

The Northern Virginia business community continues to respond to the ever-evolving environment of 2020, from the health and economic crises created by the spread of COVID-19 to the growing calls for a more equitable America. Our members have invested time, energy and money into preparing workspaces and employees for a return to the office. Our members are continuing to make the deliberate changes to policies and practices to create an equitable workplace. We ask the General Assembly in its 2020 Special Session to work with us, understand what we have accomplished so far, and ensure that the promise of a prosperous economy to which all Virginians have access is realized.

Priority 1 – Invest in Education and the Workforce

Prioritize re-allotment of funding for higher education and workforce training

The 2020 General Assembly made historic investments in education. We ask that those investments, **specifically the increase in base operating support for George Mason University, the Governor’s G3 program, and the Tech Talent Investment Program**, be restored. We also ask you to **expand eligibility for TAG grants to DACA recipients**.

Do:

- Recognize the role of the state in developing the workforce through education and training
- Direct federal CARES Act funding and reserve funds to meet these obligations

Don’t:

- Prioritize any level of education over another; K-12 and higher education are inseparable tools for economic growth and need state funding
- Assume grants or loans will provide sufficient support for disadvantaged students, particularly minority and first-in-family students

Priority 2 – Provide Flexibility to Businesses

Ensure all COVID-related legislation provides flexibility

Practically all business decisions that need to be made to provide a safe environment for employees and customers have already been made. If the General Assembly pursues additional worker or workplace safety requirements, **please include the ability for companies to show how they already meet those requirements**.

Do:

- Recognize that many businesses never “closed” and have made significant investment in safety
- Recognize that *Forward Virginia* has been in place, and business has followed it, for many months

Don’t:

- Use this Special Session as an opportunity to try again at legislation that failed during the regular session
- Expect businesses to adapt to a new set of rules without causing significant economic setbacks

Priority 3 – Create a More Equitable Virginia

Pass statewide police and criminal justice reforms to eliminate racial disparity; provide support for families seeking childcare during pandemic

The Commonwealth of Virginia has an opportunity to adopt meaningful reforms to eliminate or drastically reduce racial disparity in policing and in the criminal justice system. The business community supports **statewide reforms to policing and court practices that reduce disparate racial outcomes**.

We also encourage the General Assembly to provide **support to families in need of childcare** to prevent women and older adults from leaving the workforce.

Do:

- Focus on reforms that already have bipartisan support, reserving the more difficult measures for the regular session.
- Engage with a broad group of stakeholders including those most affected

Don’t:

- Only address the public safety outcomes of systemic racism. It impacts every facet of victims’ lives including education and health
- Fail to consider unintended consequences of well-meaning reforms

Priority 1 – Invest in Education and the Workforce

High demand fields need talent now

- Before COVID, VEC estimated Virginia needed to fill **2.6 million jobs** before 2026; in 2019 there were close to **500,000 open positions** in tech, health care, skilled trades, early childhood education, and public safety.
- G3 can reach **40,000 students** across the Commonwealth pursuing degrees in these fields
- FastForward has awarded 20,000 credentials in just 3 years; **more than half FastForward students are minorities and twice as likely to receive SNAP/TANF benefits** than other college students
- A Fairfax County EDA job fair in July led to **1700 interviews for 3500 open positions**

COVID is widening the tech talent supply gap

- A [July study](#) found that without expanding access to learning opportunities, the Capital Region alone (Richmond, DC, Baltimore) would face a tech worker shortage causing **60,000 unfilled positions by 2025**
- Many of the highest-demand tech fields only **need short-term credentials** rather than a bachelor's or associate's degree: AWS, Microsoft Azure, Google Cloud

Priority 2 – Provide Flexibility to Businesses

Investment in workplaces is significant and ongoing

- In order to meet CDC/OSHA guidelines, some companies spent as much as **\$5.00/sf** and that cost continues to rise.
 - One Nova Chamber member invested **\$340,000** to prepare for Phase II reopening in Tysons
 -
- Cost of PPE, equipment and cleaning supplies continue to rise
 - Gloves: Since May, Nitrile up 177%, Latex up 145%; Vinyl up 173%
 - Masks: N95 are four times as expensive as before the pandemic and increasingly difficult to source; 3-ply prices have dropped but remain at twice the price of pre-pandemic
 - Hand Sanitizer: prices are going down but remain at twice the price of pre-pandemic
 - Paper goods: slowly increasing now, up to 9% higher

Priority 3 – Create a More Equitable Virginia

Evidence overwhelmingly shows racial disparity in every facet of the American justice system

- The [Washington Post published a summary](#) of more than 120 studies showing overwhelming evidence of racism in the criminal justice system. Highlights include:
 - [A study of 95 million traffic stops](#) found blacks were more likely to be stopped and searched than whites
 - [Data from the U.S. Sentencing Commission](#) found that black men receive a sentence almost 20 percent longer than white men who commit the same crime

The business case is clear ...

- A [business culture of racial and gender diversity and inclusion](#) leads to greater innovation, better problem-solving, and a workplace more attractive to younger workers.

... but the human impact is greater

- [27% of formerly incarcerated people are unemployed](#). The lost opportunity to hire those individuals exacerbates the talent gap we are facing and creates an avoidable strain on social services.