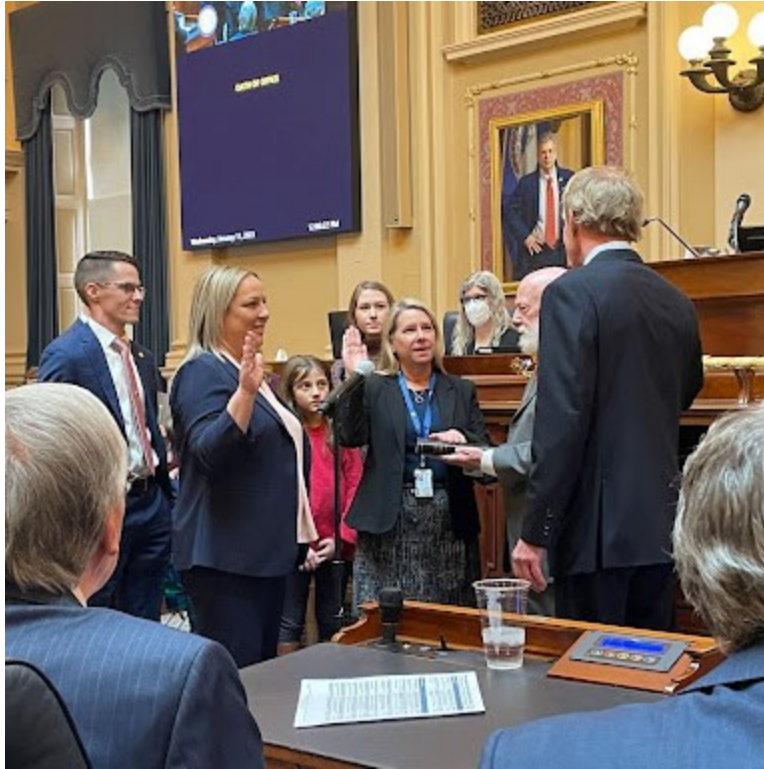

From: Delegate Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Sent: Thursday, March 2, 2023 12:52 PM
To: alyssa@elizabethfordeldelegate.com
Subject: [test] One Week In



Dear Alyssa,

Last Wednesday, I began my second session in the General Assembly and I continue to be grateful to have the opportunity to serve our community. Each week during the session, I plan to send out a newsletter to let you know what we are working on in Richmond.

Last week, we welcomed two new Delegates to the House. Delegate Ellen Campbell (R) and Delegate Holly Seibold (D) both won special elections on January 10th and were sworn-in on January 11th. I was honored to be asked to serve as Del. Seibold's mentor and I look forward to working with her.



Like last year, we have a divided government with a Republican Governor, Democratic Senate, and a Republican House. Once again, everything that passes this session must have bipartisan support. While many controversial or extremely partisan bills are unlikely to pass, we have seen a lot of legislation introduced on big topics like education (from fully funding the Standards of Quality and guaranteeing teachers are paid at or above the national average to defunding public education in support of charter schools and private school vouchers); abortion (ranging from a complete ban to a constitutional amendment to protect abortion rights); efforts to repeal environmental progress by repealing clean car standards and the Virginia Clean Economy Act, and more. We will provide updates as to how bills are moving through the House in these newsletters.

Town Hall

On Saturday, January 28th, at 10:00am, I will be joining my colleagues Senator Adam Ebbin, Senator George Barker, and Delegate Charniele Herring for an Alexandria General Assembly Delegation Town Hall in the Cafeteria of Alexandria City High School. We hope to see you there!



Legislative Agenda

Below are some of the bills I've introduced. I will discuss some of the bills I am co-patroning and my budget amendments in the coming weeks.

Voting Rights and Supporting People with Disabilities

Virginia allows people 65 or older and people with physical disabilities to vote curbside. This leaves behind people with non-physical disabilities and means that our Code is out of compliance with the ADA, which requires reasonable accommodations to access government services. [HB 2049](#) would expand curbside voting to people with non-physical disabilities that affect their ability to enter a polling place.

Access to Mental Health Care

We have a mental health crisis and Virginia is ranked 39th for access to mental healthcare. Unfortunately, the additional cost of out-of-network treatments is out of reach for many Virginians. The mental health crisis is also acute for young people with a number of groups declaring a "[national emergency](#)" in youth mental health. [HB 1879](#) would require health insurance plans to cover out-of-network mental health care services to expand coverage and

access when in-network providers are not available or do not have expertise treating a particular patient's age group, other demographics, or emotionally distressing experience.

Gun Violence Prevention

Given the lethal combination of domestic violence and firearms, Virginia law prohibits those subject to Final Protective Orders and those convicted of assault and battery against a family or household member from purchasing, possessing, or transporting firearms. However, there is a loophole in current statute that allows abusers to certify before the court that they will transfer firearms in their possession to a third-party, without any approval or enforcement by the courts or by police. Furthermore, current law allows the transfer of firearms to another household member. Many domestic violence survivors share that their abusers still have access to firearms, despite the requirement to relinquish access. [HB 1729](#) closes this dangerous loophole.

Criminal Justice Reform and Supporting Small Businesses

Virginia Code does not allow restaurants or alcohol wholesalers to hire anyone who has ever had a felony conviction to work for them in the front of house or these businesses risk losing their ABC license. We must reduce the many barriers faced by individuals returning from the criminal justice system. While that alone is reason enough to update this section of our Code, our businesses are also facing staffing shortages and this prohibition limits their ability to hire - or even promote certain employees who are already working for them. [HB 1730](#) would allow ABC licensees to hire individuals with felony convictions after two years.

Eviction Prevention

The idea for this bill was brought to me by Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins. Alexandria courts are seeing as many as 150 eviction cases a day; currently, summonses can be filed as early as six days after the payment is late, regardless of the amount due. We are seeing cases get filed for as little as \$100. An unexpected car issue or doctor's appointment can cause low-income individuals to fall temporarily behind on rent. [HB 1732](#) would require that landlords must offer payment plans to tenants who owe one month or less of rent before they can file a court summons after five days of nonpayment.

Electronic Meeting Flexibility

[HB 2050](#) would expand flexibility for local advisory bodies and regional bodies to hold all-virtual meetings outside of an emergency, above the current 25% limit. These boards are composed of residents who volunteer their time and are uncompensated. We saw during the pandemic that electronic meetings increased the ability for residents to serve on these bodies

and participate because they removed barriers like childcare and transportation. Local boards are now struggling to recruit and retain members. This is a top legislative priority of the Northern Virginia Aging Network and The Arc of Virginia; it is also supported by the Virginia Chamber, the League of Women Voters, the American Association of University Women, and more.

Addressing Flooding

[HB 1970](#) would have expanded the scope of the Coastal Resilience Technical Advisory Committee to include other types of flooding, like those experienced by Alexandria, and require the Committee to assist the Department of Conservation and Recreation in developing, updating, and implementing the Virginia Flood Protection Master Plan. We knew when we filed this bill that it would not pass, but it was a tool to accelerate this conversation. On Monday, a subcommittee voted to send a letter to DCR to further this goal.

[HJ 516](#) would expand the membership of the Joint Subcommittee on Recurrent Flooding to better address and represent all types of flooding. (This Subcommittee was previously the Joint Subcommittee on Coastal Flooding, however, its membership was not updated to reflect the change in scope.)

Consumer Protection for Event Ticketing

Ticket resellers are legally able to sell tickets that are not in their possession without disclosing this and that they may never acquire said tickets. There have been stories across the country of people buying these speculative tickets, paying for hotel and lodging to get to an event, only to arrive and discover they do not have a ticket. Additionally, some companies are creating deceptive websites that mimic official box office ticketing websites. These websites lead consumers to think they are buying tickets at face value when they are really paying a premium. [HB 1857](#) is a bipartisan consumer protection bill to address these unscrupulous practices by requiring disclosure of speculative tickets and banning deceptive URLs.

Supporting Students

Brought to me by my constituent, Alex Sprague, [HJ 500](#), would designate the week of March 20 in 2023 and in each succeeding year, as Student Appreciation Week in Virginia. They also brought to me [HJ 509](#), which would provide that each child attending public school has a right to access a school-based mental health professional, including the choice to access a professional who does not utilize Applied Behavioral Analysis. We are also working on [HB](#)

[1879](#) (outlined above regarding access to mental health care) with the student group Pride Liberation.

Visitors

Each week I like to highlight some of the constituents and organizations we meet with.



Moms Demand Action

We had a great conversation about gun violence prevention and common-sense gun safety legislation that has been introduced this session, including safe storage, a three-day waiting period, a ban on assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, and more.



Education Association of Alexandria

We met with teachers from Alexandria to discuss fully funding and implementing the Standards of Quality, ensuring teachers are paid at least the national average, expanding support for English Language Learners, and more.



Tenants and Workers United/New Virginia Majority

We had the pleasure of welcoming our largest group of constituents to date and discussed the affordable housing crisis, rent stabilization, and the importance of giving local governments greater authority to hold negligent landlords accountable for unsafe and unhealthy living conditions.



Virginia Poverty Law Center

My staff and I enjoyed meeting with staff members from the Virginia Poverty Law Center, as we've been working with them on several pieces of legislation.

My Legislative Team



Normally I have a staff of one, but our team grows during session. Please welcome our 2023 team - Ted (Chief of Staff), Anja (Shared Administrative Assistant with Delegate Shelly Simonds), Miriam (Intern), and Alyssa (Session Aide). We look forward to serving you this session!

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

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