



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

Ralph S. Northam
Governor

February 14, 2019

The Honorable Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.
Co-Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
Pocahontas Building, Room E507
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable S. Chris Jones
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
Pocahontas Building, Room W1312
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Thomas K. Norment, Jr.
Co-Chairman, Senate Finance Committee
Pocahontas Building, Room E603
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Senator Hanger, Senator Norment, and Delegate Jones:

I want to thank each of you for your efforts and dedication to the citizens of the Commonwealth. I commend you for your hard work and commitment to Virginia's financial future, which is reflected in the various revenue proposals from the House and Senate and in each chamber's proposed budget amendments.

This session presents a once in a lifetime opportunity. We are blessed with a robust revenue forecast as a result of a strong economy and changes in federal tax laws. We have accomplished an important first step by conforming our tax laws to federal changes, allowing the Tax Department to process tax filings. But equally, if not more importantly, we have to invest in core priorities.

When I presented my budget in December, I outlined a vision for Virginia's long-term success. I am pleased that there are some areas of agreement. We agree teacher salaries must be a priority. We agree that expanding broadband access across the state is critical for individuals and businesses. We agree that the state must do more in the area of school safety.

There are other examples where we have found common ground; however, there are a few areas that I ask for additional consideration. My requests are limited to my highest priorities. The attached appendix outlines the details of these issues, but I would like to highlight a few at the outset.

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In order for every Virginian to thrive, we must invest in their success – and that requires a greater focus on issues of equity.

First and foremost, we have to ensure that our education system – from early childhood to K-12 to higher education – is equitable for every student, no matter his or her zip code. To that end, I ask you to consider restoring funding to the level I proposed for the at-risk add-on program, which benefits schools with the greatest needs. I also ask that you include funding for early childhood programs and need-based financial aid for higher education.

Second, we need to do more in the area of affordable housing, as I laid out in December. Unfortunately, Virginia has five of the top ten cities with the highest eviction rates in the country. We have the opportunity to make a real difference by providing funding for attorneys to represent those at risk of eviction. We need to have the expertise at the state level to support eviction prevention efforts, and we should put more funding in the Housing Trust Fund.

We also must ensure we protect women's access to needed healthcare, maintain the health of the Chesapeake Bay, and keep structural balance and reserves at the center of our budget priorities.

Secretary Layne will address these issues with you directly in the coming days. In addition, my Cabinet will be contacting you about other concerns, and I ask you to consider them in your conference deliberations.

I am proud of our ability to work together, find common ground, and move forward on issues that are important to our citizens. This is the signature of the legislative process in Virginia.

Through collaboration and compromise, we have achieved a great deal of which we can be proud. As we approach the end of the session, I am confident that we can continue to operate in the best interest of the citizens of the Commonwealth and find even more opportunities for success.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph S. Northam". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ralph S. Northam