

Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

Delegate • Virginia House District 45

Dear Elizabeth,

At the beginning of June we returned to Richmond to vote on the budget conference report. We are scheduled to return again tomorrow to consider the budget amendments the Governor released last night and to vote on some bills that are still in conference. While there are about 30 bills still in conference, some of them were connected to the budget and some are dead. The most notable of these is the bill to incentivize the Washington Commanders to build their new stadium in Virginia. I voted against both the House and Senate versions of this bill when they were on the floor in March and would have voted against it again, although its sponsors [announced last week](#) it would not come before us again this year.

Before we get to the budget, I want to first highlight some upcoming and recent events.

June 21st Democratic Primary

This year, like every year, is an election year in Virginia and **next Tuesday, June 21st** is the Democratic primary to choose a nominee for the United States House of Representatives in the 8th Congressional District. Republicans have already chosen their nominee. You can vote early in-person at certain locations through this Saturday, June 18, or between 6am-7pm at your polling place on June 21. You can find more information on your locality's website:

- Alexandria <https://www.alexandriava.gov/Elections>
- Arlington <https://vote.arlingtonva.us/Home>
- Fairfax <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/elections/>

Volunteering at Carpenter's Shelter

In 2019, I launched a program called Volunteer with the Vice Mayor to highlight the wonderful nonprofits in our community and to invite residents to meet with me while collectively giving back. Our first event was serving lunch at [Carpenter's Shelter](#). We also assembled care packages and read with [The Spitfire Club](#), did several cleanups with the [Four Mile Run Conservatory Foundation](#) and Girl Scout Troop 3966, served guests at [Casa Chirilagua's](#) Family Dinner Night with the Alexandria Sheriff's Office, delivered Meals on Wheels for [Senior Services of Alexandria](#), painted the [Butterfly Effect Mural](#) in Old Town, and distributed food with [ALIVE!](#)

Thanks to everyone who came out to volunteer with us at our first event this year at Carpenter's Shelter. We made and served a taco lunch and Congressman Don Beyer, resident of the 45th District, made delicious brownies.

We're planning future events; stay tuned for the next one! And if there's an organization you'd like to volunteer at with me (and they can support group events), [please let me know!](#)



Gun Violence Prevention

I am heartbroken over the recent mass shootings in Uvalde, Buffalo, Laguna Woods, Dallas, and too many others. I am committed to doing everything I can to protect the progress we have already made in Virginia and to keep moving forward to ban assault-style weapons and high capacity magazines and keep our residents safe.

Over the past few years, we have enacted the following laws in Virginia:

- Establishing universal background checks
- Mandating that gun owners report lost or stolen firearms
- Allowing localities the authority to ban or regulate firearms in public spaces
- Granting judges the ability to issue an Emergency Risk Protective Order, aka the red flag law
- Reinstating the one-gun-a-month limit on gun purchases
- Making it a Class 6 felony for someone subject to a protective order to possess a firearm
- Classifying it as a misdemeanor to recklessly leave firearms around minors
- Allowing school boards to ban guns from school board property
- Restricting convicted domestic abusers from purchasing firearms
- Extending the time period for FBI background checks on gun sales in Virginia
- Outlawing guns in Capitol Square and state government buildings
- Banning people from possessing guns within 40 feet of polling places on an election day

Earlier this year we saw attempts to repeal or weaken many of these common-sense gun safety regulations. I am proud to have voted against each of these failed attempts. Although we have made progress in Virginia, there is still more work to be done.

Roe v. Wade

Last month we learned about the draft Supreme Court opinion to overturn Roe v. Wade. I have heard from many residents about their opposition and outrage, which I share. Reproductive decisions are best left in the hands of pregnant people, their doctors, and their families. It is important to note that abortion will remain legal in Virginia, as long as the General Assembly continues to protect this right. I will always fight to protect the right to safe and accessible abortions and vote against anti-abortion bills, as I did this year.

Budget Update

We are scheduled to return tomorrow to hopefully complete our work on the 2022-2024 state budget. The Governor released 35 amendments last night that we will vote on tomorrow. Some of these are technical in nature, however some are attempts to legislate through the budget. These include the creation of a new felony for protesting outside a judge's house or courthouse; changes to bail and earned sentence credits; and restricting abortion access for low-income individuals on Medicaid. If both chambers accept all of the Governor's amendments, the budget is passed. If any of the amendments are rejected, the budget returns to the Governor for his signature or veto.

On June 1, both Chambers passed the conference report after budget negotiators spent several months reconciling many differences between the House and Senate budgets.

I was pleased to see that the hard work of our delegation resulted in crucial funding for specific projects in Alexandria, including \$40 million for the Combined Sewer Outfall (CSO), \$4 million for the Senator John Warner Maritime Heritage Center, the Home Port of the Tall Ship Providence, and \$500,000 for Douglass Memorial Cemetery in Old Town.

With respect to personal finances and taxes, the conference report provides one-time rebates to taxpayers of \$250 for individuals and \$500 for couples. These rebates will be sent out early this fall. It also makes the Earned Income Tax Credit partially refundable for the first time ever in Virginia, which will help target tax relief to families who need it the most. It eliminates the state portion of the grocery sales tax (1.5%) effective on January 1, while retaining the local portion (1%) which provides necessary funding for localities. Additionally, it provides that the portion of the state tax that is distributed to school divisions be replaced with a similar amount of general fund money based on school-age population. It also provides an increase in the standardized deduction to \$8,000 for individuals and \$16,000 for families.

The conference report funds mental health by providing the funds to fully implement the STEP-VA program, provide staff with pay raises, expand the crisis support system, create permanent supportive housing, and establish a behavioral health loan repayment program to address staffing shortages.

It provides historic levels of funding for our public schools, including \$1.2 billion for school construction grants and loans; below are some of the distinctions between the conference

and House budget related to education.

Item	Conference Report	House Budget
Teacher Pay Raises	10% (5% each year - split 50-50 between state and localities)	8% (4% each year; split 50-50 between state and localities)
Teacher and Support Staff Bonuses	\$1,000 one-time in December	1% in each year of biennium
Educator Workforce Initiatives to increase recruitment and retention of qualified educators and support positions	\$1.5 Million + \$10 Million ARPA funds for recruitment	\$0
Increased Funding for School Support Positions	\$271.7 Million	\$0
At-Risk Add-On Funding Increase	\$145.3 Million (Increased from 26% to 36%)	\$58.3 Million (Increased from 26% to 31%)
Early childhood education mixed delivery pilot program	\$16.7 Million (includes infants and toddlers)	\$10 Million (does not include infants and toddlers)
Expands Virginia Preschool Initiative slots for at-risk three-year-olds	\$32.7 Million	\$13.35 Million
School-Based Mental Health Integration Pilot (Assistance and grants to school divisions to integrate mental health services, including contracts with public or private community-based providers.)	\$2.5 Million	\$0
Increased funding for need-based financial aid at public colleges and universities	\$140 Million	\$24.8 Million
Additional State Aid to Local Public Libraries (The initial two installments of a four-year plan to fully fund the state library aid formula.)	\$5 Million	\$0

I was disappointed that the Housing Trust Fund did not receive the level of funding that Governor Northam and the Senate provided in their budgets and that one of the conference report amendments included language that will recriminalize possession of over four ounces of marijuana.

Given the more than \$44 million in funding for Alexandria and the significant investments in education, health, and human services that far surpassed what was in the House budget (as outlined above and below), I voted for the conference report.

Below are some of the other items that differed between the conference report and the House budget:

Item	Conference Report	House Budget
Housing Innovations in Energy Efficiency Program (funded from Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative proceeds)	\$190 Million	\$0 (assumed withdrawal from RGGI)
Funding for rural EV charging network	\$0	\$5 Million
Water Quality Improvement Fund	\$251.3 Million	\$277.8 Million
Mental Health Licensure Pilot (Supports the costs of required supervision for graduates of Masters of Social Work and Masters of Counseling programs seeking licensure at public institutions.)	\$1 Million	\$0
Developmental Disability Waivers and Reimbursement Rates	\$390 Million	\$414.5 Million
Medicaid reimbursement rates for personal care, respite and companion services raised by 7.5%	\$85.9 Million	\$0
Increase in Medicaid Dental Rates	30% effective 7/1/22	5% effective 7/1/23
Housing Trust Fund	\$150 Million	\$110 Million
Raises the cap on the Virginia Housing Opportunity Tax Credit, which provides state tax credits for low-income building projects that receive federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credits	Raises cap to \$60 Million	Maintains current cap of \$15 Million
Additional funding for Voter Education and Outreach	\$4.7 Million	\$0
Funding for resettlement agencies to provide assistance to refugees	\$2 Million	\$0
Funding for a new gun violence prevention initiative, the Virginia Center for Firearm Violence Intervention and Prevention	\$8 Million	\$0
Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention Fund	\$5.4 Million	\$2 Million
Sexual and Domestic Violence Victim Fund	\$2.8 Million + \$9 Million from ARPA Funds	\$2.8 Million
Increased funding for Virginia Fresh Match to provide double-up dollars at farmers' markets and community retailers for SNAP and WIC recipients	\$2 Million	\$0

Funding for Social Equity Research Institute at VCU	\$3 Million	\$0
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In the Community

Here are some of the events I've participated in recently across our district.

Senator Adam Ebbin and I have enjoyed meeting residents and providing legislative updates to associations and other groups across the district, including the: League of Women Voters of Arlington-Alexandria; Rosemont Citizens Association; Fairlington Citizens Association; Del Ray Citizens Association; Royalton Condo Association; North Ridge Citizens' Association; Alexandria Chamber of Commerce; and Arlington Chamber of Commerce.



I joined the 34th annual Alice Ferguson Foundation Potomac River Watershed Cleanup with Alexandria Renew. To participate in a river cleanup near you, visit <https://fergusonfoundation.org/get-involved/upcoming-community-events/>



Councilwoman Sarah Bagley and I joined other volunteers to deliver Meals on Wheels with Senior Services of Alexandria. To volunteer, call 703-836-4414, ext. 112 or visit: <https://seniorservicesalex.org/programs/meals-on-wheels>.



It was inspiring to celebrate the most recent class of Alexandria Living Legends and to be reminded of the good in the world. Congrats and thank you to the Living Legends who make our community a better place every day. Read more about them:

<https://thezebra.org/2022/05/19/living-legends-of-alexandria-2020-finally-honored/>



Together with residents across our community, commonwealth, and country, I attended rallies and protests calling for common-sense gun safety legislation and protection for abortion rights.





Senator Ebbin and I met with members of the Danish Parliament to discuss American politics.



We had a great time celebrating the LGBTQ+ community at Alexandria's Pride with Vice Mayor Amy Jackson and the rest of City Council.



Senator Jennifer McClellan, Senator Jennifer Boysko, Delegate Kelly Convors-Fowler and I gathered in Alexandria to celebrate the power of women coming together to solve problems and the passage of SB493 to protect Virginians against unsolicited digital flashing. Thanks to Bumble and the National Women's Political Caucus of Virginia for their support of this legislation!



Thank you

If you'd like to share your feedback on legislation or need anything, please feel free to email me at DelEBennett-Parker@house.virginia.gov or call our office at 703-239-3155.

Warmly,
Elizabeth

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Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Delegate
Virginia's 45th District

www.ElizabethforDelegate.com

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