

COUNTY OF YORK

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 5, 2022

TO: York County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Neil A. Morgan, County Administrator



SUBJECT: Virginia Municipal League (VML) Article

I wanted to share with the Board a non-partisan magazine article written by Michelle Gowdy, Executive Director for VML. Ms. Gowdy explains several concerns that she has regarding the upcoming General Assembly session and new administration. I also share similar concerns that were highlighted within the article.

Let's tame the variants (both viral and legislative)

OMICRON – NOT A WORD that I want to hear! I think we all would like to attend parties, travel, and hug each other after all this world has been through but, here we are again with a new variant that is still mostly an unknown. The most important thing to do is to voluntarily get your booster shot. I went to the local pharmacy to get mine and during the 30 minutes that I was there, I was amazed that myself and an elderly lady were the only persons to get the booster! Not going to lie, this one hurt. But hopefully it is the protection that I will need to work with another set of new variants that are still mostly unknowns – the new Governor and the new members of the General Assembly in the new year!

The Republicans are now in charge in the House of Representatives, the Governor's office, and other statewide offices. Only time will tell what the new approaches and focus they will be bringing to issues means for localities, but here are some ideas to share with your legislators over the holiday break:

First, according to www.youngkinforgovernor.com, the Governor Elect has said that he will eliminate the Virginia Grocery Tax. Doing so would significantly affect local government revenues. Virginia's grocery tax is 2.5 percent, with one percent of the tax revenue going back to local governments. Governor Elect Youngkin, speaking to ABC News 13, said, "There's plenty of money in the system, and we'll make sure that localities aren't going to come up short."

VML strongly urges the new Governor to ensure that localities are kept financially sound. Offsetting revenue losses (such as those proposed) with one-time monies won't fly. Instead, there must be a recurring stream of money equivalent to the losses incurred by the elimination of the grocery tax so basic, essential government services, like K-12 education and public safety, can continue to be funded.

Note: *Northam has just proposed a cut of the grocery tax – but VML still urges localities to push for consistent long-term funding to make up for the loss.*

The next two issues are difficult because they touch on benefits to workers who are vital to communities. But I am going to be honest about the costs associated with these proposals so it's clear what they will mean to Virginia's localities.

Education. Outgoing Governor Ralph Northam has announced a 10 percent teacher raise over the next two years. "Paying teachers is the right thing to do, and a wise investment," he said as reported WTOP News

Teachers are very important but offering money for only

those positions acknowledged by the state's Standards of Quality (SOQ) when there are 1) many 100 percent locally funded positions because the state's standards are woefully low; and 2) many other school division employee groups not acknowledged by the state, shifts a real financial burden onto the locality.

How do you propose a school budget offering a raise for only some employees of the school system and not for others working alongside them? Please remind your legislators that this proposal incurs a true cost to localities and that they should address these costs if they wish to move forward.

Law Enforcement. Northam has indicated that his new two-year budget will propose a 7.7 percent pay increase for new state troopers, a 25 percent increase to starting salaries for new correction officers, and a 20 percent pay increase for new deputy sheriffs and regional jail officials. "Law enforcement officers carry a heavy burden as they work to protect Virginians, and this raise is the right thing to do," the Governor stated according to WWBT News.

While laudable, raises for these segments of law enforcement IGNORE the state's statutory commitment to local police departments through the HB 599 program. Close to 70 percent of Virginians are served by local police departments, NOT law enforcement sheriffs' departments.

Bottom line: The state needs to step up and honor its funding commitment to local

police departments or remove the moratorium on city annexation, which was the deal struck with localities in the late 1970s/early 1980s.

For more information on this issue, please refer to the VML 2022 Legislative Program and its discussion on HB599 printed in this issue of *VTC* and available online at www.vml.org/2022-general-assembly.

So, in summary, VML understands and supports law enforcement and teacher salary increases, but believes it is vital for state policy makers to acknowledge and address the burden these measures place on local governments. State K-12 and public safety staffing standards and funding levels simply do not address the reality of staffing needs in communities!

On December 16, Governor Northam proposed a two-year biennial budget and changes to the final year of the current two-year budget. As always VML, was pleased to provide information on the proposal in *eNews* – so don't miss out! Make sure to sign up and check out previous issues (like the one from December 16) at www.vml.org/publications/enews.

Thank you for all you do for local government. Happy New Year everyone!

