

Elizabeth Bennett-Parker

Delegate • Virginia House District 45

Dear {{ FirstName | default: 'Friend' }},

Tomorrow is crossover, the deadline by which bills must pass the House in order to “cross over” to the Senate (and vice versa). Over the next two days, we are scheduled to vote on almost 300 bills on the House floor. This is a daily increase of more than three-fold over last week, when we voted on about 225 bills over the course of five days.

Later this week, we'll vote on the budget. Yesterday afternoon, the House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Finance and Appropriations Committee released their budget recommendations; you can find the House materials [here](#) and the Senate materials [here](#).

Last week we learned that the Youngkin administration made a serious miscalculation in state education funding resulting in local [school divisions receiving \\$201 million less in state aid](#) than they expected. This mistake is the result of the Youngkin administration failing to account for funding to hold localities harmless from the elimination of the state's portion of the sales tax on groceries. Now it is up to the General Assembly to find \$201 Million in the budget to fix the Administration's mistake and make sure schools have the funding they need.

We also learned last week that none of the constitutional amendments introduced this year in the House and referred to the Privileges and Elections Committee would be considered. However, several constitutional amendments including the [automatic restoration of voting rights](#), [repealing the ban on same-sex marriage](#) in Virginia's constitution, and [guaranteeing the right to reproductive freedom](#), are expected to pass the Senate this week and will then come over to the House. The latter was the only constitutional amendment to be docketed in the House and it died along partisan lines in the Courts Committee. The restoration of voting rights and repealing the ban on same-sex marriage have some bipartisan support in the House (Republican House members have introduced versions of both of these), but it remains to be seen if these will be docketed for a vote or make it out of committee, as both died last year.

Budget Amendments

This week we will consider the House budget. Below are some of the budget amendments I submitted.

Expanding Pre-K

Access to quality, affordable early childhood education is critical to support working families and crucial for setting our students up for success. This amendment would

provide funding to serve more families across the Commonwealth.

[Addressing Senior Hunger](#)

Over 175,000 seniors in our Commonwealth do not have enough food to eat. The emergency SNAP allotments that were provided during the pandemic are ending next month. Seniors will see the worst of these cuts, some having their benefits reduced from \$283 to just \$23 a month. A number of other states have passed state-funded supplements to ensure that seniors have food on their table. This amendment would provide an additional benefit of \$25/month per eligible senior.

[Increasing Participation in Government](#)

This budget amendment would provide grants for local governments and state agencies to update meeting rooms with technology to allow for the live-streaming of public meetings and/or remote testimony from members of the public. Live-streaming meetings and having the ability to participate remotely increases participation in government by removing barriers for people with disabilities, seniors, those who lack childcare or transportation, those who live in rural areas, and more.

[Affordable Housing Trust Fund Impact Reporting](#)

Brought to me by the Arlington NAACP, this amendment would require DHCD to collect and publicly report on the characteristics of residents and neighborhoods benefiting from Affordable Housing Trust Fund projects. This transparency would ensure that Virginia is able to measure whether supported projects disproportionately benefit one or more groups of residents and their impact on residential housing segregation.

[Paid Parental Leave for General Assembly Aides](#)

State employees are eligible to receive at least 8 weeks of paid parental leave; however, this is not necessarily the case for General Assembly aides. Each office sets their own paid leave policy and given that most House members have only one year-round staff member, there is a disincentive to offer paid parental leave. This amendment would make General Assembly aides eligible for the same leave benefits as other state employees and create a pool of funding for temporary staff, so that offices do not have to rely on campaign funds to hire help. Our staff work hard for us and our constituents and like other state employees, they deserve time to welcome a new child into their families.

[Legislative Updates](#)

Below is an update on some of the bills I introduced or co-patroned. Five of the bills I introduced are still alive in some format. Two other bills resulted in letters to Commissions to request further study and recommendations.

Reducing Food Insecurity in Virginia

[HB2445](#) revives the Food Crop Donation Tax Credit to support farmers, feed the hungry and reduce food waste by incentivizing farmers to donate to local food banks. This bill passed out of committee unanimously last week thanks to the hard work of some amazing high school students from the Virginia Beach chapter of Food Rescue US. Watching them has been inspiring and a source of optimism. In addition to lots of other advocacy, they spent a day off from school in the Capitol - leaving home at 3:30am to testify at a 7am meeting. Watch the bill presentation and their testimony below:



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 with alcohol. [HB 1730](#) would allow ABC licensees to hire individuals with felony convictions after two years and the completion of probation. This bill initially died along partisan lines in subcommittee, but after working across the aisle we were able to reach a consensus on the bill language, and bring it back from the dead. It passed out of the General Laws Committee unanimously and a vote on the House floor is expected tomorrow.

Consumer Protection for Deceptive Event Ticketing Practices

[HB 1857](#) is a consumer protection bill addressing the unscrupulous practices of ticket resellers 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 substantial premium. After a significant amount of work (and an attempt by a committee member to kill the bill in subcommittee), the bill passed out of committee unanimously and a vote on the floor is expected this afternoon.

Supporting the Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission

[HB2371](#) removes the requirement that the volunteer members of the Commission secure a \$10,000 surety bond in order to serve. This requirement is a barrier to service on an advisory body without compensation. The bill passed out of committee unanimously and a vote on the floor is expected this afternoon.

Electronic Meeting Flexibility for Advisory Boards

I have been working to increase access to service on local advisory bodies and representation in government by increasing flexibility for remote participation and virtual meetings for three years. Last year, I learned the importance of having companion bills in the House and Senate as my bill ([HB444](#)) sailed through the House unanimously while the Senate bill ([SB214](#)) died a fiery death, alerting us to the problems ahead. This year, the chambers have reversed and my bill [HB2050](#) died along partisan lines in a House subcommittee. I am grateful to Senator Dave Marsden for carrying the Senate companion ([SB1351](#)) this year; his bill passed the Senate 25-14 and I am working with him to hopefully get it out of the House in an amended version.

Access to Mental Health Care

[HB 1879](#) would expand mental health care coverage and access by requiring health insurance plans to cover out-of-network services 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. The Chair of the Health, Welfare, and Institutions Committee is sending a letter to the Health Insurance Review Commission, requesting they study this issue and return with recommendations.

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 domestic abuse from having firearms. However, there is no process by which the courts or police can ensure that these firearms are actually transferred to another party and current law allows this transfer to another household member. [HB 1729](#) would have closed this dangerous loophole, but it died along partisan lines - along with all of the gun safety bills that were heard in the House Public Safety Committee.

Eviction Prevention

The idea for this bill was brought to me by Councilwoman Alyia Gaskins. [HB 1732](#) would have required that large landlords must offer payment plans to tenants who owe one month or less of rent before they can file for eviction after five days of nonpayment. The bill died along partisan lines.

Voting Rights and Supporting People with Disabilities

Virginia law is out of compliance with the ADA because it only allows people with physical disabilities to vote curbside, leaving behind people with non-physical disabilities. [HB 2049](#) would have expanded curbside voting to people with non-physical disabilities that affect their ability to enter a polling place. This bill was heard at 7am and I am grateful to the people and organizations who spoke in support. It was incredibly depressing to watch this bill die along partisan lines.

Below are some of the bills I am co-patroning that have had a change in status since our last newsletter.

Bill	Topic	Status
HB1510	Authorizes localities to establish programs to grant tax incentives or provide regulatory flexibility to encourage the preservation, restoration, or development of urban green space.	Passed House 72-27
HB1526	Expands the Virginia Literacy Act to include students in grades four through eight.	Passed House 100-0
HB1534	Creates a loan repayment program for mental health professionals.	Died in Appropriations Subcommittee 5-3
HB1567	Requires the Virginia Department of Health to convene a workgroup to evaluate strategies to reduce maternal & infant mortality rates.	Passed House 100-0
HB1702	Requires landlords with more than four units whose leases have an automatic renewal provision or the option to renew to provide written notice of any rent increase at least 60 days before the lease ends.	Passed House 58-42
HB1874	Prohibits the Board of Social Services and Department of Health from requiring persons applying to participate or renewing their participation in SNAP or WIC to appear in person.	Passed Committee 20-1
HB1924	Prohibits employers from paying individuals with disabilities wages lower than minimum wage.	Passed Committee 21-0
HB1996	Requires the summons for Unlawful Detainer/Civil Claim for Eviction form to be modified to be understandable to persons whose literacy level matches the Virginia literacy level for fourth grade; explain that failure to appear in court may result in eviction from the defendant's household; and provide the statewide Legal Aid and Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot program websites and phone numbers, directing defendants to contact those programs for more information and assistance.	Passed House 99-0
HB2023	Addresses the wage gap and promotes gender equity by prohibiting employers from seeking the wage or salary history of a prospective employee or basing prospective salary on the wages of their former position.	Died in Subcommittee 5-1; Senate version passed Senate 20-18
HB2205	Establishes a refundable state child tax credit for households with an income that does not exceed \$100,000	Died in Subcommittee 5-2

HB2338	Directs the Commonwealth Transportation Board to use up to 30 percent of available funds in the Transit Ridership Incentive Program to improve the accessibility of transit bus passenger facilities and transition public transit bus fleets and infrastructure to zero-emission bus fleets and infrastructure.	Passed House 64-35
--------	--	--------------------

Visitors

American Association of University Women

We met with constituents representing the AAUW to discuss maternal health, paid family medical leave, access to childcare, ending workplace discrimination and harassment, supporting public education, and more.



CASA In Action

We met with the Virginia chapter of CASA in Action and discussed legislation to protect affordable housing, fully fund public education, and expand affordable health care.





Northern Virginia Association of Realtors

We met with realtors from the district and discussed legislation about short term rentals, security deposits, and affordable housing.



League of Women Voters

We had the pleasure of meeting with the League of Women Voters on their day of advocacy and discussed protecting and expanding voting rights, enacting campaign finance reform, supporting public education, and more.



Students from George Mason University

We were excited to welcome students from GMU on their first visit to the Capitol and to hear about their priorities, from addressing food insecurity on campus, to funding parity, and establishing university climate action plans.



Alexandria PTAC

We met with constituents representing the Alexandria PTAC and discussed lifting the support cap and fully funding staffing standards; supporting student mental health; providing better support for English Language Learners; enhancing literacy instruction; and more.

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

Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Delegate
Virginia's 45th District
www.ElizabethforDelegate.com
Find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#)

Paid for and Authorized By Elect Elizabeth Bennett-Parker