

Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

Delegate • Virginia House District 45

Dear Elizabeth,

Last Wednesday, I was sworn-in as a Delegate. Thank you for this honor and privilege. I am grateful to have the opportunity to continue to serve our community. Each week during the General Assembly session, I plan to send out a newsletter to let constituents know what we are working on in Richmond.



Committee Assignments

I was thrilled to receive the news last week that I will be serving on the Finance Committee and the Committee on Counties, Cities, and Towns.

The Committee on Finance plays a crucial role in considering the matters of Virginia's general and special revenues, including tax exemptions, sales and use tax, and food and beverage tax. I look forward to being a good steward of the Commonwealth's taxpayers' revenue.

My experience in local government has provided me with a strong understanding of the impact legislation can have on localities. This experience will allow me to effectively represent Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax on the issues and needs that will come before the Counties, Cities, and Towns Committee. I look forward to continuing to work with our local elected officials on ways to empower them to best serve our community.



Legislation

Below are the bills I've introduced. I am also working on additional bills with some of my colleagues - in a number of cases, we discovered we were working on the same or similar legislation - and I will discuss these bills in the coming weeks.

Creating More Accessible, Diverse, & Equitable Government Bodies

HB 444 would allow public bodies, like our many advisory boards and commissions comprised of volunteers, to hold some electronic meetings outside of a declared emergency while also ensuring and enhancing access and transparency for members of the public. We have seen participation in government meetings dramatically increase over the past two years since the introduction of electronic meetings and this is something that should be allowed to continue outside of an emergency. I have been working on this bill with the Virginia Coalition for Open Government, the Virginia Press Association, the Virginia Municipal League, and the Virginia Association of Counties. Electronic meeting authority is also one of the top six legislative priorities for the Northern Virginia Aging Network; supported by the Arc of Northern Virginia; in the legislative package of the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce; and many more organizations, including environmental groups.

Tools for Flooding Mitigation

Flooding is a significant issue in our district. We need every tool possible to help mitigate the devastating damage it has caused families and business owners. To create more tools to fight flooding in the 45th District and statewide, I have introduced HB 448. This important bill would create a state work group to review and make recommendations concerning the existing limits on local authority to review certain land-disturbing activities for stormwater impacts. A report of the work group's findings and recommendations will be due no later than November 15, 2022. In

the 2023 session, I would plan on introducing legislation based on the recommendation of this DEQ work group.

Facilitating Education Through In-School Instruction

Our children can not learn in-school if they cannot get to school. Among the many challenges currently faced by our local school systems are severe staffing shortages, including those of school bus drivers. HB 452 would give school divisions the ability to advertise school bus driver openings on the sides of buses. The current Virginia Code does not permit any form of advertising on school buses and while this alone would not solve the problem, school districts need every tool possible at their disposal. This bill is supported by the Virginia Education Association.

Affordable Housing

We have an affordable housing crisis in our community. HB 465 would allow localities that have an affordable dwelling unit ordinance (like Alexandria) to require developers to contribute to the affordable housing trust fund for any new development. Currently, localities like Alexandria can only request, but not require, contributions on certain projects and we get nothing on projects that are built by-right. Our community often feels like we are not getting enough from developers for affordable housing and this bill would help address that and serve to increase the amount of affordable housing available to residents.

Helping Small Businesses

The idea for HB 460 was brought to me by independent restaurant owners in our district who have been struggling throughout the pandemic. It would create price transparency for consumers when ordering food via delivery apps by mandating that food delivery platforms must be transparent about the fees (including commissions, delivery fees, promotional fees, and food item fees) they charge. For example, if a restaurant normally charges \$8.50 for a pizza if you order it directly at the restaurant, but the food delivery platform lists the pizza as \$10.50, it should be clear that the additional \$2 is a fee charged by the food delivery platform, and not what the restaurant actually charges. This bill has been endorsed by the Virginia Restaurant, Lodging & Travel Association.

Fighting Climate Change Through Electric Vehicle Use

Climate change is an existential threat and our government must work together with residents to reduce our carbon footprint, including our dependence on fossil fuels. HB450 is a simple, yet important bill that would prohibit a person from parking a vehicle not capable of receiving an electric charge in a space reserved for charging electric vehicles. This bill is preparing our infrastructure to better serve a society where more people will be driving electric vehicles.

Ensuring Public Safety and Protections for Victims of Stalking

HB 451 would give individuals who are being stalked and threatened electronically or by mail a legal tool to protect themselves and their families from harassment and harm. It would allow Virginia residents to be protected from out-of-state stalking threats that place the victim in reasonable fear of death, criminal sexual assault, or bodily injury to herself or a family or household member. Currently, such evidence is only admissible if the conduct occurs within the

Commonwealth of Virginia. This bill is supported by the Virginia Sheriff's Association and the Virginia Chiefs of Police.

Preventing Food Waste

We waste around 40% of our food while members of our community go hungry; food waste is also the leading source of methane in landfills, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions. A bill that is not yet numbered would decrease food waste by protecting food donors and receivers from penalty or liability for donating or receiving food past the best-by date or other non-safety labels as long as all parties are informed, the food is labeled as not meeting all labeling/date requirements, and there are no acts of gross negligence or intentional misconduct by either party. Current U.S. food dating practices are [confusing and result in food being thrown away](#) when it is still safe and edible to eat. Many other states have enacted this common-sense change.

Transforming Rail in Virginia

Last year, the Commonwealth formalized a historic \$3.7 billion investment that will positively affect our economy and our quality of life by making significant improvements and enhancements for our passenger and freight rail systems. This project includes a new Long Bridge over the Potomac River, as well as the purchase of track and right of way, which will separate passenger and freight rail tracks, enable more frequent passenger rail, and help alleviate congestion on our roads. The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority was created as part of this project. HB 465 would make sure that the Virginia Railway Express (VRE), which is currently the only commuter rail system in the Commonwealth, is well-represented on this Authority to ensure the success of this project. Regardless of whether you ride VRE or not, better commuter rail transportation will help alleviate congestion and make commuting better for everyone.

More Legislation Being Finalized

Additionally, I have been working on budget amendments and as a co-patron on other legislation related to these topics and more. I will include details on those beginning next week.

Transition of Power

Last week, Governor Northam delivered his final State of the Commonwealth Address outlining the incredible accomplishments made over the past four years. You can watch his speech [here](#) or read it [here](#).

On Saturday, Glenn Youngkin was inaugurated as Governor and you can read his inaugural address [here](#). In his first act, Governor Youngkin signed [11 executive actions](#).

Many of his actions are beyond his authority as Governor, such as his attempt to undermine local school division mask mandates and to withdraw Virginia from the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative.

The Governor's Executive Orders cannot supersede state law. Senate Bill 1303, which passed last year, requires each school division to adhere to CDC protocols to the extent practicable. Current CDC guidelines recommend universal masking for all students and staff over the age of two.

As COVID cases continue to rise, we must do everything in our power to keep our children, educators and school staff safe. Masks are an effective tool in preventing the spread of COVID, and therefore critical to our ability to maintain in-person learning.

I am grateful to our local leaders in Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax for following the CDC guidance and the clear science on the benefit of masks in stating that mask mandates for our schools will remain in place. Thank you for prioritizing the health of students and educators.

It is going to be an interesting session, to say the least. I am in Richmond to fight for the residents of the 45th District and my office is here to serve you.

Save the Date - Virtual Town Hall 1/29 at 10am

We'll be hosting a virtual town hall Saturday the 29th at 10am. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) to stay updated and we'll also send the information out next week.

Contact Me

If you'd like to share your feedback on legislation during this session or need anything, please email me at DelEBennett-Parker@house.virginia.gov or call our office at 804-698-1045.

Warmly,

Elizabeth