

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
c/o Department of Environmental Services
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705, Arlington, VA 22201

October 2, 2023

The Honorable Christian Dorsey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: State Legislative Priorities

Dear Chair Dorsey:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on Arlington's priorities for the 2024 Virginia legislative session. Arlington has seen more intense and damaging storms, increased flooding, and higher temperatures, including record heat in early September due to the climate crisis. Globally sea and land temperatures continue to rise, glaciers and polar ice caps continue to melt, and extreme weather events around the world become more frequent, the need to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions becomes increasingly urgent.

Protecting Statewide Climate Initiatives. The County's legislative approach should continue to defend against efforts to rescind or weaken key climate legislation passed by the General Assembly in 2020 and 2021.

- As a top priority, Arlington County leaders should continue to oppose Governor Youngkin's actions to end Virginia's participation in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and any efforts by the Virginia General Assembly to weaken the Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA) or other laws that fight climate change.
- The General Assembly should also direct Dominion Energy to revise its recently released Integrated Resource Plan, which calls for extending the use of coal and new fossil gas plants, to align it with the VCEA.

Net-Zero Carbon Buildings About 60 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Arlington result from the heating and cooling of buildings. The most important positive climate change priority for the General Assembly should be allowing localities to adopt and implement local programs and policies that promote electrification, energy efficiency and distributed (local) renewable energy and allow for adaptation to increasingly intense storms and flooding and mitigation of urban heat islands. Such programs include:

- Local Authority to Establish Energy Conservation Requirements: Localities should be authorized to adopt measures that are more stringent than the minimum standards of the Virginia Energy Conservation Code. This approach could include the option for localities to adopt residential and commercial "stretch codes" that are compatible with local climate and energy goals.

- **Stronger Energy Conservation Code:** The County should support legislation to reform the process of updating the Virginia Energy Conservation Code. International Energy Conservation Code updates should be adopted promptly without weakening amendments each time a new iteration is adopted by the International Code Council (within two years of its adoption) and should reflect Virginia’s commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 or sooner.
- **Benchmarking:** Localities should be authorized to require commercial buildings 50,000 square feet and larger to disclose annual energy usage to the locality, to help drive policies to improve energy efficiency and reduce GHG emissions.
- **On-Bill Financing/On-Bill Repayment:** The General Assembly should establish on-bill financing (utility-funded) and/or on-bill repayment (third-party funded) programs for energy efficiency upgrades to residential and commercial properties. These programs are offered by 110 energy utilities across the nation. They help address energy equity by providing low interest rates, long pay-back periods, performance-based improvements, and pre-qualified contractors.

Renewable Energy Achieving the County’s goal of meeting 100 percent of its electricity needs through renewable energy will require major transformations of the electricity market to ensure Arlington users have access to clean, reliable, and affordable electricity. Legislation can ensure:

- **Competition in Renewable Electricity Markets:** Provide both residential and commercial properties with choice in selecting a renewable energy provider for their home/facility.
- **Community Choice Aggregation.** Support expansion of retail electricity choice and provide implementing guidance that allows local jurisdictions to aggregate the load of residential and commercial customers, along with their own assets, and to require residential and commercial customers to be included in a program by default (but be allowed to opt-out).
- **Solar-ready Schools.** Require net-zero energy standards and solar-ready roofs for new schools and those undergoing major renovations, enabling renewable energy adoption and long-term savings.

Decarbonization of Transportation. Vehicles with internal combustion engines are also a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. Funding and legislation that simultaneously support the electrification of vehicles and expansion of public transit and other multimodal options are needed to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this sector.

- **Increase in Funding for Local Public Transit Systems:** State funding for transportation should shift from prioritizing highway and road construction to supporting public transit, transit-oriented development, and rail and other inter-city transportation.
- **Electric School Buses:** Funding is needed to speed the transition of school bus fleets to zero emissions, leveraging bus batteries as a vehicle-to-grid asset when not in use.
- **Electric Vehicle Rebates:** The General Assembly successfully created a strong EV rebate program in 2021 but has not provided any funding to implement the program.

- Grant Funding for Electric Transit Buses: The same consideration should be given for replacement of fossil gas buses as for diesel buses to qualify for grant programs aimed at supporting the transition of public transit to electric buses.

Other Environmental Issues: Clean air and water, access to parks and open spaces, healthy natural areas, and less waste and litter are key elements of a healthy environment and community. Arlington would benefit from greater authority and support from the State to advance its goals in these areas. This would include:

- Funding and legislation to preserve and promote the growth of healthy, vibrant urban forests—including combating invasive species in our natural areas—essential to the environment and quality of life by reducing heat island effects, improving water and air quality, reducing stormwater runoff, and combating climate change.
- Measures to pave the way for Extended Producer Responsibility legislation and reduction in single-use plastics.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. We would be happy to answer questions or provide additional information.

Sincerely yours,



Joan McIntyre,

Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

cc: Arlington County Board

Ilana Creinin, State Legislative Affairs Liaison