



American Federation of Teachers Virginia

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Dear Joint Committee,

I thank you for the opportunity to speak about the Virginia General Assembly 2022 Legislative Session Priorities for the American Federation of Teachers Virginia. My name is Tyvon Bates, and I am the Political Director with American Federation of Teachers - Virginia. I proudly represent more than 5,000 members from Fairfax County and the cities of Norfolk and Hampton.

I would like to share some of our union's priorities for the 2022-2024 Biennial State Budget. First, we stand with the Fund our Schools Coalition and share their 5 priorities:

- Fund the [Fund Our Schools Coalition's 2022 legislative priorities](#):
 - Fully fund the Virginia Board of Education's revised Standards of Quality.
 - Lift the support staff cap that has limited funding for support positions including psychologists and social workers since 2009.
 - Make bold investments to start providing adequate teacher and staff pay. Provide funding to school divisions to support a substantial raise for educators so that Virginia can reach the national average for teacher pay as soon as possible. Virginia currently has the steepest teacher wage penalty of any state and is more than 10% below the national average for teacher pay despite being in the top 10% of median household income.
 - Invest in school infrastructure
 - Stand against cuts and repurposing of K-12 public schools funding. Avoid vouchers and tax credit programs that would direct money away from Virginia's public schools.
- Ensure that all school divisions can take advantage of state money for educator raises by lifting the requirement for districts to match the remaining amount of the state raise before paying the LCI-determined state-portion. In districts like Fairfax County where the LCI requires the local government to fund around 82% of school staff raises, the requirement to fund the remaining amount before receiving the state portion has meant that districts like Fairfax have not been able to take advantage of state money at all. We



urge the General Assembly to pass a bill that would allocate the LCI-determined amount for educator salaries to each school division regardless of that division's ability to fully fund the remaining amount.

- Continue to hold districts harmless for enrollment losses as we are dealing with the impacts of the 3rd school year impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Oppose repealing the grocery tax, which would negatively impact localities' ability to fund necessary public services including education.
- Support [Delegate Coyner's bill](#) to develop a statewide literacy plan for Virginia aligned with the science of reading.

I also want to bring to your attention an issue that uniquely impacts Fairfax educator salaries. Last year when the General Assembly passed a 5% raise for teachers, FCPS educators never saw this increase. This is because the Local Composite Index determines a ratio of around 82% to 18% in local vs. state responsibility for state-budgeted raises in Fairfax County and we only see the state's portion if the local government funds the full remaining amount. This left the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors on the hook for over \$100 million that they said they couldn't afford to match and so they initially budgeted for another year of frozen salaries, what would have been the 6th year FCPS salaries were frozen since 2009. In the end we were able to fund 2% while we watched the majority of Virginia districts fund 5% or more. We are asking the General Assembly to fund the state portion of the budgeted raise for educators regardless of the locality's ability to match the rest. This would mean that even if local districts can't afford the full match, their educators could still see the state portion.

Finally, I ask that the General Assembly oppose a repeal of the grocery tax. Local governments rely on these taxes to fund essential services to their communities including public education. In localities like Fairfax, the public schools' budget is by far the largest portion of the county budget and it's the first place the Board of Supervisors makes cuts when the budget is tight. This decrease in tax revenue would be a significant blow to FCPS funding.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Virginia's public schools have been called on to address inequities and gaps in public services that go far beyond the scope of our practice. Public schools provide so many services to our communities, but we need the staffing and funding to be able to meet our students' needs. In a time when educators are leaving the profession in never-seen-before numbers, it is time for Virginia to invest boldly in ensuring that our public schools are staffed at the recommended ratios and that our educators are valued and adequately compensated for their expertise and the critical role they play in our communities.

Sincerely,

Tyvon Bates

AFT Virginia Political Director