

2023 GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

The Virginia General Assembly has officially completed the 2023 session with over 2863 bills presented and 1686 bills passing both Houses to go to the Governor to be signed into law. While only a “stopgap” budget has been approved with more significant negotiations expected soon, I would like to take a moment to share with you some of our accomplishments from this year. The House Republican majority was successful in passing important legislation on taxes, education, healthcare, small business, etc. Thankfully, we were also successful in limiting the number of bills that I would characterize as counterproductive. I am providing you with a “list” of some of my legislation, as well as other bills that I believe are important. Please let me know if you have any questions.

DELEGATE FOWLER’S 2023 MAJOR LEGISLATIVE INITIATIVES

I introduced **HB 1372** which repeals the law that requires Virginia to adopt California’s Air Emissions standards which was passed by Democratic majorities in the General Assembly and approved by Governor Ralph Northam. Virginia’s elected representatives should determine what’s best for Virginia, not California! Several identical bills were introduced on this issue and I ultimately signed on as chief co-patron on **HB1378**. Our legislation passed the House on straight party line vote of 52-48 but was defeated in the State Senate Natural Resources Sub Committee by a vote of 8-7. Rest assured we will introduce this bill again next year.

I am happy to report that my **HB1471**, (identical to Sen Dunnavant’s **SB1261**), passed and has been signed into law by Governor Youngkin. This bill represented two years of legislative effort and will greatly reduce the cost of prescription drugs. Essentially, HB1471 will provide physicians and patients with real time cost information on prescription

drugs including lower cost generic equivalents. This knowledge will then allow patients the opportunity to reduce the cost of their medicines, and more importantly will ensure that patients receive the prescriptions required to maintain good health.

Another important legislative item I was working on was a House budget amendment in the amount of \$1 million dollars for the actual mitigation of the algae blooms affecting the water quality of Lake Anna. Both the House and State Senate budgets contained this amendment. Unfortunately, the House and State Senate conferees have not yet finalized the state budget. Stay tuned. I also passed legislation, **HB1563**, that will help our farmers by eliminating the sales tax for property used to grow agricultural products. Finally, I passed **HB1388** which will provide active members of the VA National Guard with free access and parking to VA State Parks.

BUDGET

The House budget that we passed included significant tax relief for Virginians to ensure more of your hard-earned money stays in your pocket. Moreover, as inflation continues to be a burden on families, we voted for various measures to alleviate its effects by lowering costs. That includes legislation aimed at reducing your electricity bill, easing the process to purchase a car within your budget, and raising the standard deduction so you end up paying less in taxes. Unfortunately, reaching a budget compromise with the State Senate has proved difficult and many of our efforts in the House are yet to be realized at the time of this writing. Our House and Senate budget conferees are still negotiating, and I am hoping that this partisan divide can be resolved in a way that will benefit all Virginians.

EDUCATION

During this legislative session, we worked hard to build on the momentum of the past year and deliver real results that make Virginia the best place to live, work, and raise a family. Some of those significant priorities include lowering costs for families and restoring excellence in our schools. I supported both bills below.

HB 1527: Student literacy measures; scope; students in grades four through eight.

Expands several provisions of the Virginia Literacy Act, enacted during the 2022 Regular Session of the General Assembly, effective with the 2024–2025 school year, and currently applicable to students in kindergarten through grade three, to students in grades four through eight, including (i) requiring each local school board to provide a program of literacy instruction to such students that is aligned with science-based reading research and provides evidence-based literacy instruction; (ii) requiring each local school board to provide reading intervention services to such students who demonstrate substantial deficiencies based on their individual performance on the Standards of Learning reading assessment or a literacy screener provided or approved by the Department of Education; ...

HB 1704: Public elementary and secondary schools; reports of certain arrests and convictions; receipt, report, and compilation.

Requires each division superintendent to annually designate an employee in the local school division as the division safety official whose duty is to receive all reports required to be made pursuant to relevant law from (i) every state official or agency and every sheriff, police officer, or other local law-enforcement officer or conservator of the peace having the power to arrest for a felony upon arresting a person who is known or discovered by the arresting official to be a full-time, part-time, permanent, or temporary teacher or any other employee in

such local school division for a felony or a Class 1 misdemeanor or an equivalent offense in another state.

TEACHERS

Teachers have an extraordinarily difficult job, which has only been exacerbated by the unprecedented times that our schools have experienced over the past few years. My House Republican colleagues and I introduced several pieces of legislation to empower teachers with the support needed to reestablish normalcy in their classrooms where teachers can actually teach and students can actually learn.

While budget negotiations are still underway, the House version of the budget that we passed includes net raises of 12 percent for teachers over the next two years. Moreover, the budget includes additional funding to significantly increase investments in our school divisions across the Commonwealth. We have also allocated funding for more school resource officers.

Education is the first and most important legacy that we leave to our children. Thank you for the work you do to help prepare our next generation to succeed. Here is another bill I supported that passed the House and Senate and may be of interest to you.

HB1691: School Resource Officer Grants Program and Fund, a bill which provides that matching grants from the School Resource Officer Incentive Grants Fund may be awarded to local law-enforcement agencies and local school boards for the expenses related to the equipment necessary for uniformed school resource officers and school security officers.

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare is always an important issue in the General Assembly. This year we worked to address issues that many people like you have

brought to my attention. We passed legislation that will help protect healthcare workers from threats of violence, a common problem faced by those in the healing arts. We also took steps to get treatment to people faster, by authorizing pharmacists to do simple tests for UTIs, and if positive, begin treatment and make a referral to a physician.

As I mentioned, my bill HB1471 passed the House and Senate overwhelmingly regarding prescription drugs, however not all of our efforts were successful. Legislation that would have helped provide more oversight to eliminate backlogs and dangerous conditions in our pharmacies came up short. Nonetheless, we will continue to work on the problem to get people the drugs they need in a timely fashion and ensure that pharmacy workers get the help they need to do their jobs correctly. I've listed below some bills that passed the House and Senate that may be of interest to you.

HB2274: Pharmacist scope of practice; initiation of treatment for certain diseases and conditions. Allows pharmacists to initiate treatment with, dispense, or administer controlled substances or devices for the initiation of treatment

HB1835: Threats made against health care providers; penalty. Removes the location element that specifies a health care provider must be in a hospital or in an emergency room on the premises of a clinic or other facility rendering emergency medical care from the crime of making an oral threat to kill or to do bodily injury to a health care provider.

VETERANS

Virginia is home to more veterans than any other state in the nation. Those who put on the uniform often serve here and ultimately decide to retire here. My House Republican colleagues and I made it our mission to pass legislation that builds on last year's military tax reduction by allowing all veterans – regardless of age – to enjoy lower taxes. While

our Republican majority in the House was able to advance the legislation, the measure was defeated in the Senate.

We recognize the critical need to address the mental health crisis faced by our veterans. Fortunately, we were able to pass legislation that ensures military service members transitioning from military to civilian life are supported by the program for mental health and rehabilitative services administered by the Department of Veterans Services.

We also increased the income tax subtraction for members of the National Guard of the Commonwealth beginning this year. The summary for that bill, along with a few others that may be of interest to you, are listed below. I voted YEA on all of these bills.

HB1624: Department of Veterans Services; mental health and rehabilitative services. Adds military service members transitioning from military to civilian life to the list of persons supported by the program for mental health and rehabilitative services administered by the Department of Veterans Services.

HB2362: Burial fees for military spouses. Provides that, from such funds as may be appropriated or otherwise received for such purpose, the Commonwealth shall pay any burial fee for (i) a member of the National Guard and Reserve or (ii) a deceased spouse of a member or veteran of the United States Armed Forces or of the National Guard and Reserve.

HB2363: Income tax subtraction; National Guard. Increases from \$3,000 to \$5,000 the income tax subtraction for wages or salaries of a member of the National Guard of the Commonwealth for taxable years beginning on or after January 1, 2023. The bill also expands the military ranks that qualify for the subtraction from O3 and below to O6 and below.

SENIORS

One of our highest priorities this session was to make sure senior citizens in nursing homes receive the attentive and diligent care that they deserve. After years of negotiations, we were able to pass **HB1446** legislation that sets minimum staffing requirements in certified nursing homes in Virginia. This legislation finally brings the Commonwealth in line with the majority of states that have minimum staffing standards in place and imposes administrative sanctions for those that don't comply. The bill has a delayed effective date of July 1, 2025.

We are also working to combat the rampant fraud and scam schemes that are plaguing our Commonwealth. If you are looking for guidance for yourself or a loved one who may be victim to or susceptible to these scams, you can always reach out to the Office of the Attorney General by calling them at **800-552-9963**.

SECOND AMENDMENT

I am proud to staunchly protect your constitutional right to own a firearm. This year, my House Republican colleagues and I were successful in passing common sense legislation in the House

that ensures those rights are preserved to the fullest extent of the law – unfortunately, the Democrat-controlled Senate stopped several of these measures.

However, it is just as critical to defeat bad legislation that infringes on your Second Amendment rights. Fortunately, we killed a variety of unconstitutional restrictions on guns that would have turned some current legal gun owners into felons. We also defeated some of the most extreme gun control legislation to date including a state-funded firearm “buy-back” program. Finally, we defeated a Democrat-sponsored bill that would have increased the age threshold when one can own a gun to 21 years old. I've listed below some positive pieces of legislation that

passed the House and Senate that may be of interest to you which I supported this session.

HB2449: Concealed handgun permits; Virginia Criminal Information Network, disclosure of information. Limits the exception to the requirement that the State Police withhold from public disclosure concealed handgun permittee information submitted to the State Police for purposes of entry into the Virginia Criminal Information Network.

HB1422: Concealed handgun permit; demonstrated competence. Adds a firearms safety or training course conducted by the United States Concealed Carry Association (USCCA) or by a USCCA-certified firearms instructor, or any firearms safety or training course or class available to the general public offered by a law-enforcement agency, institution of higher education, or private or public institution or organization or firearms training school utilizing instructors certified by the USCCA to those programs that satisfy the demonstration of competence requirement for the issuance of a Virginia resident or nonresident concealed handgun permit.

PRO-LIFE

When my colleagues and I in the General Assembly gather to legislate on behalf of Virginians, no issue is more paramount than protecting the sanctity of human life. This session, my House Republican colleagues and I passed several pieces of legislation in the House to defend innocent life. This includes legislation to ensure that infants who survive abortions will receive medical care and a chance at life, and that women seeking an abortion do so with complete information about their choice.

Unfortunately, these pragmatic proposals were killed in the Democrat-controlled Senate. However, our Republican majority in the House successfully defeated several extreme abortion measures, including one that would have enshrined abortions without any restrictions into the

Constitution of Virginia. Had we not defeated this measure, abortions up until the very moment of birth would have been deemed legal.

SMALL BUSINESS

Working with Governor Youngkin, the House put a significant emphasis on helping small businesses deal with the record inflation plaguing our economy. We passed legislation that significantly raises the standard deduction for personal income tax filers and voted to lower the top rate which is paid by most Virginians. For small businesses that file as Schedule C, this will be a significant tax cut. Or it would be, if Senate Democrats would stop their blockade of the budget bill.

Larger businesses that pay Virginia's corporate income tax would also get a break, as we passed legislation cutting that rate as well. Yet again, Democrats in the Senate said no, but we're continuing to work to break the logjam and get businesses the tax relief they need. Our efforts to assist small business is intended to help them to not only prosper, but to create more jobs!

Here is one bill that I believe will help streamline Virginia's efforts to assist our small business entrepreneurs. **HB2195**: Creates the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement (the Department) to administer workforce development programs. The bill consolidates statewide workforce program evaluation and data sharing under the Department and provides protections against improper disclosure of data.

It is my privilege to represent you in the Virginia House of Delegates. I also believe that it is important to keep you informed on the important issues in the General Assembly and I also greatly appreciate your feedback on legislation, so please keep in touch.

Sincerely,

Hyland F. "Buddy" Fowler, Jr.