



Start of Session Legislative Report

The Virginia General Assembly convenes Wednesday, March 13 for a 60-day legislative session. During this very narrow timeframe, the legislature will consider and act upon close to 3,000 individual pieces of legislation. VAMA maintains a full-time lobbying presence in Richmond during the session, with two registered lobbyists on the ground working to protect the interests of our members.

This year VAMA has introduced a slate of six proactive measures to improve the business climate for housing providers operating in Virginia:

- Delegate Randy Minchew (R-Leesburg) has introduced H.B. 910. Senator John Cosgrove (R-Chesapeake) will be introducing a Senate companion. The bills seek to level the playing field for taxpayers appealing erroneously high local government real estate tax assessments at the Circuit Court level by allowing a taxpayer option of a jury trial, allowing the disclosure of certain information pertinent to the valuation under a protective order and requiring the use of the Supreme Court's uniform pretrial scheduling order to ensure both parties are held to equivalent standards.
- Delegate Vivian Watts (D-Annandale) has introduced H.B. 711. This bill would prohibit long-term grants of possession to individuals other than the tenant of a property.
- Delegate Jackson Miller (R-Manassas) will introduce this year's omnibus legislation comprising amendments to the Virginia Rental Housing Act supported by VAMA and other statewide real property organizations.
- Delegate Manoli Loupassi (R-Richmond) will introduce legislation to reform the unlawful detainer process and clarify that housing providers may appear as witnesses.
- Senator Mark Obenshain (R-Harrisonburg) and Delegate Tony Wilt (R-Harrisonburg) will introduce legislation to clarify that local governments are not authorized to adopt regulations stricter than the statewide building code pertaining to building and landscape materials. This bill is a response to local action taken by the Harrisonburg City Council to require retrofit of properties to establish a buffer of 18-inches between buildings and mulch beds.
- Delegate Jimmie Massie (R-Richmond) will introduce legislation to allow local governments the explicit authority to exempt on-site professionally managed properties from rental inspection programs.

Bill introductions are slowly being made public and the scope of VAMA's monitor and action lists continue to grow. However, a few measures of particular interest have already been introduced:

- Proffer reform: Delegate Todd Gilbert (R-Shennandoah) has introduced H.B. 770 on behalf of the Homebuilders Association of Virginia. Senator Dick Saslaw will be introducing companion legislation in the Senate. The bill sets a new standard that proffers must be specifically and uniquely attributable to a project, limits off-site proffers to roads, schools and public safety facilities and has the enforcement tool of a legal presumption that the reason for denial of a rezoning was unwillingness to agree to "unreasonable" proffer conditions. VAMA will be closely monitoring.
- Restrictions on towing: Delegate Kaye Kory (D-Falls Church) and Senator Scott Surovell (D-Mount Vernon) have introduced H.B. 37, H.B. 506 and S.B. 387, restricting the ability of private property owners to manage parking by towing trespassing vehicles. VAMA will be opposing these bills.
- Funding the Virginia Housing Trust Fund: Senator Mamie Locke (D-Hampton) and Delegate Chris Peace (R-Mechanicsville) have introduced S.B. 105 and H.B. 683, to fund the Virginia Housing

Trust Fund: VAMA supports this initiative, which has received the approval of the Virginia Housing Commission. Delegate Alfonso Lopez (D-Arlington) plans to introduce similar legislation as well.

VAMA will host two lobby days at the Virginia General Assembly this year on January 19 and February 17. All members are invited and encouraged to attend. Staff provides an issue briefing, talking points and facilitates meetings with legislators. It provides an excellent opportunity to build relationships and influence the public policy process.