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TO: County Administrators
FROM: William B. Kyger
DATE: January 9, 2008
RE: VACo's 2008 Legislative Priorities

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I am pleased to present you with copies of the Virginia Association of Counties' 2008 Legislative Priorities. Please share these with your supervisors. The entire 2008 Legislative Program is available on our web site at www.vaco.org. The annual program is the membership's collective policy blueprint. The document serves to inform legislators and to guide VACo members and staff.

Key budget issues highlight the program including adequate state funding for K-12 public education, mental health and the Comprehensive Services Act. The program also includes key policy issues such as VACo's longstanding statement on local land use authorities.

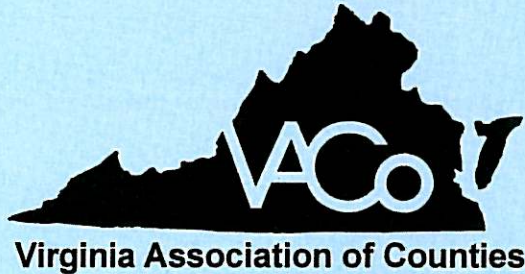
The legislative process was initiated last spring when the VACo Board of Directors hosted regional courthouse meetings throughout the Commonwealth. The 11 meetings were intended to bring together local leaders and state legislators to discuss key issues facing counties. The membership adopted the 2008 Legislative Program during our annual business meeting on Nov. 13. Eight standing policy committees along with our Resolutions Committee helped to develop the program.

In the next few weeks you will receive an invitation to the VACo 2008 regional spring courthouse meeting nearest you. We hope your schedule permits you to participate.

You'll find a directory of VACo's legislative team in this pamphlet.

Happy New Year,
William B. Kyger, Jr.
VACo President and Member of the Rockingham County Board of Supervisors

2008



Legislative Priorities

State and Local Fiscal Sustainability

VACo is committed to guaranteeing state and local fiscal stability to ensure that the Commonwealth and its local governments provide cost-effective, quality services with equitable and sufficient tax structures.

VACo is committed to protecting the reliability and sustainability of the Commonwealth's general fund. The general fund supports most of the core government functions including public education (K-12 and higher education), health and human resources, public safety, natural resources and environmental services. Separate user fees should be increased to support transportation (although a core government service, the Commonwealth historically has funded transportation with dedicated non-general funds in order to reserve the general fund for the additional core services).

Aid to Localities

VACo requests the Commonwealth to use the most current population statistics available, such as those developed by the Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service, for the purposes of determining state aid to those localities that have experienced growth since the last census. Those localities that have remained stable or have lost population should be held harmless and funded based on the last U.S. Census results.

Behavioral Health Care

VACo supports increased funding in the provision of mental health services for children. Funding streams through the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services must be increased to support services for children at risk of foster care and/or custody relinquishment.

The Commonwealth should maintain, fully fund and continue to operate state facilities that offer services for mental health and mental retardation. These facilities should include inpatient treatment facilities for the long-term care of adults and adolescents. The Commonwealth should provide funding sufficient to allow community services boards to adequately meet the charge of providing a community-based system of care for mental health, mental retardation and substance abuse programs.

Comprehensive Services Act

VACo supports additional state funding in the "CSA Pool" as local governments comply with new Comprehensive Services Act (CSA) policy initiatives for children at risk of foster care and/or custody relinquishment. New guidelines will increase the number of children eligible to receive "mandated" services. To ensure the delivery of quality services and adequate follow-up, localities must have the flexibility to use state funding for direct and indirect costs associated with growing case loads of children already eligible for services and for the newly defined categories of children.

VACo supports continued state funding for the Community Development Infrastructure Grant. These grants should be increased over a period of time and should not be child-specific. VACo also supports increased state funding for the costs of local administration of the CSA.

Deployment of Broadband Internet Services

VACo urges the Commonwealth to assist communities throughout Virginia in providing universal access to broadband Internet services.

Education Funding and Re-benchmarking the Standards of Quality (SOQ)

VACo supports full state funding for public education (including the SOQ, targeted incentive programs, capital and maintenance support, and teacher salaries). Full state funding should be achieved without reduction to other parts of the federal and state public education budgets or to the other core services.

When re-benchmarking the SOQ, VACo calls on the state to recognize and fully fund the true costs of public education. VACo urges the state to determine, prescribe and fund the SOQ on the basis of realistic and actual educational needs, practices and costs. This includes operational, capital and maintenance costs for school facilities and transportation.

Health and Human Resources Funding

VACo supports state policies and funding to ensure the Commonwealth's at-risk families have access to high quality and appropriate services.

Homeland Security Emergency Preparedness and Volunteer Recruitment & Retention

The General Assembly should maintain current state funding and make certain that localities, often the first responders, are included in the planning process for homeland security and emergency preparedness measures.

Land Use/Growth Management Tools

Authority to plan and regulate land use should remain with local governing bodies, and VACo opposes any legislation to weaken that authority. The General Assembly should grant localities the tools necessary to adequately meet citizens' increasing transportation, education, public safety and other vital public infrastructure needs that are driven by new development. Such tools may include broad impact fee authority for all counties, adequate public facilities provisions in subdivision ordinances, state funds for the purchase

of development rights, and real estate transfer charges.

Moratorium on Annexation

VACo supports full funding of the Commonwealth's HB 599 commitments, as well as the continuation of the current moratorium on city annexations. The moratorium has promoted more intergovernmental cooperation, allowed counties to plan for future growth and economic development, and protects their tax base to provide needed services.

Sovereign Immunity

VACo opposes any substantive change in local governments' present defense of sovereign immunity for tort liability.

Transportation Funding

VACo continues to maintain that the General Assembly must substantially increase revenues for transportation. To address well-documented, unmet infrastructure needs that negatively affect the quality of life of all residents, these new revenues must be separate, reliable and permanent.

Unfunded Mandates

VACo opposes unfunded mandates by the Commonwealth. Furthermore, VACo opposes the shifting of fiscal responsibility from the state to localities for existing programs.

Water Quality Improvement Funding

VACo supports additional state funding and technical assistance to help localities improve water quality in a manner consistent with tributary strategies, implementation of Total Maximum Daily Loading goals, and water quality standards established by the State Water Control Board. VACo strongly opposes the imposition of a state fee, tax or surcharge on water, sewer, solid waste or any other service provided by a local government or authority.

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Visit www.vaco.org to download VACo's complete 2008 Legislative Program .