HJ28](#) (amendment) and
[HB130/HB416](#) (referendum)

The League of Women Voters supports the following Affordable Housing proposals:

Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) funded by the Department of Behavioral Health for people living with serious mental illness (SMI) .

We support an investment in the Virginia Housing Trust Fund (HTF) which will bring the total amount of funding to \$300M over the biennium - \$125M for FY23 and \$175M for FY24. Based on historic outcomes, this would lead to approximately 8,800 affordable rental and 500 new homeownership opportunities in FY23 and 10,500 affordable rental and 600 new ownership opportunities in FY24.

In addition, we support the State Housing Stability Fund Budget Amendment. This budget amendment establishes the Virginia Housing Stability Fund. This will provide long term rental assistance to low-income housing residents and will enable them to buy housing costing 30 percent of their income.