

# Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

Delegate • Virginia House District 45

Dear Elizabeth,

## Governor Youngkin's Proposed Budget

Last week, I joined my colleagues on the House and Senate Money Committees as Governor Youngkin presented his proposed budget. The Governor proposed a long list of amendments he would like to see made to the current 2023-2024 budget, which included tax cuts for corporations. Not mentioned in his speech were other amendments that would fund further study on the construction of a new Commanders stadium in Virginia, and two anti-abortion items that would criminalize pregnant people and abortion providers who violate a 15-week abortion ban and ban Virginians on Medicaid from receiving funding for abortions in the case of severe and incapacitating fetal diagnoses.

Among these proposals were grand promises to fund mental health care access in Virginia and pay our “quiet heroes” like teachers, but he could have gone farther. If we are serious about tackling the issues that face Virginia like providing accessible mental health care and properly paying our teachers, then we cannot risk defunding these and other vital services by passing tax cuts on wealthy corporations that would cost Virginia more than a half a billion dollars in lost tax revenue. For a fraction of the amount the Governor wants to spend on

corporate tax cuts, Virginia could fund the state share of over 1,100 school counselors, 1,200 nurses and licensed mental and behavioral health providers in our schools, and 700 more instructors for students who are learning English.

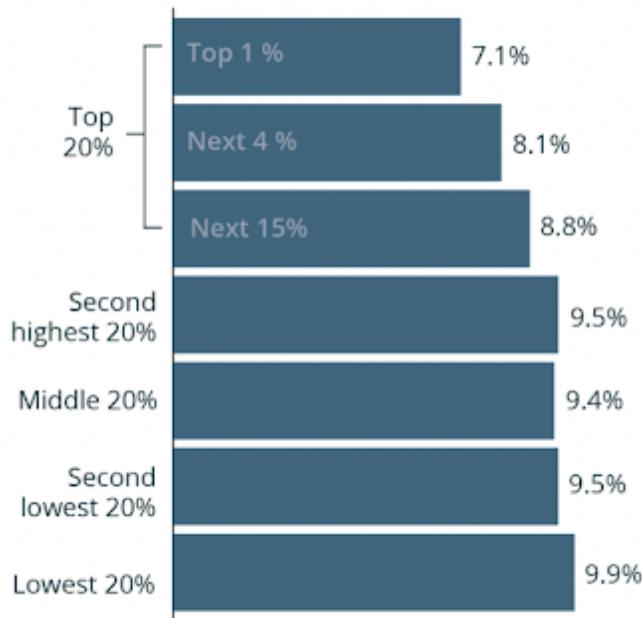


His amendments include \$50 million for merit-based bonuses for teachers to be determined by the Department of Education in conjunction with local school divisions. These would provide payments to only about 10% of the teachers in Virginia. The amendments also include \$45 million for the state's share of one-time retention bonuses for instructional and support staff; *however*, this funding requires a locality to provide a match. (By comparison, \$137.4 million was included in the biennial budget to cover the entire cost of these bonuses.)

The Governor also included an additional \$50 million for laboratory schools (in addition to the existing \$100 million in the biennial budget); alternatively this funding could be used for public schools, like better funding the items above or below. He also included: \$7.2 million for K-8 math specialists in low-performing schools; \$16.9 million to provide a reading specialist for every 550 students in grades four and five beginning in the 2023 school year; \$21 million for the Virginia Community College System to expand its dual enrollment program; and \$10 million in incentive payments for teachers hired next summer for hard-to-fill positions

The Governor proposed reducing the top individual income tax rate by .25%, which would cost the state \$333 million. Virginia has a very flat income tax structure with four tax brackets in which billionaires and millionaires pay the same tax rate as those earning anything over \$17,000. This ultimately results in the top 1% (and top 20%) paying a smaller share of their income in taxes than those who earn less.

### Families with low incomes in Virginia pay a greater share of their income toward state and local taxes



Source: Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy (ITEP), Jan. 2021



Our income tax brackets have not been adjusted in more than thirty years. The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission recently released a [report](#) on how Virginia could make its income tax more progressive. Many of the options featured creating new income brackets and rates so that the top 1% pay their fair share.

As it stands, the Governor's plan would tax every family's income at a higher rate than corporate profits and would continue to put more money back in the hands of the wealthiest individuals. Furthermore, while this proposal currently costs \$1 billion in revenue, the costs for this proposal will balloon to \$2.9 billion for the next budget cycle - decreasing our ability to invest in key priorities like strong public schools, accessible child care, better health care, and more affordable housing.

Below I have provided a summary of some of the Governor's other proposed budget

amendments. We are still working through the [761-page budget bill](#) to determine what else has been proposed that was not mentioned in his speech.

Agency	Description	Amount in 2023	Amount in 2024	Biennial Total
Department of Behavioral Health	Increase funding for comprehensive crisis services system	\$0	\$58,345,204	\$58,345,204
Department of Behavioral Health	Pursue hospital-based psychiatric emergency alternatives	\$0	\$20,000,000	\$20,000,000
Department of Behavioral Health	Provide one-time funds for mobile crisis units	\$0	\$20,000,000	\$20,000,000
Department of Behavioral Health	Expand school-based mental health pilot	\$0	\$15,000,000	\$15,000,000
State Council of Higher Education for Virginia	Support student mental health services	\$0	\$9,000,000	\$9,000,000
Department of Health	Enhance the Behavioral Health Loan Repayment Program	\$0	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000
Department of Conservation and Recreation	Provide additional funding for the Resilient Virginia Revolving Loan Fund	\$100,000,000	\$100,000,000	\$200,000,000
Department of Environmental Quality	Provide additional funding for the Enhanced Nutrient Removal Certainty Program	\$0	\$107,058,659	\$107,058,659
Department of Conservation and Recreation	Provide supplemental funding to	\$0	\$50,000,000	\$50,000,000

	support agriculture best management practices			
Department of Medical Assistance Services	Increase rates for personal care, respite, and companion services	\$0	\$41,616,322	\$41,616,322
Department of Medical Assistance Services	Add 500 developmental disability waiver slots	\$0	\$15,155,118	\$15,155,118

### Application Period Open for Alexandria Stormwater Fee Credits

Did you know you can save money on your stormwater fee? **Between now and February 15th**, property owners can apply for a credit of up to 50% against their annual fee by taking actions to improve stormwater quality and/or quantity.

Examples of projects that are eligible for this credit include installing rain barrels under downspouts, taking a no-fertilizer pledge, and dry floodproofing to keep existing property safe from the impacts of stormwater. You can learn more and apply for the credit [here](#).

### What the Respect for Marriage Act means for Virginia

Last week, President Biden signed the Respect for Marriage Act (RFMA). The RFMA requires the federal government and states to recognize same-sex and interracial marriages if they were legally performed in the past and are legally performed in the future. RFMA, however, does not prohibit states from denying new marriage rights if the Supreme Court overturns Obergefell v. Hodges or Loving v. Virginia.

Virginia’s Constitution still bans same-sex marriage, so if the Supreme Court overturns marriage equality, new same-sex marriages could not be granted here. The RFMA does require states to honor other states’ marriage licenses, so Virginians would still be able to travel out of state to get married somewhere that honors their rights.

The RFMA also explicitly protects religious objections to marriage equality. Places of worship will not be required to perform same-sex wedding and businesses are within their rights “to not provide goods or services to formally recognize or celebrate a marriage.”

Earlier this year, a constitutional amendment to repeal Virginia’s constitutional ban on same-sex marriage and include an affirmative right to marry was [defeated](#) on partisan lines. Legislation will again be introduced next session to repeal this ban and I hope to see it passed.

## Nominations for Commending or Memorial Resolutions

Commending Resolutions are passed by the General Assembly to celebrate an individual or an organization that has demonstrated excellence and/or dedication to the well-being of others. For example, I recently presented the [Chinquapin Wahoos](#) and the [Titan Robotics Club](#) with commending resolutions for their achievements. Last month, I presented Lyles-Crouch crossing guard Ms. Cora Reed with a resolution for her 50+ years of service, dedication to our students, and recognition as one of the most Outstanding Crossing Guards in Virginia. Other examples include a local organization's milestone anniversary, or celebrating an individual's retirement from public service or notable award or recognition. Memorial Resolutions recognize outstanding leaders in our community who have recently passed.

I welcome your ideas and suggestions for deserving individuals and organizations in our community. Please nominate an individual or organization [here](#).

## In the Community



### Commending the ACHS Titan Robotics Team

I had the honor of presenting a Commending Resolution to the Alexandria City High School Titan Robotics team for winning the prestigious Chairman's Award at the Chesapeake District Championship and qualifying for/competing at the World Championship earlier this year. I'm excited to follow their progress during the upcoming season. Learn more at: <https://www.frc5587.org/>



### **Visit to Ferdinand T. Day with ACPS**

Other members of the Alexandria delegation and I joined members of the School Board and Interim Superintendent Dr. Kay-Wyatt to visit classrooms at Ferdinand T. Day Elementary and discuss legislative priorities for ACPS.



### **Town Hall**

Senator Adam Ebbin, Delegate Charniele Herring and I held our annual pre-session Town Hall earlier this month. Thanks to everyone who joined us and shared their priorities.



### **Firefighter and Friends Toy Distribution**

School Board Member Willie Bailey's organization, Firefighter and Friends to the Rescue, brought joy to thousands of children, distributing over 3,200 new toys and over \$2,800 in gift cards to kids from over 60 schools, shelters, and nonprofits from Fairfax County and Alexandria. Learn more: <https://www.ffandfriends2therescue.org/>



**Melwood's Miracle on 23rd Street**

[Melwood](#) is a local nonprofit providing jobs and opportunities for people with disabilities in our region. Their Arlington location is within the 45th District and I enjoyed celebrating at their annual Miracle on 23rd Street event.



### **Scottish Christmas Walk Parade and Holiday Boat Parade**

One of my favorite Alexandria traditions is the annual Scottish Christmas Walk Parade and the Holiday Boat parade.



### **Debra Deneise Smith Foundation Breakfast with Santa**

The Debra Deneise Smith Foundation is creating a community where all children know that the continued attainment of education is critical and within their grasp, regardless of financial ability. They delighted children in our community with their annual Breakfast with Santa and toy distribution. Learn more: <https://www.debradsmithfoundation.org/>.



### **SiX Conference**

I joined state legislators from across the country at the State Innovation Exchange conference, where we discussed progressive tax policy, supporting public education, and more.



### **Rally for Starbucks Workers**

I like my coffee Union Strong! It was great to see so many people come together in solidarity and rally to support Starbucks workers on the one-year anniversary of their first workers' union victory.



### **Del Ray Christmas Tree Lighting**

We had a great time lighting the Del Ray Christmas Tree with NBC4's Pat Collins and his infamous snow stick.

