



The Virginia General Assembly began its 402nd session on January 13th. After they decided that this short session would be shorter than usual (30 days as required by the constitution rather than the 46 days customarily agreed to by the two parties), legislators hit the ground running on the more than 1000 bills introduced so far this year, as did your Chamber. The House is meeting all virtually while the Senate is meeting at the Science Museum of Virginia in Richmond. For more information regarding the Chamber's business advocacy efforts and to see our 2021 Legislative Agenda, please visit the Chamber's website at <https://novachamber.org/government-advocacy/>. The Chamber is also representing the [legislative priorities](#) of the [Northern Virginia Back to Work Leadership Task Force](#).

On January 27 at 10:00am the Chamber will hold its annual Lobby Day. Typically held in Richmond, Lobby Day is the opportunity for members to share their views on the General Assembly session directly with elected leaders. This year is virtual and we are happy to host: Gov. Ralph Northam, Speaker Eileen Filler-Corn, Majority Leader Charniele Herring and Minority Leader Todd Gilbert, with more invited.

The Budget

G3: Get Skilled, Get a Job, Give Back Program (\$34.5M)

The G3 Program is also a priority of the Chamber as well as the Nova Back to Work Leadership Task Force. We believe G3 can become a critical component of the higher education and workforce development ecosystem in the Commonwealth. We spoke in favor of the program extensively during the 2020 regular session and have expressed our support this session. The impact of COVID makes G3 even more important, because many Virginians have lost their jobs and find themselves either unemployed, or underemployed, and in need of upskilling.

The bills that implement this program are moving through the legislature now - [HB 2204/SB 1405 Speaker Filler-Corn and Majority Leader Saslaw](#).

Need-Based Financial Aid for Undergraduates (\$30.3M, \$6.9 to Mason)

The Chamber and Back to Work have identified higher education funding as a key priority for this General Assembly session. This funding recognizes that many potential students do not have access to financing options or simply cannot afford higher education and commits the Commonwealth to helping all students have the same opportunity to attend college.

Tech Talent Investment Fund (\$31.8M)

The Tech Talent Investment Program was one of the most impactful parts of the deal the Commonwealth struck to attract Amazon HQ2 to Northern Virginia. The program will create more than 30,000 computer science graduates over the next two decades.

Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (additional \$15M; total \$49.7M)

The General Assembly and the Governor continue to invest in VATI and we strongly support them doing so. COVID has made very clear the issues stemming from a lack of access to broadband for employers and students.

Virginia Jobs Investment Program & Technology Development Grant Fund (\$4.7M & \$5.6M)

Microsoft recently announced a major expansion in Reston with a \$64 million investment and the promise of creating 1,500 jobs. This grant fund is part of that deal and we support this kind of investment to grow companies' Virginia footprint.

Virginia Innovative Partnership Authority (\$40.5)

The General Assembly in 2020 created this new Authority and this funding will get the ball rolling.

Establish Office of Education and Labor Market Alignment (\$500k)

An interesting budget item/bill this General Assembly establishes this office to connect numerous workforce development efforts and grow the workforce development ecosystem in the Commonwealth. The companion bill is **SB1314 by Sen. Hashmi**.

Education and Workforce Bills

The Chamber's top priorities continue to be in the area of education and workforce development. See the [2021 Legislative Agenda](#) as well as [Back to Work's 2021 Priorities](#) for more details on what we are backing. The bills below are in addition to the bills establishing G3 and

- [SB1303 In person learning](#) – Sen. Dunnivant's bill would require local school divisions to offer in-person instruction if a student's parents so choose. The Chamber has not taken a position on this but is watching closely. After failing to report the bill on Thursday, the committee chose to pass it by meaning it could come back next week.
- [HB1876 Workforce development](#); expands type of data sharing. – This bill by Del. Subramanyam is a mostly technical bill backed by the Virginia Economic Development Authority that breaks down silos among state agencies that engage in workforce development. We strongly support the state becoming a greater partner to the private sector on workforce development.
- [HB1986/SB1204 George Mason's Tier III Status](#) – these bills carried by Del. Bulova and Sen. Barker would elevate George Mason University's status to Tier III. This is a technical change that gives the university more autonomy but requires a new agreement with the state.

Paid Leave Bills

The General Assembly has a number of paid leave bills before it this year, although not quite as many as in the 2020 session. The Chamber opposes unfunded mandates on businesses but has been successful in working with patrons of leave bills so that they understand the consequences on businesses, both direct and unintended. Here's a quick rundown of a few:

- [SB 1159](#) and [SB1219](#) from Sen. Favola – **SB 1159** requires businesses that already have a PTO benefit program to allow employees to use sick leave for the care of immediate family members. This bill was discussed by the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee on Monday but passed by for the day following concerns about the impact on collective bargaining agreements. **SB1219**, which the Chamber supports, would study both how to and the impact of allowing private insurance companies to sell paid family leave insurance plans to businesses. The intent is to identify what code changes are needed and how the state can incentivize private companies to voluntarily offer paid family leave of up to 12 weeks to employees. The bill was reported out of the same committee on Monday.
- [HB 2016 from Del. Ayala](#)/[HB2137 from Del. Guzman](#) and [SB 1330 from Sen. Boysko](#) – These bills, opposed by the Chambers and numerous business groups, would establish a state-run paid family and medical leave program requiring employers to offer 12 weeks of paid family leave time to employees. The Senate version was passed by for the year in Committee this week and the House version could be before the subcommittee as early as Tuesday (Jan. 26).
- [HB 2103 from Del. Reid](#) – This bill requires 40 hours of paid sick time be offered to employees, with some limitations. The bill exempts employers with less than 35 employees, provides the benefit only to employees who work at least 30 hours per week, and does not include seasonal, part-time or contracted employees. Del. Reid has worked with the Chamber and many other business groups on his approach.

Other Business Bills

The Chamber is monitoring or working with stakeholders on a number of other business bills. One broadly consequential effort is to allow expenses paid for using PPP loan proceeds to be deducted from state income taxes. The Administration's position that the proceeds are exempt from income but the expenses are not deductible is counter to the Congressional intent of the CARES Act and the most recent stimulus bill (the Consolidated Appropriations Act). The Chamber is engaged with other business groups and key legislators on this issue.

We spoke against HB 1889 which impacts the housing provider industry; we are supporting a number of bills extending VABC allowances implemented during COVID to help restaurants; and we are working with legislators on criminal record expungement that will protect employers while reducing racially disparate outcomes of our criminal justice system.

Weekly Update – Week 1

These weekly updates are meant to provide a snapshot of how the Chamber is advocating on behalf of our members at the General Assembly. If you would like to know how the Chamber is engaging on a topic not included in this update, please contact Vice President of Government Relations Clayton Medford (cmedford@novachamber.org).