



2023

Virginia Latino Advisory Board

Annual Report

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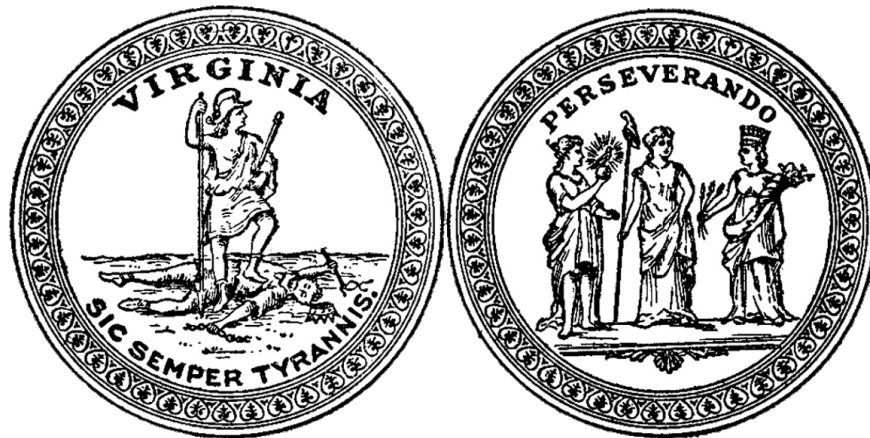


VIRGINIA
LATINO
ADVISORY
BOARD

VIRGINIA LATINO ADVISORY BOARD

2022-2023 Annual Report

August 2023



This report is directed to Governor Glenn Youngkin and his administration, and it is written and approved by the 21 members of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board.

The document is open to the public and pages 3-4 have a summary of all the recommendations.

Though comprehensive, this report is not an exhaustive list of all issues impacting Latinos in Virginia.

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Table of Contents

2022-2023 Annual Report	1
Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
General Recommendations	3
Business & Workforce	3
Education & Career Training	3
Health	4
Housing & Community Development	4
2023 Virginia Latino Advisory Board Members	5
Officers	5
Committee Chairs	5
Current Members	5
Former Members (served through June 30th 2023)	5
Letter from the Chair	6
About the Virginia Latino Advisory Board	7
Overview of Latinos in Virginia	8
VLAB Member Activities in 2023	9
VLAB Listening Sessions in 2023	11
VLAB Board Meeting Dates in 2023	11
VLAB Statements in 2023	12
Recommended Action	13
General Recommendations	13
Business and Workforce	14
Education & Career Training	21
Health	24
Housing and Community Development	28
Conclusion	32
Appendices of 2023 Annual Report	32

Executive Summary

Latinos live, work, study, and contribute to their communities throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. More than 1 in 10 Virginia residents is Latino, with that number estimated to grow to nearly 1.6 million by 2030. 2023 marked a positive turning point in many aspects that impacted the Latino workforce, health, education, and housing. Still, challenges persist and VLAB is honored to present these recommendations to Governor Glenn Youngkin to further advance the prosperity of the Latino community in Virginia.

General Recommendations

Advocate for Latino representation in all positions across the Commonwealth to be representative of the Latino population in Virginia, including elected and appointed officials, senior roles, and beyond.

Expand access to support, initiatives, information, and resources, and to the Latino communities across Virginia, particularly to the newly immigrated.

Support a pay differential for bilingual employees acknowledging their additional skill – and workload.

Business & Workforce

Provide \$1M in state funding to George Mason University towards the Virginia Small Business Development Center program for the course of two fiscal years to hire bilingual advisors.

Provide zero-fare public transportation to Virginians:

- **Support and expand** the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) funds for the purpose of providing zero-fare grants to jurisdictions throughout the Commonwealth.
- **Support** the passing of the federal Freedom to Move Act, whose purpose is to provide federal funds for fare-free public transportation.

Create a Marketing & Communications plan to better disseminate information about state resources, both to the community and internally within state departments including a Tip Line for Virginia residents

- **Launch** Estamos Contigo Campaign
- **Create** a dedicated hotline for Latino business owners to share their ideas with us. Provide funds for the printing of a half million bilingual postcard-size flyers with the hotline telephone number.

Education & Career Training

Pilot a grant to increase the number of Virginia colleges and universities that have a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status.

Increase Latino representation in faculty and senior administrative leadership by 25 percent in higher educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth.

Increase awareness through a dedicated multilingual social media campaign to promote the Virginia Alternative State Aid Application (VASA) and the delayed launch of the Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the 2023/2024 college application process.

Encourage all Virginia colleges and universities to provide application fee waivers for low-income students to improve access to higher education for the 2023/2024 admissions cycle.

Expand professional certifications for K12 educators to increase Career and Technical Education (CTE) course offerings for students.

Prioritize English Language Learner (ELL) and language access funding and programming throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in areas with high needs.

Health

Create a workgroup to advise the Department on cultural competence and language access as it works to roll out the Governor's *Right Help, Right Now Plan*

Develop Executive Order #2 Impact Workgroup

Encourage DOI Officer collaboration with Virginia Association of Clinical Psychologist, Virginia Society of Clinical Social Work, and the Virginia Counselors Association

Raise the age for legally residing youth eligible for Medicaid from 19 to 21 years of age

Continue to expand upon the Governor's Right Help, Right Now behavioral health plan to increase access to mental health supports across the Commonwealth

Provide a rate increase for Medicaid-funded community-based behavioral health services.

Authorize the Department of Medical Assistance Services to establish a methodology for an annual adjustment to reimbursement rates for Medicaid-funded mental health services for inflation.

Provide language-access training and implementation resources to health-based nonprofit organizations receiving funding to provide direct services in the Commonwealth.

Make permanent the school-based mental health services pilot. Create a School-Based Mental Services Health Trust Fund to ensure long-term, dedicated funding for school-based mental health services.

Identify opportunities where Medicaid-funded behavioral health services can be provided to children and adolescents without a diagnosis as an early intervention and prevention strategy in line with guidance from CMS.

Direct DBHDS, DMAS and the DHP to identify pathways to license and employ bi/multilingual behavioral health workers with international credentials who are currently unable to practice in Virginia.

Direct Virginia's public colleges and universities to explore educational exchange opportunities with institutions of higher education in Latin America to promote the cultural and linguistic preparation of our behavioral health workforce.

Create a bilingual, statewide system of support for patients of Parkinsons, Alzheimer's, and other related brain disorders affecting Virginia's elderly Latino populations. Efforts should include education and awareness around early diagnosis and intervention.

Create a bilingual program to increase awareness of food allergies and the mental health considerations within the Virginia population especially among children of Hispanic/Latino descent.

Tackle Opioid Crisis

Housing & Community Development

Increase funds increases to the Housing Trust Fund

Create state-funded housing choice vouchers

Support initiatives and legislation that affords residents of manufactured/mobile homes a realistic opportunity to participate in bids

All recommendations are expanded upon on pages 13-31 of the full report.

2023 Virginia Latino Advisory Board Members

Officers

Lyon Sanchezconcha	of Richmond, VA	Chair
Dr. Joshua DeSilva	of Arlington, VA	Vice Chair
Eduardo Zelaya	of Arlington, VA	Secretary

Committee Chairs

Diana Patterson	of Winchester, VA	Business & Workforce Chair
Yahusef Medina	of Richmond, VA	Education & Career Training Chair
Astrid Gamez	of Reston, VA	Health Chair
Juan Vega	of Roanoke, VA	Housing & Community Development Chair

Current Members

Juan Espinoza	of Blacksburg, VA	Education & Career Training
C. Alex Guzmán	of Richmond, VA	Health
Rev. Jonathan Avendano	of Sterling, VA	Education & Career Training
Ana Metzger	of Midlothian, VA	Business & Workforce
Jo-Ann Chase	of Brambleton, VA	Health
Emilio Revilla	of Glen Allen, VA	Business & Workforce
Wendy Clavijo	of Vienna, VA	Housing & Community Development
Jennifer Kelley	of Moseley, VA	Business & Workforce
Leslie Sanchez	of Lynchburg, VA	-
Saul Hernandez	of Washington County, VA	-
<i>_Dr. Sergio Rimola</i>	<i>of Herndon, VA</i>	<i>Health</i>
<i>_Cecilia Williams</i>	<i>of Fairfax, VA</i>	<i>Health</i>
<i>_Karina Kline-Gabel</i>	<i>of Harrisonburg, VA</i>	<i>Education & Career Training</i>
<i>_Rodrigo Soto</i>	<i>of Springfield, VA</i>	<i>Housing and Community Development</i>

Former Members (served through June 30th 2023)

Dr. Sergio Rimola	Health Committee Chair – <i>Herndon*</i>
Cecilia Williams	Health – <i>Fairfax</i>
Paul Berry	Chair Emeritus, Education & Career Training – <i>Reston</i>
Karina Kline-Gabel	Education & Career Training – <i>Harrisonburg</i>
Walewska Watkins	Housing & Community Development Committee Chair – <i>Ashburn*</i>
Rodrigo Soto	Housing & Community Development – <i>Springfield</i>

**Served as Committee Chair for part of the year*

Letter from the Chair

August 11, 2023

Esteemed Governor Glenn Youngkin,

First, I wish to thank you for the opportunity to serve the Commonwealth as the Chair of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board, one of Virginia's most important commissions tasked with serving as your ear to our vibrant and ever growing Latino community. I would also like to thank you, for serving as our beautiful state's 74th Governor. Since you were sworn in, we have celebrated your successes that have made Virginia a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Thank you for keeping the Latino community in mind in doing so.

Latinos are an invaluable part of Virginia's electorate, and for those who cannot vote, they are an important part of the citizenry impacted by the decisions of elected officials. The Virginia Latino Advisory Board is very honored to represent this constituency. We do not take that responsibility lightly, and we feel charged with advocating for, among all things, more representation and expanded access for all. We hope to see more Latinos in influential places across the Commonwealth, and we hope to extend all initiatives and resources that are available to every Latino community member who needs it. Before you lies a series of both legislative priorities and administrative recommendations carefully crafted for you and your team to consider.

We present our recommendations for great collaborative potential; and we, as a collective force, will continue to do what we do best, work hard and help one another, and in so, we will honor what is inscribed in the back of the Virginia State Seal: "Perseverando."

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lyons Sanchezconcha', written in a cursive style.

Lyons Sanchezconcha

Chair, Virginia Latino Advisory Board

About the Virginia Latino Advisory Board

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board (VLAB) was established in 2005 to advise the Governor of Virginia on issues of Latino interest so that his administration can best serve the Latino constituents of Virginia. VLAB envisions a Virginia that includes and advances the Latino community by promoting greater opportunities while acknowledging the contributions of the diverse cultural heritage to the Commonwealth. VLAB has the power and duty to:

- Advise the Governor regarding the development of economic, professional, cultural, educational, and governmental links between the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Latino community in Virginia, and Latin America;
- Undertake studies, symposiums, research, and factual reports to gather information to formulate and present recommendations to the Governor relative to issues of concern and importance to the Latino community in the Commonwealth; and,
- Advise the Governor as needed regarding any statutory, regulatory, or other issues of importance to the Latino community in the Commonwealth.

VLAB conducts its work through four committees: Business & Workforce, Education and Career Training, Health, and Housing.

The Business and Workforce Committee examines the role of Latinos and Latino-owned businesses in Virginia's economy and suggests policies that will increase the economic prosperity of Virginia's Latino community. The Committee works with Latino entrepreneurs, business owners and leaders across Virginia to promote the Latino community's important role in Virginia's labor force and business community.

The Education and Career Training examines the importance of education and career development in supporting Latino communities across Virginia. By working with early childhood, K-12 systems, higher education, and workforce development agencies in all regions of the Commonwealth, the committee works to promote greater educational attainment and equity, and stronger pathways to economic opportunity.

The Health Committee examines the health of Latino communities across Virginia and works to craft recommendations and policies that are sensitive to the needs and concerns of those communities. By working with health providers, and federal, state, and local partners, the committee promotes policies and practices that address the need to increase the numbers of insured Latinos and to encourage health and wellness.

The Housing and Community Development Committee examines the lack of affordable housing and high level of home evictions within Latino communities in the Commonwealth. The committee works to identify recommendations to increase the supply and availability of affordable housing; to prevent and reduce evictions; and to improve communication for seeking assistance and support.

The former "Civic Engagement & Social Justice Committee," examined strategies for strengthening relationships between Latino communities and all Virginians and promoted practices that are central to civic participation, including voting and voter registration, leadership, and service on state boards and commissions. The committee also works with community partners to improve communication among Latino communities and state government and to raise awareness about issues of importance to Latino communities. In 2022, this committee was transitioned to serve as a "work-group" in efforts to grow the other committees, to utilize this work group to lead collaborative efforts with the to four other Constituency Boards in Virginia, and because its work was already woven into the fabric all other committees and everything that VLAB does.

Overview of Latinos in Virginia

Latinos¹ can trace their heritage in Virginia back 500 years, almost a full century before the first colonists landed in Jamestown in 1607. These pioneers entered the Chesapeake Bay in 1525,² leaving a permanent mark of diversity and cultural patrimony in the Commonwealth that continues in 2023. The incredible accomplishments and progress the community has made in industry, the arts, and culturally is a combination of the social and intellectual contributions that bridge centuries of Latino presence in Virginia.

The Latino community of the Commonwealth contributes in significant ways to the economic and social well-being of modern Virginia. Since 2010 the community has witnessed a 32.1% increase, and the 2020 Decennial Census now counts Latinos as 10.6% of the population, or more than 908,000 individuals.³ We concentrate in Northern Virginia, the Tidewater region, and the Richmond Metropolitan area. *The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis* estimates that by 2030 Latinos will represent 17.2% of Virginia's population, numbering over 1,600,000 residents, and accounting for 79% of Virginia's growth.⁴

Since Latinos in Virginia are diverse in origin, live in every part of the state, and skew younger compared to the rest of the population. Salvadoran, Mexican, and Puerto Rican heritage accounts for over half of Latinos in Virginia, with countries in the Caribbean, and South and Central America accounting for the remainder. With a median age of 29⁵ and 22% under the age of 18,⁶ Virginia has a large and young Latino population.

The Latino community of Virginia is composed of multiple unique subgroups and represents every point along the spectrum of the immigration experience: some communities are older with multiple decades of accumulated presence, while others are newer. The subgroups "differ in their lifestyles, health beliefs, and health practices."⁷ Over half (54.2%) are bilingual, and more than a quarter (27.7%) only speak English. An estimated 120,000 or 17.3% speak Spanish and limited or no English. In addition, Portuguese, and indigenous languages of South and Central America are the native languages of a smaller percentage of Virginia's Latinos.⁸

Latino Virginians are a force behind the economy and leading in various fields all across the Commonwealth. Yet, while many celebrate the American Dream, there are various issues to address in order to make this dream more achievable for all Latinos in the Commonwealth. This report hopes to outline recommendations in the fields of Education, Business, Healthcare, Housing, and more to continue

¹ The terms Latino or Latinx refers to people, of all genders, whose heritage originates from Latin America. The term Hispanic refers to people of Spanish or Spanish-speaking Latin American heritage. The terms are not interchangeable. In this report, the terms Latino or Latinx will be used unless the term Hispanic was the term used when data were collected.

² Peck, D. "Lucas Vásquez de Ayllón's Doomed Colony of San Miguel de Gualdape", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol 85. No. 2 pg. 189. Also see <https://www.virginia.org/hispanicsandlatinosinvirginia>

³ <https://demographics.coopercenter.org/census2020>

⁴ Page 7 https://www.vlab.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/vlab/documents/vlab-meetings/LatinoVirginiansSept2018_final.pdf

⁵ <https://www.edexcelencia.org/research/latino-college-completion/virginia>

⁶ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/VA/RHI725219>

⁷ https://www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/dch/programs/healthycommunitiesprogram/tools/pdf/hispanic_latinos_insight.pdf

⁸ Goren, L. and Mejia, F. Stitches in the Economic Fabric: Latino Virginians and the State Economy. The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis. Accessed at https://www.vlab.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/vlab/documents/vlab-meetings/LatinoVirginiansSept2018_final.pdf

doing what our community does best, and what is inscribed on the back of the Virginia State Seal, “Perseverando.”

VLAB Member Activities in 2023

In the year since its last Annual Report, VLAB members have engaged in several initiatives, events, and successes in partnership with Governor Youngkin’s administration. Collaborative links between the Office of the Governor, his Executive staff, the General Assembly, and VLAB continue to advance solutions for the well-being of all Virginia residents.

VLAB members represent every geographic region in Virginia where they maintain strong ties to their communities, engaging in activities that propel Latino cultural, economic, and social issues forward. VLAB’s highlights from 2022-2023 include:

- Emilio Revilla and Lyons Sanchezconcha facilitate a Community Listening Session in Richmond alongside Radio Poder to hear issues and concerns related to the Latino community.
- Karina Kline-Gabel, Emilio Revilla and Lyons Sanchezconcha attend the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute Hispanic Heritage Month Gala.
- Jonathan Avendano and Astrid Gamez attend the National Hispanic Pastors Alliance Conference and Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration in Washington, D.C.
- Dr. Sergio Rimola joins the Latinos on the Fast Track Leadership Institute Summit in Washington, D.C. with the National Hispanic Medical Association.
- Dr. Joshua De Silva and other VLAB board members celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month with the Governor and First Lady in Richmond, VA.
- Diana Patterson and other VLAB board members celebrate the declaration of 10/11/22 as Jason Miyares Day in honor of Virginia’s first Latino elected into state-wide office.
- Eduardo Zelaya and other VLAB Board Members facilitate a Community Listening Session virtually alongside CASA to hear issues and concerns related to the Latino community.
- Astrid Gamez hosts a Roundtable discussion with Attorney General Jason Miyares in Culmore, VA.
- Astrid Gamez hosts a Roundtable discussion with Lt. Governor Winsome Sears in Falls Church, VA.
- Lyons Sanchezconcha and Astrid Gamez attend a Roundtable discussion hosted by the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and with Lt. Governor Winsome Sears in Richmond, VA
- Astrid Game attended Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) Cumbre Latina/Hispana 2023, Richmond, Va
- Astrid Gamez hosts a Coffee with the Attorney General Jason Miyares for advocating for crime victims and Taking Actions in the Commonwealth
- Jennifer Fierro Kelley attended the Hispanic Association on Corporate Responsibility’s Latina Empow(h)er Summit in Arizona in March.
- Astrid Gamez hosts de *Prevencion del Abuso Infantil Hagamos Conciencia Evento* alongside the Salvadoran Consulate and Washington, DC in recognition of Child Abuse Prevention Month.

- Astrid Gamez assists with the Independence Day parade with Governor Youngkin in Leesburg, VA
- Astrid Gamez attended Futuro Latino Coalition’s “Fentanyl, the Overdoses Crisis” forum virtually
- Cecilia Williams assists as a Spanish Interpreter for immunizations and vision and hearing screenings at high schools throughout the year and all across Northern Virginia.
- Cecilia Williams assisted at Fairfax County Health Department with closing all COVID-19 PODS
- Juan Vega is appointed Board Member of the Legal Aid Society of Roanoke Valley.
- Juan Vega was appointed Member of the Roanoke Bar Association Centennial Celebration Committee.
- Lyons Sanchezconcha attends the Hispanic College Institute event hosted by the Virginia Latino Higher Education Network in Blacksburg, VA in order to increase college access in the Latino community for Virginia high school students.
- Lyons Sanchezconcha hosts a virtual presentation on accessing education in the US with the Peruvian Consulate in Washington, D.C.
- Yahusef Medina, Alex Guzman, and Lyons Sanchezconcha attend listening session with US Senator Tim Kaine in Richmond, VA
- Jennifer Kelley, Yahusef Medina, and Lyons Sanchezconcha speak to First-Generation Latino students at Virginia Commonwealth University on their paths and advice
- Diana Patterson was appointed Board Member of the Scholar Latino Initiative in the Northern Shenandoah Valley.

*scheduled to take place after report approval on August 11, 2023

VLAB Listening Sessions in 2023

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board is constantly looking at ways to hear directly from the Latino community that it represents across the commonwealth, three community listening sessions were held in which VLAB members could hear, first hand, of issues and concerns facing the Latino constituency.

The Listening Sessions were often hosted in partnerships with regional or state-wide, Latino-service organizations and held in public spaces, like Churches that donated the use of their space. These events are an opportunity to shed light on issues of representation and access to resources and information.

They were strategically scheduled the night before the Full Board Meetings for maximum attendance from board members. There were three listening sessions held, in Arlington, Charlottesville, Roanoke, and Richmond, and the full notes are attached as appendices to the end of this report.

Henrico, VA - 10/10/22
Virtually on Zoom - 12/15/22
Sterling, VA - 01/23/23
Winchester, VA - 03/09/23
Richmond, VA - 05/09/23
Virtually on Zoom - 08/10/23
Chesterfield, VA - 09/15/23*
Harrisonburg, VA - 12/07/23*

In efforts to create a conversational, intimate environment, like “un cafecito” setting, community listening sessions were not live streamed, recorded, or made available for remote participation. Fliers were made and distributed through all platforms to increase participation and to also have region-based conversations. Notes were taken, and summarized in meeting minutes.

Listening Session notes are attached as Appendix B to this report.

VLAB Board Meeting Dates in 2023

The Latino Advisory Board has met the following dates since its last report

10/11/22 - Richmond, VA
12/16/22 - Arlington, VA
01/27/23 - Virtually on Zoom
03/10/23 - Winchester, VA
05/12/23 - Richmond, VA

VLAB Meeting agenda and minutes are attached as Appendix A to this report.

*scheduled to take place after report approval on August 11, 2023

VLAB Statements in 2023

In the year since its last Annual Report, VLAB has collectively signed on to publicly address specific matters related to the Latino Communities. The Board will only write statements in response to items mentioned in previous reports or significant events impacting Virginia's Latino community. Below are the this year's three statements, in summary, on behalf of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board:

VLAB 2022 Recommendations in Spanish

Housing and Community Development Committee Chair drafted a version of our 2022 Annual Report's Executive Summary of Recommendations in Spanish in order to allow community members who read and understand better in Spanish to be able to know and stay familiar with the work of the Board. Member Karina Kline-Gabel reviewed the draft and it was published on VLAB's Facebook page.

VLAB Invites Collaboration and Partnership with the US Peruvian Consulate in Washington, D.C.

VLAB Chair, Lyons Sanchezconcha, drafted a statement in which he bring salutations to Consul Carlos Manchego Gardois and invites him to a meeting to discuss partnerships between the Peruvian Consulate in Washington, D.C. and the Virginia Latino Advisory Board, an endeavor we hope to continue with other South and Central American Consuls in Washington, D.C. who serve their expatriots within Virginia. This letter led to his visit to a Board Meeting in Winchester, to a visit with Peruvian community Leaders convened by Deputy Director of Diversity, Opportunity, and Inclusion, Michael Perez, and a meeting with the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Kay Cole James.

VLAB Letter to General Assembly Budget Conferees

Civic Engagement & Social Justice work group led by Rodrigo Soto, drafted a statement in support of language access legislation for the General Assembly budget approval. The letter, addressed the budget conferees, advocated for policy that was in line with VLAB's 2021 annual report recommendation to increase funding for language access across the state of Virginia.

The full letters are included as Appendix C at the end of this report.

Recommended Action

General Recommendations

Advocate for Latino representation in all positions across the Commonwealth to be representative of the Latino population in Virginia, including elected and appointed officials, senior roles, and beyond.

Expand access to support, initiatives, information, and resources, and to the Latino communities across Virginia, particularly to the newly immigrated.

Designate a pay differential for bilingual employees acknowledging their additional skill and workload.

Recommendations and Narrative

Advocate for Latino representation in all positions across the Commonwealth

Across party lines and in all regions of Virginia, more Latino representation is needed. Attorney General Jason Miyares is the first person elected into state office with Latino descent, and we need to see more of that. We have yet to have a Latino serve as Mayor in a Virginia City, serve on the Virginia Senate, or represent Virginia in Congress. The only way we can do this is through intentionality.

Considering Virginia's demographics, in order to be truly representative of the Latino population, there should be 10 or 11 state delegates who are Latino, but currently there is only one. This representation needs to expand into leadership all across state departments and agencies, we do not have any Latino leading any of the Virginia state departments or agencies, and none in the Governor's cabinet and only three in his administration. Furthermore, on state boards and commission⁹, we must have representation beyond the members on the Virginia Latino Advisory Board, but across all of the regulatory boards so that they can accurately represent the Virginians they serve.

Beyond elected and appointed positions, Latino representation in spaces where it is not currently representative of the population needs to continue onto Virginia's doctors, lawyers, educators, and more. Initiatives and advocacy that increase Latino representation must be a part of decision making going forward. Any endeavor to support this has VLAB's full support.

Expand access to support, initiatives, information, and resources, and to the Latino communities across Virginia, particularly to the newly immigrated.

Due largely in part to not having information available in the language a person speaks, resources often do not reach many parts of the Latino community. There must be a strong effort to assess every piece of information, initiative, or support for its accessibility. It is imperative that any effort that is meant for the public good meet the community where they are at, rather than expect the community to come to it. Every time that a public service or good is designed to be easier for someone who received a college

⁹ <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2022/07/12/public-transit-governing-boards-dont-look-like-their-riders-a-new-state-study-could-fix-that/>

education or only speaks English to access it, it is excluding another group of people, and this inequitable access will further divide communities by disadvantaged groups.

Reaching Latino communities, particularly newly immigrated families, need to be included in the design and implementation of all government endeavors and public goods or services. This means developing a way to use monies allocated for language access accordingly so that initiatives such as those coming from Virginia's state department and agencies are able to hire bilingual staff or at the very least produce content in Spanish or have someone responsible for making the content in Spanish. The City of Richmond hires for interpreter roles and that works at a local level; this could be tried at the state level.

Across listening sessions the Board heard many examples of access being an issue particularly within new, immigrant, Latino communities. One example was the information around the Driver's Privilege Cards across the state. Particularly in rural regions, people have trouble getting information in their language about the Driver's Privilege because either they do not have the bilingual staff or the current staff is uninformed about who qualifies and what the process entails. Another example of this is the access to the Virginia Alternative to State Aid (VASA) Application information and support. This tool was specifically designed to serve undocumented students across the state who have graduated from a Virginia high school that they attended for at least 2 years and paid state taxes to get state financial aid, however, there was never any funding allocated for spreading information about this new tool in Spanish or support staff to adequately help students and their parents through this process. As a result, the State Council on Higher Education of Virginia has seen fewer students use the application than anticipated, this can be incorrectly perceived to mean that the need for this is not there. This issue is purely an outcome of barriers to accessibility that must be addressed.

Support a pay differential for bilingual employees acknowledging their additional skill and workload.

In a diverse and globalized world, many organizations provide additional compensation to employees who have the skills to communicate with clients and partners in more than one language. This pay incentive for a specific skill – in this case a language skill – is known as a pay differential. Pay differentials for language skills are common in government agencies, law enforcement, foreign service, healthcare, defense and intelligence, and customer service. Salaries are generally 5-20 percent higher for bilingual employees.¹⁰ Currently, Richmond Public Schools is offering a \$2,000 sign-on bonus for new hires who are bilingual. This is a way to address its particular need, and while recruiting is one approach, the fact is that bilingual staffers, particularly in positions where they are serving a high bilingual population, are working more hours, expanding the services into new markets, and overall bringing a specialized skill to the organization. They should get compensated for this when the secondary language is a part of the job description or at least 20% of the actual duties performed. This compensation would be subject to assessed or demonstrated proficiency and in line with the research and budget allocation from 2022 Senate Bill 270¹¹ on language access.

¹⁰ <https://altalang.com/beyond-words/bilingual-pay-differential/#:~:text=Pay%20differentials%20for%20language%20skills,percent%20higher%20for%20bilingual%20employees.>

¹¹ <https://lis.virginia.gov/cgi-bin/legp604.exe?221+sum+SB270>

Business and Workforce

Provide \$1M in state funding to George Mason University towards the Virginia Small Business Development Center program for the course of two fiscal years to hire bilingual advisors.

Provide zero-fare public transportation to Virginians:

- **Support and expand** the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) funds for the purpose of providing zero-fare grants to jurisdictions throughout the Commonwealth.
- **Support** the passing of the federal Freedom to Move Act, whose purpose is to provide federal funds for fare-free public transportation.

Create a Marketing & Communications plan to better disseminate information about state resources, both to the community and internally within state departments including a Tip Line for Virginia residents

- **Launch** Estamos Contigo Campaign
- **Create** a dedicated hotline for Latino business owners to share their ideas with us. Provide funds for the printing of a half million bilingual postcard-size flyers with the hotline telephone number.

Recommendations and Narrative

Provide \$1 million in state funding to George Mason University towards the Virginia Small Business Development Center program to hire bilingual advisors in areas with a high Hispanic population.

The Small Business Development Center (SBDC) provides one-on-one counseling, workshops, and multiple resources to potential and existing businesses in the Commonwealth. In 2022, the SBDC assisted with 402 business starts, \$177M in capital investment, and 8484 jobs created and retained. There is a total of 26 SBDC offices throughout Virginia, each one with its own serving region and every city and county is served¹². George Mason University receives federal funding from the SBA to lead and manage the VA SBDC network and distributes a portion of the funding to 14 organizations that host a local SBDC office¹³. The federal funding is allocated based on population and geographic territory and each SBDC office must provide matching funds. The local SBDCs are housed at universities, community colleges, chambers, and economic development organizations. Matching funds are provided by host organizations and local municipalities.

The VA SBDC received state funding from 1989-2002 when the network was administered by the Department of Business Assistance, an entity under the supervision of the Secretary of Commerce. As of October 2002, there were state financial cuts that affected and ended the state funding for the VA SBDC¹⁴. In 2003, SBA had an RFP process and awarded George Mason University the cooperative agreement to lead and manage the VA SBDC network¹⁵. According to the Virginia Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity (SBSD), legislation to establish this new department was passed in Virginia in 2013, with the SBSB beginning its operations in 2014. Though the SBSB provides consulting services, it does so in a virtual format and if in person, partnering with the SBDC. The SBSB focuses on

¹² <https://www.virginiasbdc.org/about-us/>

¹³ <https://masonsbdc.org/sponsors/>

¹⁴ <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizjournals/washingtonbureau/2003/03/10/bureau2.html?page=2>

¹⁵ Jody Keenan, VA SBDC Director

business certifications for disadvantaged and minority businesses that may become a government contractor.

The VA SBDC offers training and in-person assistance, which is a more effective method of contact for Hispanic small business owners. By reviewing the Laurel Ridge SBDC office that added a part time bilingual speaker in 2020, over the course of two years the office saw an increase from 3 to 206 Hispanic clients served. A small number of those businesses reported their business improvement, which totaled \$826,000 in capital investments, \$2.5M in sales increase, 13 new business starts, and 113 jobs created and retained from 2020 to 2022. For every \$1 that was invested by the local municipalities specifically for a bilingual advisor, \$128 was returned in increased sales based on the businesses that reported data¹⁶. Most business owners don't know where to start, and the language and cultural differences provide additional obstacles. Many begin a business without the proper registrations and licenses, thus losing the municipalities and the Commonwealth thousands of dollars. By having an advisor that can guide them in their language, they are more likely to register their business correctly and operate it more efficiently, which results in higher sales, more jobs, and more tax revenue for Virginia and its regions¹⁷.

Provide zero-fare public transportation to Virginians.

- Support the funding of and the expansion of funding for Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation's (DRPT)¹⁸ Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) funds for the purpose of providing zero-fare grants to jurisdictions throughout the Commonwealth.
- Support the passing of the federal Freedom to Move Act¹⁹, whose purpose is to provide federal funds for fare-free public transportation.

Many Latinos work important low-paying jobs that keep the economy growing, from painters to construction workers, from fast-food cooks to hotel cleaners. Many of these workers do not have driver's licenses or reliable transportation. A permanent and well-funded zero-fare public transportation system will facilitate transportation, thereby making them more reliable and productive tax-paying employees.

The Transit Rider Incentive Program (TRIP) was part of Gov. Ralph Northam's 2020 transportation omnibus. Lawmakers allotted \$1.5 million to the DRPT. 75% percent of the funding was reserved to enhance regional connectivity in urbanized areas with populations of over 100,000 residents. 25% was set aside to test out various initiatives to offset bus fares for low-income Virginians. COVID-19 changed the focus to supporting zero-fare initiatives, with Lynchburg, Roanoke, Alexandria, Richmond, Charlottesville, and Fairfax County leading the way²⁰.

¹⁶ https://drive.google.com/file/d/1mqlll0Y3Ct-YZrELuXiydqkuLgEv9dv5/view?usp=share_link

¹⁷ <https://www.lib.jmu.edu/special/zarrughpaper/>

¹⁸ FY22 report: <https://www.drpt.virginia.gov/media/545jgf4r/transit-ridership-incentive-program-fy22-overview.pdf>

¹⁹ In June 2020, Sen. Ed Markey and Rep. Ayanna Presley, both Democrats of Massachusetts, introduced the Freedom to Move Act, which would provide federal grants for states and cities to institute free-to-ride public transit. It was referred to a Senate committee in April 2021 and hasn't advanced.

<https://pressley.house.gov/sites/pressley.house.gov/files/Freedom%20to%20Move%20Act%20of%202021.pdf>

See also

<https://pressley.house.gov/sites/pressley.house.gov/files/Freedom%20to%20Move%20Act%20One%20Pager.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2021/04/06/virginia-bus-systems-could-go-fare-free-for-at-least-three-years/>

A new \$40 million pot of money in Virginia will be used to set up fare-free programs for local transit agencies in the coming years²¹.

Most riders are low-income minorities.

27% of riders of the GRTC (Greater Richmond Transit Company) have a combined household income of less than \$10,000 per year. Over half earn less than the federal poverty rate for Virginia of \$26,500 for a family of four. 89% of GRTC's riders have household incomes below the state median. 74% of the system's riders are people of color²².

It's a nationwide movement.

Washington D.C. is the largest U.S. city to codify a fare-free transit system as the movement takes off nationwide. Kansas City, Missouri, previously the largest city with such a law, made its own transit system zero-fare in 2019²³. Boston, San Francisco and Denver are experimenting with zero fare. In late 2019, Kansas City, Missouri, became the first major U.S. city to approve a fare-free public transit system²⁴.

It makes economic sense.

"For some smaller transit agencies that don't really collect much cash anyway ... they're almost spending more to collect the fare than they're actually receiving in revenue," said Grant Sparks, a director at the Virginia Department of Rail and Transportation²⁵.

In Richmond, fare revenue was just 8% of the overall transit agency's budget²⁶. Per the GRTC, it spends \$570,000 for farebox collection and security, \$400,000 for fare enforcement on the Pulse (Richmond's high-capacity rapid transit system), and \$340,000 for the paper to print bus passes. That's over \$1.7 million annually to maintain fare collection on its fleet of buses. GRTC CEO Julie Timm noted the following: "But if I'm spending \$1.7 million each year in order to collect \$7 million in fares from impoverished people who can barely afford to put their money into the system, then we need to reflect²⁷."

Fares in Kansas City made up only 12%, or about \$8 million, of the buses' operating budget. Meanwhile, the city was spending \$2 million to \$3 million annually on fare collection. Similarly, D.C. fares are under 10% of the district's transit budget²⁸.

Riders take advantage of the zero fare.

Per Yonah Freemark of the Urban Institute, "most of the research tells us that, when cities make public transportation free, ridership does go up. And we have actually seen that to be the case in Richmond,

²¹ <https://dcist.com/story/21/05/18/virginia-putting-40-million-toward-free-transit-fare-programs/>

²² Virginia GRTC's 2022 annual report: <https://www.drpt.virginia.gov/media/5gkgdjty/annual-report-fiscal-year-2022.pdf>

²³ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/30/dc-free-bus-bill-becomes-law-zero-fare-transit.html>

²⁴ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/14/zero-fare-public-transit-movement-gains-momentum.html>

²⁵ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/14/zero-fare-public-transit-movement-gains-momentum.html>

²⁶ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/14/zero-fare-public-transit-movement-gains-momentum.html>

²⁷ <https://www.virginiamercury.com/2021/04/06/virginia-bus-systems-could-go-fare-free-for-at-least-three-years/>

²⁸ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/14/zero-fare-public-transit-movement-gains-momentum.html>

Virginia, where ridership on their transit system has increased substantially since the buses were made free.”²⁹

The Alexandria Transit Company is also known as the DASH bus system. "Not in over seven years have we seen this magnitude of ridership increases, all while the Federal Workforce remains in a primarily hybrid/remote work environment," said DASH CEO and General Manager Josh Baker in a statement. Rider feedback has shown mostly positive responses to the fare-free service. A total of 71% of surveyed riders and 80% of surveyed low-income riders said they rode DASH more frequently because it is free. The survey found 22% of current riders who were surveyed did not ride DASH before it became fare free³⁰.

Federal Freedom to Move Act

The purpose of the Act is to provide federal funds for fare-free public transportation and for the improvement and expansion of mass transit systems to facilitate the mobility of people so that they can better access education, jobs, and healthcare³¹.

Virginia Code § 33.2-1526.315³²

The 2020 General Assembly established the Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) in Virginia Code § 33.2-1526.3 with two distinct goals: to improve regional connectivity of urban areas with a population more than 100,000 and to reduce barriers to transit use for low-income riders. This report provides an annual update on the program. Jurisdictions can apply through the DRPT website³³.

Create a Marketing & Communications plan to better disseminate information about state resources, both to the community and internally within state departments including a Tip Line for Virginia residents

- Launch Estamos Contigo Campaign
- Create a dedicated hotline for Latino business owners to share their ideas with us. Provide funds for the printing of a half million bilingual postcard-size flyers with the hotline telephone number.

There is a need for an awareness campaign and resource page in Spanish of government resources available to Hispanics with emphasis on business and workforce. It's imperative that the State of Virginia support the economic growth of its Hispanic citizens.

Segmentation of audience: According to the 2020 U.S. Census, Virginia's Hispanic community is nearly 20%, with rapid growth levels.

The 10 Cities in Virginia with The Largest Hispanic Population in 2023

1. Manassas Park
2. Manassas

²⁹ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/some-cities-turn-to-free-public-busing-to-counteract-inequity>

³⁰ <https://patch.com/virginia/oldtownalexandria/fare-free-dash-bus-draws-more-ridership-few-concerns-report>

³¹ <https://pressley.house.gov/sites/pressley.house.gov/files/Freedom%20to%20Move%20Act%20of%202021.pdf>

³² <https://law.lis.virginia.gov/vacode/title33.2/chapter15/section33.2-1526.3/>

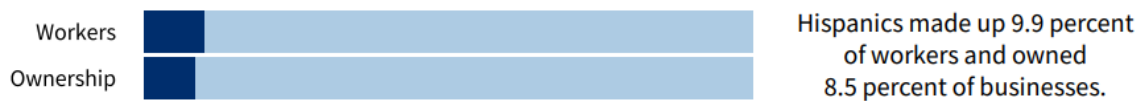
³³ https://www.drpt.virginia.gov/media/dgcmuot/zero-fare-app_final-app_fy24.pdf

3. Herndon
4. Harrisonburg
5. Winchester
6. Galax
7. Fairfax
8. Leesburg
9. Culpeper
10. Alexandria

Situational Analysis

There are many Hispanic employees and small businesses thriving in Virginia.

Hispanics



Ownership shares include equal and majority ownership Sources of data: American Community Survey, 2018 (Census and IPUMS); Annual Business Survey, 2018 (Census); Nonemployer Statistics by Demographics, 2018 (Census).

In Hispanic businesses, there is often only one employee, the business owner. In Virginia, there are 57,000 Hispanic businesses without employees and only 5,638 with employees so less than 10% have employees. On the other hand, there are 563,000 non-Hispanic businesses without employees and 129,325 with employees, that is over 20% a percentage which that is over double that of Hispanic businesses.

It's no secret that Hispanics have always been behind on capital access and growth support due to the language barrier and a lack of government service and program participation. Thus, limiting growth potential. To invigorate the growth information access is critical.

Access through a Spanish resource page

Virginia has been a long supporter of small business. According to the US Small Business Administration, 95.5% of all businesses are small businesses in Virginia. There are many functional programs in Virginia run by the state that support small businesses and workforce that Hispanics don't know how to participate in or unaware they exist.

But there is an opportunity for this Administration to support the Hispanic community by providing an awareness campaign directed to them on all the programs and services the state already offers. By creating a resource webpage in Spanish of relative government programs and services that will service Hispanic business owners and employees. On the resource page, there should be a contact for each department, who speaks Spanish, and a short description of vital services Virginia departments and agencies provide.

The Media Campaign in Spanish

There are 12 secretaries in the Governor's administration. It is essential that this campaign each month feature a department under a Secretary's office with programs and services that will aid Hispanic small business owners and employees to drive traffic to the resource page.

The campaign would be targeted to the (above listed audience) and it would have a print, radio, digital and broadcast component. This would be a call-to-action campaign as there are many pertinent programs Hispanics are simply unaware exist.

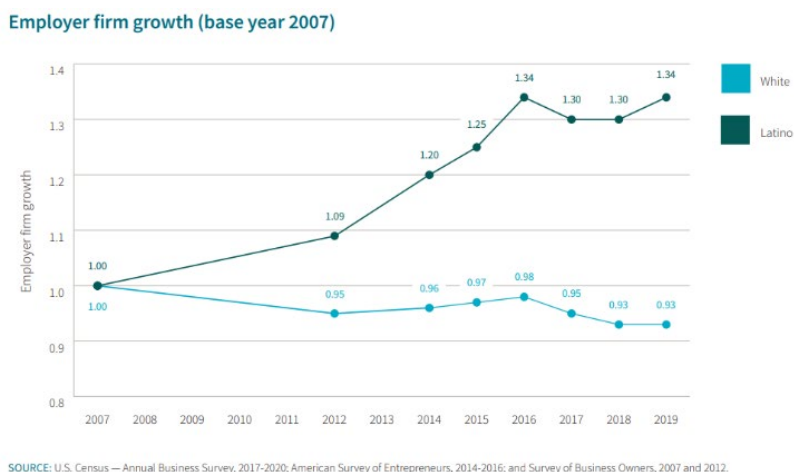
Recommendation

We would recommend that the State of Virginia create a resource webpage in Spanish for Hispanics to access vital business and employment resources. Additionally, we would recommend that there be a media campaign to make Hispanics aware of the resource page and educate the Hispanic public on government departments' programs, services, and functionality.

Idea hotline for business owners

It is imperative to harness the creative and innovative ideas and policy recommendations of Latino business owners. The Administration should facilitate VLAB's efforts to identify these people by creating a Latino business hotline and marketing flyers.

In the United States between 2007 and 2019, the number of Latino-owned employer businesses **grew** by 34% while White-owned employer businesses experienced a 7% **drop**.³⁴ During this period, the annual payroll of Latino-owned employer businesses grew over twice as fast as for White-owned.³⁵



Virginia is among the most supportive states for Latino business owners.³⁶ Virginia ranks ninth in the country, based on the number of Latino-owned businesses and the number of employees they employ.³⁷ East of the Mississippi River, only Connecticut and Michigan have a higher percentage of Latino-owned businesses than Virginia.

The best Hispanic business ideas are sometimes held by people who are out of the loop, who don't know there is an organization like VLAB that has access to the Governor and other policy makers. A two-

³⁴ <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/state-latino-entrepreneurship-2022.pdf>

³⁵ <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/state-latino-entrepreneurship-2022.pdf>

³⁶ <https://www.zippia.com/advice/best-states-hispanic-owned-businesses/#:~:text=Virginia&text=A%20whopping%203.4%25%20of%20all,m most%20supportive%20on%20this%20list.>

³⁷ <https://www.zippia.com/advice/best-states-hispanic-owned-businesses/#:~:text=Virginia&text=A%20whopping%203.4%25%20of%20all,m most%20supportive%20on%20this%20list.>

pronged approach can change this in a short period of time, presenting the Administration with creative and innovative business policy ideas:

Hotline

We ask the Administration to create a Hispanic business idea hotline that the VLAB Business Committee can manage. In the same way that the Administration established a parent's hotline, it should establish one to encourage Latino business owners to share their ideas with VLAB.

Flyers promoting the hotline

In support of the hotline, the Governor's office would print a half million postcard size flyers with information about VLAB, a link to its webpage and calendar, and the hotline number. VLAB members will hand them out at listening sessions and in their localities.

Education & Career Training

Pilot a grant to increase the number of Virginia colleges and universities that have a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status.

Increase Latino representation in faculty and senior administrative leadership by 25 percent in higher educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth.

Increase awareness through a dedicated multilingual social media campaign to promote the Virginia Alternative State Aid Application (VASA) and the delayed launch of the Free Application For Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for the 2023/2024 college application process, and encourage all Virginia colleges and universities to provide application fee waivers for low-income students to improve access to higher education for the 2023/2024 admissions cycle.

Expand professional certifications for K12 educators to increase Career and Technical Education (CTE) course offerings for students.

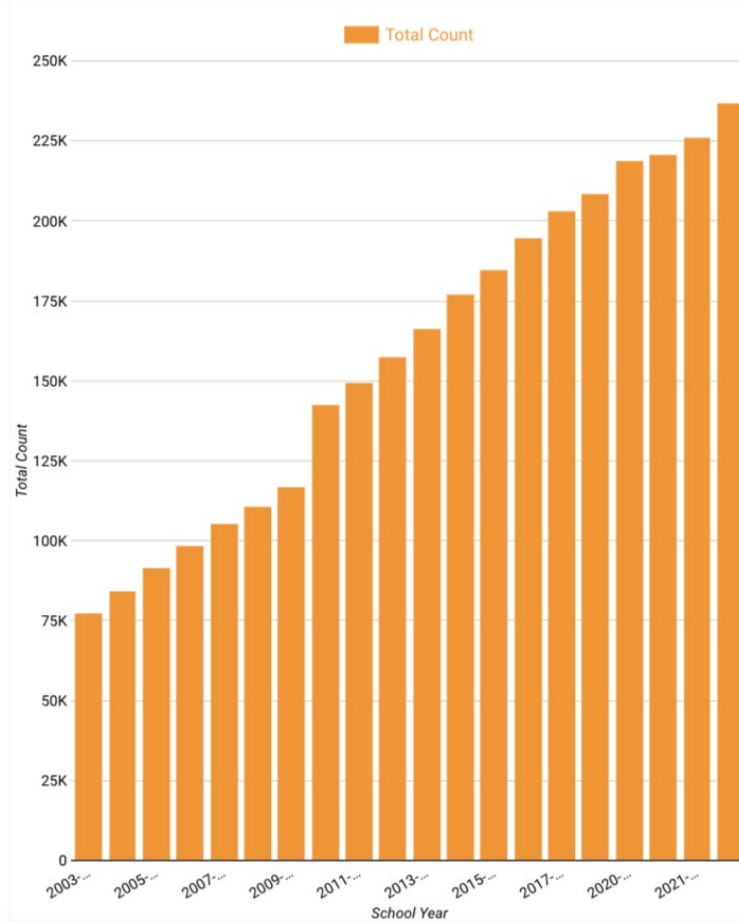
Prioritize English Language Learner (ELL) and language access funding and programming throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in areas with high needs.

Recommendations and Narrative

Pilot a grant to increase the number of Virginia colleges and universities that have a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status.

Currently, only one institution in Virginia is classified as a Hispanic serving institution (Marymount University). To be classified as a HSI, institutions must have a full time enrollment of at least 25% Hispanic/Latino students. With the projected growth of Hispanic/Latinos expected to increase in the coming years (see Chart 1 below) for K-12, it will be important that there are some HSI's in the Commonwealth that will provide access and affordability for these students. Enrollment has grown from 75k students in 2003 to over 225k students in 2021.

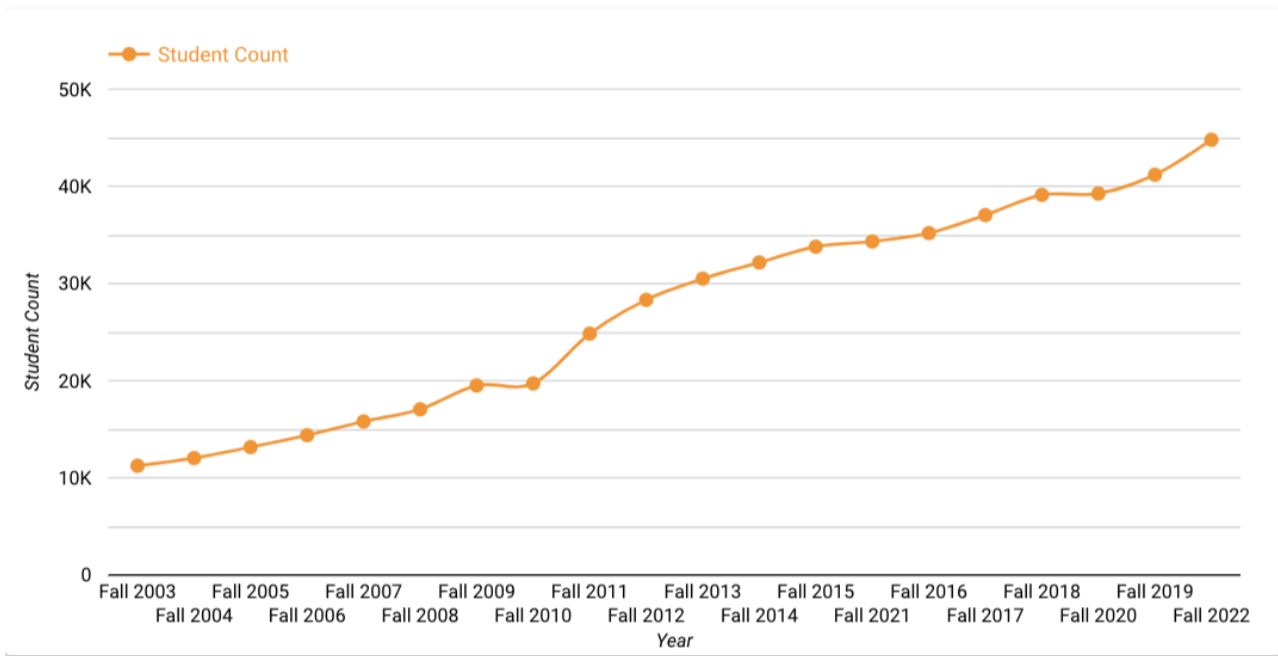
Chart 1: Hispanic Student Enrollment in the Commonwealth of Virginia, K-12, (2003-2021)



Increase Latino representation in faculty and senior administrative leadership by 25 percent in higher educational institutions throughout the Commonwealth.

As Hispanic Enrollment continues to grow in Public 4 Year institutions (see chart 2 below), it is important that Hispanic Faculty and Staff also reflect that growth. Various research studies have illustrated the benefits that Hispanic Faculty provide to Hispanic undergraduate students.

Chart 2: Hispanic Enrollment in Public 4 year institutions in Virginia (2003-2022)



Increase awareness through a dedicated multilingual social media campaign to promote the Virginia Alternative State Aid Application (VASA) and the delayed launch of the [Free Application For Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) for the 2023/2024 college application process, and encourage all Virginia colleges and universities to provide application fee waivers for low-income to improve access to higher education for the 2023/2024 admissions cycle.

Due to changes to the FAFSA at the federal level, the launch of the FAFSA for the 2023/2024 application cycle is expected to be delayed until December. This has major implications for students as they navigate the college search process, bringing in uncertainty around affordability. For many colleges, students will have a condensed timeline to submit the FAFSA in order to maximize their financial aid package. It is highly recommended that students and families are made aware of this delay as well as the availability of the [Virginia Alternative State Aid Application \(VASA\)](#) as a great alternative for Virginia colleges and universities. Social media campaigns and advertisements on Spanish radio stations throughout Virginia would be an effective method to get the word out about these critical pieces of information.

College Application fees can be as much as \$75 for certain institutions in Virginia. For many first generation and low income students, this application fee can be a barrier to entry. VLAB suggests a strong recommendation from the Commonwealth to all Virginia Public Colleges and Universities to waive the application fee for all low-income students that apply.

Expand professional certifications for K12 educators to increase Career and Technical Education (CTE) course offerings for students.

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the role of K-12 educators extends beyond imparting traditional academic knowledge. As society's needs change, there is an increasing demand for well-rounded individuals equipped with both academic proficiency and practical skills. Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses play a pivotal role in preparing students for the real world by offering hands-on training and exposure to various professions. To enrich CTE offerings and ensure students are well-prepared for diverse career paths, it is essential to expand professional certifications for K-12 educators.

Enhancing Educator Expertise:

Expanding professional certifications for K-12 educators can lead to a significant enhancement of their expertise in specialized fields. By undergoing rigorous training and obtaining relevant certifications, educators can deepen their understanding of specific industries and occupations. This, in turn, enables them to deliver more engaging and effective instruction to students. For example, a certified educator in the field of robotics can provide comprehensive guidance to students pursuing careers in engineering or automation.

Broadening Course Offerings: Professional certifications enable K-12 educators to introduce a wider range of CTE courses, catering to the diverse interests and talents of students. As educators gain expertise in various vocational areas, schools can expand their CTE curriculum to include disciplines such as culinary arts, graphic design, healthcare, and information technology. This expansion allows students to explore a multitude of career pathways, helping them discover their true passions and talents early on.

Fostering Real-world Relevance: Incorporating professional certifications into K-12 education infuses real-world relevance into the curriculum. Educators armed with industry-recognized credentials can seamlessly integrate practical insights, current trends, and emerging technologies into their teaching. This approach bridges the gap between classroom learning and actual professional scenarios, enabling students to acquire skills that are directly applicable in their future careers. For instance, a certified automotive technology educator can provide students with up-to-date insights into the automotive industry, ensuring they are job-ready upon graduation.

Empowering Educators and Students: Expanding professional certifications empowers both educators and students alike. Educators gain a sense of accomplishment and credibility as they acquire specialized knowledge, boosting their confidence in the classroom. Students, on the other hand, benefit from the expertise of certified educators, receiving high-quality instruction and mentorship. Moreover, exposure to certified educators from various fields can spark students' interest in careers they might not have considered before, broadening their horizons and encouraging them to explore diverse career options.

Conclusion: In a rapidly changing global landscape, it is imperative to equip students with the skills and knowledge they need to thrive in a variety of careers. By expanding professional certifications for K-12 educators, schools can enrich their Career and Technical Education offerings, providing students with an array of engaging, relevant, and practical courses. This approach not only enhances educators' expertise but also empowers students to make informed career choices and succeed in a dynamic and ever-evolving professional world. As educational institutions embrace this forward-thinking approach, they

contribute to the holistic development of students and lay the foundation for a future workforce that is prepared for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

Prioritize English Language Learner (ELL) and language access funding and programming throughout the Commonwealth, particularly in areas with high needs.

In the multicultural landscape of education, fostering inclusivity and equity is of paramount importance. English Language Learners (ELLs) constitute a significant segment of the student population in Virginia, representing both cultural diversity and the promise of a richer educational experience. To ensure that these students receive the support they deserve, it is essential to prioritize ELL and language access funding and programming throughout the Commonwealth, especially in areas with high needs.

The Current Landscape of ELL Education in Virginia: Virginia, like many states, has witnessed a remarkable increase in its ELL student population over the years. According to the Virginia Department of Education, in the 2020-2021 academic year, there were over 95,000 ELL students enrolled in public schools across the state, accounting for nearly 9% of the total student population. This surge underscores the necessity for targeted and comprehensive language support programs that enable these students to fully engage in the educational process.

Addressing Disparities: It is crucial to recognize that ELL students often face unique challenges. These challenges encompass language barriers, cultural adjustments, and social integration issues. In areas with high ELL concentrations, such as Northern Virginia, these challenges are further exacerbated. Statistics from the Virginia Department of Education reveal that schools in this region have a notably higher percentage of ELL students compared to the state average. As of the 2020-2021 academic year, Fairfax County Public Schools, one of the largest districts in Northern Virginia, had approximately 25% of its student population classified as ELLs. This underscores the urgency to allocate adequate resources to these areas.

The Importance of Prioritizing Funding and Programming: Prioritizing ELL and language access funding and programming is essential for several reasons. Firstly, it ensures that ELL students have equal access to educational opportunities, laying the foundation for academic success. Secondly, comprehensive language support programs not only assist in language acquisition but also enhance cognitive development and critical thinking skills. Moreover, investing in ELL education aligns with the broader goal of cultivating a culturally aware and competent citizenry, capable of thriving in an interconnected world.

Case for Inclusive Education: The positive impact of prioritizing ELL and language access funding is evidenced by success stories from school districts that have embraced inclusive practices. For instance, Prince William County Public Schools in Virginia has implemented targeted language support initiatives and witnessed improvements in both language proficiency and academic achievement among their ELL students. Graduation rates for ELL students in this district increased from 60.8% in 2015 to 77.3% in 2020, showcasing the potential of a well-funded and supportive educational environment.

Conclusion: As Virginia continues to evolve in its pursuit of educational excellence, it is imperative to remember that true progress is marked by the inclusivity and success of all students. Prioritizing ELL and language access funding and programming throughout the Commonwealth, especially in areas with high needs, is a significant step toward achieving this goal. By providing equitable resources and comprehensive support, Virginia can empower its ELL students to flourish academically, culturally, and socially. As these students embrace their diverse backgrounds and languages, they enrich not only their own lives but also the fabric of the entire Commonwealth.

Health

Create a workgroup to advise the Department on cultural competence and language access as it works to roll out the *Governor's Right Help, Right Now Plan*

Develop Executive Order #2 Impact Workgroup

Encourage DOI Officer collaboration with Virginia Association of Clinical Psychologist, Virginia Society of Clinical Social Work, and the Virginia Counselors Association

Raise the age for legally residing youth eligible for Medicaid from 19 to 21 years of age

Continue to expand upon the Governor's Right Help, Right Now behavioral health plan to increase access to mental health supports across the Commonwealth

Provide a rate increase for Medicaid-funded community-based behavioral health services.

Authorize the Department of Medical Assistance Services to establish a methodology for an annual adjustment to reimbursement rates for Medicaid-funded mental health services for inflation.

Provide language-access training and implementation resources to health-based nonprofit organizations receiving funding to provide direct services in the Commonwealth.

Make permanent the school-based mental health services pilot. Create a School-Based Mental Services Health Trust Fund to ensure long-term, dedicated funding for school-based mental health services.

Identify opportunities where Medicaid-funded behavioral health services can be provided to children and adolescents without a diagnosis as an early intervention and prevention strategy in line with guidance from CMS.

Direct DBHDS, DMAS and the DHP to identify pathways to license and employ bi/multilingual behavioral health workers with international credentials who are currently unable to practice in Virginia.

Direct Virginia's public colleges and universities to explore educational exchange opportunities with institutions of higher education in Latin America to promote the cultural and linguistic preparation of our behavioral health workforce.

Create a bilingual, statewide system of support for patients of Parkinsons, Alzheimer's, and other related brain disorders affecting Virginia's elderly Latino populations. Efforts should include education and awareness around early diagnosis and intervention.

Create a bilingual program to increase awareness of food allergies and the mental health considerations within the Virginia population especially among children of Hispanic/Latino descent.

Tackle Opioid Crisis

Recommendations and Narrative

Recommendation #1: Create Right Help, Right Now Plan Workgroup

VLAB recommends that the Department of Health and Human Resources create a workgroup to advise the Department on cultural competence and language access as it works to roll out the *Governor's Right Help, Right Now Plan*. The group should include at least one Latino member and should include

recommendations on how to distribute information about mental health services to the Latino community.

Recommendation #2: Develop Executive Order #2 Impact Workgroup

VLAB recommends that DBHDS create a workgroup to study utilization of DBHDS community services by people of color and to manage the impact of Executive Order 70 on Virginia state hospitals. This workgroup should include at least one Latino member and should focus on impacts on minority communities from the Governor's executive order.

There is a fast growing population of Latino-Hispanic population in the Commonwealth, and we need bilingual: Spanish-English healthcare providers to better serve the Latino-Hispanic Community.

Recommendation #3: Encourage DOI Officer collaboration with Virginia Association of Clinical Psychologist, Virginia Society of Clinical Social Work, and the Virginia Counselors Association

VLAB recommends that the Chief Diversity, Inclusion and Opportunity Officer develop an initiative in collaboration with the Virginia Association of Clinical Psychologists, the Virginia Society of Clinical Social Work, and the Virginia Counselors Association ***focused on diversifying the mental health professions in Virginia.*** Data from the Department of Health Professions should be used to establish benchmarks for recruitment of mental health professionals of diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation #4: Raise the age for legally residing youth eligible for Medicaid from 19 to 21 years of age

At 19 and 20, many youth have not yet entered the workforce and therefore may not have health insurance. Keeping Medicaid eligibility through age 21 will prevent youth from having their insurance coverage dropped. It is at this age when many mental health conditions are diagnosed and access to health care is critical at this stage of life.

Recommendation # 5: Continue to expand upon the Governor's Right Help, Right Now behavioral health plan to increase access to mental health supports across the Commonwealth

The Governor's Right Help, Right Now behavioral health transformation plan is a critical first step to reforming the state's mental health system and addressing the behavioral health needs of every Virginian. It is important to build upon this plan to ensure all Virginia communities are receiving access to the continuum of behavioral health and substance abuse services.

Recommendation # 6: Provide a rate increase for Medicaid-funded community-based behavioral health services.

Private behavioral health service providers bill 82% of all community-based services in Virginia, yet rates for many of these services have not increased in 20 years. Increasing Medicaid reimbursement rates ensures providers can hire, pay and retain the staff necessary to resolve Virginia's mental health crisis.

Recommendation #7: Authorize the Department of Medical Assistance Services to establish a methodology for an annual adjustment to reimbursement rates for Medicaid-funded mental health services for inflation.

Medicaid rates are set at the discretion of Virginia's legislature and do not adjust automatically with inflation. Behavioral health professionals are facing increased costs and regulatory burdens while billing at deflated Medicaid rates. An annual adjustment for inflation ensures the resiliency of our behavioral health system.

Recommendation #8: Provide language-access training and implementation resources to health-based nonprofit organizations receiving funding to provide direct services in the Commonwealth.

As a matter of operation, the Commonwealth contracts with and grants awards to nonprofit organizations to deliver services to people in the Commonwealth. These organizations are not always equipped to deliver those services in a linguistically and culturally appropriate manner. We recommend VDH and its agencies designate funds within its awarding grants specifically for the provision of language access services for said funding opportunity.

Recommendation #9: Make permanent the school-based mental health services pilot. Create a School-Based Mental Services Health Trust Fund to ensure long-term, dedicated funding for school-based mental health services.

Children spend the vast majority of their time in school. According to Mental Health America, Virginia currently ranks 48th in the nation for youth mental health. Addressing the crisis means serving children where they spend the majority of their day. This offers the least amount of disruption to children and their families.

Recommendation #10: Identify opportunities where Medicaid-funded behavioral health services can be provided to children and adolescents without a diagnosis as an early intervention and prevention strategy in line with guidance from CMS.

Traumatic or adverse childhood experiences are very likely to result in some sort of behavioral health need or diagnosis. Currently, mental health providers are unable to bill Medicaid for services rendered prior to the patient developing symptoms. This means that a child who witnesses a traumatic event, such as the murder of a parent, would be ineligible for services until they begin demonstrating diagnosable behavior. This recommendation would fund and increase access to preventative services for traumatic experiences.

Recommendation #11: Direct DBHDS, DMAS and the DHP to identify pathways to license and employ bi/multilingual behavioral health workers with international credentials who are currently unable to practice in Virginia.

Virginia is experiencing a severe shortage of licensed behavioral health professionals and an even greater shortage of bilingual and multilingual professionals. This recommendation addresses the shortage of both by extending pathways to professionals currently living in Virginia. According to the Census Bureau's 2019 American Community Survey, 130,000 Virginia LEP residents speak Spanish, or 1% of the state's population. Spanish is the largest language group among LEP residents. VLAB's listening sessions across the Commonwealth in FY2023 indicate access to cultural and linguistically appropriate behavioral health services is severely lacking.

Recommendation #12: Direct Virginia's public colleges and universities to explore educational exchange opportunities with institutions of higher education in Latin America to promote the cultural and linguistic preparation of our behavioral health workforce.

Virginia is experiencing a severe shortage of licensed behavioral health professionals and an even greater shortage of bilingual and multilingual professionals. This recommendation envisions a long-term solution to bolstering Virginia's behavioral health workforce.

Recommendation #13: Create a bilingual, statewide system of support for patients of Parkinsons, Alzheimer's, and other related brain disorders affecting Virginia's elderly Latino populations. Efforts should include education and awareness around early diagnosis and intervention.

Using a large insurance database for case identification, a study of Parkinson's Disease and ethnicity found that Hispanics had the highest incidence of PD. (2010 Jan 15, Geographic and Ethnic Variation in Parkinson Disease: A Population Based Study of US Medicare Beneficiaries). This study was confirmed by a 2010 study from the University of Missouri and the American Parkinson Disease Association that showed that Hispanic males over the age of 65 are at the greatest risk of being diagnosed with

Parkinson's Disease. The growing Hispanic population and increased life expectancy in the United States, contributes to this elevated risk-as well as possible exposure to pesticides at an early age. Hispanics are also under-represented in PD research despite the importance of diversity for results to apply to a wide range of patients. A survey found roughly half of Hispanics with PD linked to a tertiary center were unaware about research participation opportunities. (Hispanic Perspectives on Parkinson's Disease Care and Research Participation). Hispanics are also under-represented in PD genetic research. (Annals of Neurology: Characterizing the Genetic Architecture of Parkinson's Disease in Latinos, 2010).

Recommendation #14: Create a bilingual program to increase awareness of food allergies and the mental health considerations within the Virginia population especially among children of Hispanic/Latino descent.

On April 11, 2022, Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin signed into law Elijah's Law which requires early childhood care providers to have food allergy policies in place. In 2015 Governor Terry McAuliffe signed HB2090 which mandates training standards that address food allergy awareness. However, a recent study published in JAMA Network Open suggests that racial, ethnic and socioeconomic differences in the prevalence of food allergies exist and are evident in clinical outcomes such as food allergy-related emergency department related visits and epinephrine auto injector use. Moreover, a study produced by Northwestern University, reported June 15, 2023, found that the prevalence of food allergy is highest among Hispanic individuals across all ages. "Food allergies are not frequently talked about impacting racial and ethnic communities." said study corresponding author Dr. Ruchi Gupta. "It's not on the radar. But we now know it does impact them more, and it's important to improve awareness." While rates of food allergies have dramatically increased over the past few years, little consideration has been given to the mental health ramifications of living with this condition, among them depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, being bullied, and an overall poorer quality of life. Indeed, mental health issues associated with food allergies are likely underrecognized according to a 2018 report in "Clinical Reviews in Allergy & Immunology" entitled "Beyond Avoidance: the Psychosocial Impact of Food Allergies."

Recommendation #15: Tackle Opioid Crisis

Put the full, intersectional power of Virginia's government behind resolving the opioid crisis, especially among Virginia's Latino population. Provide prevention and substance abuse treatment services in Spanish. Ensure there is adequate bilingual professional staff to address root causes of fentanyl and other substance abuse. Create a statewide public awareness campaign in Spanish to educate Virginia's Latino population about the fentanyl crisis and available resources.

Housing and Community Development

Increase funds increases to the Housing Trust Fund

Create state-funded housing choice vouchers

Direct the Department of Housing and Community Development to direct its programs to be accessible to individuals using Individualized Tax Identification Numbers (ITIN)

Support initiatives and legislation that affords residents of manufactured/mobile homes a realistic opportunity to participate in bids (avoid circumvention language)

Recommendations and Narrative

In the Central Virginia region, Hispanics represent 5% of households, but represent 12% of people living in mobile homes.³⁸ According to Project:Homes, a non-profit provider of affordable housing, about 20% of the mobile-home parks included in the study are predominantly Hispanic. This is probably representative of the Commonwealth, given that Hispanics are concentrated in Virginia's largest metropolitan areas, with 62% of them living in Northern Virginia:³⁹

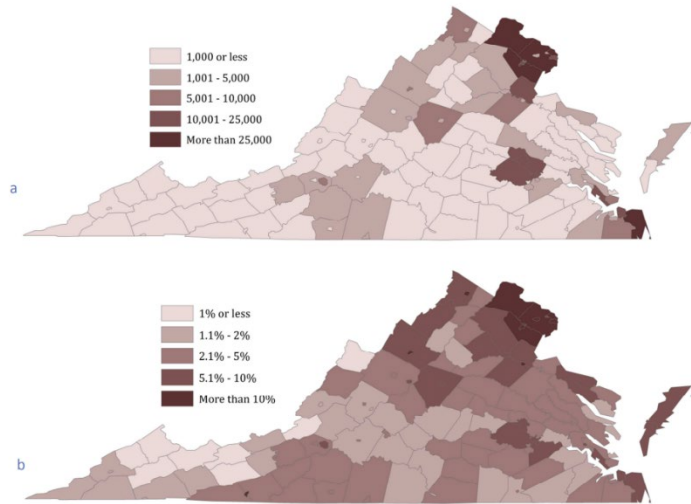


FIGURE 8 - (A) NUMBER OF HISPANIC RESIDENTS IN EACH LOCALITY
(B) PERCENT OF RESIDENTS IN THE LOCALITY WHO ARE HISPANIC

Last year's report highlighted problems of housing affordability for Virginians. About a third of households are housing-cost burdened, with almost half of them spending more than 50% of their income on housing costs. These households are mostly located in the Hampton Roads area, Richmond, and Northern Virginia. Throughout the year, VLAB met with numerous Hispanic community leaders, homeowners, and tenants from those and other regions of the Commonwealth who echoed our findings and recommendations.

1. Support legislation that funds increases to the Housing Trust Fund

We found widespread support for more robust budget allocations into the Housing Trust Fund (HTF), which supports financing for the construction of homes and rentals affordable to those with incomes below the Area Median Income (AMI)— including permanent supportive housing for individuals with intellectual, mental health, and other complex medical disabilities.

The HTF has been significantly underfunded, and at times even defunded, resulting in today's 200,000 shortage of affordable homes. Given the Governor's recent praise of the use of federal and state funds to finance affordable and special-needs housing units throughout the Commonwealth, **VLAB**

³⁸ PROJECT:HOMES, "Manufactured Housing Communities," November 2016, available at https://mhccv.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/mhccv_centralva_report.pdf.

³⁹ WELDON COOPER CENTER, "Hispanics in Virginia," May 2011, available at https://demographics.coopercenter.org/sites/demographics/files/NumbersCount_HispanicsInVirginia_05_2011_0.pdf

recommends that the Administration follow the lead of subject matter experts and spearhead a conservative appropriation and allocation of \$150 million for the Commonwealth HTF while acknowledging that Virginia needs closer to \$500 million to address this shortage.

Additionally, VLAB recommends that the Administration encourage legislation to the HTF that protects funds from being diverted to housing-related initiatives. The HTF and the Virginia Housing Opportunity Tax Credit serve different roles. It appears that language added in 2022 to the Virginia Housing Opportunity Tax Credit would divert funds from the HTF if the former reached its limit.⁴⁰

2. Support legislation that creates state-funded housing choice vouchers.

Approximately 19 million households in the U.S. qualify for housing choice vouchers (commonly referred to as Section 8 voucher) because their incomes are below 50% of the median income level, but only about a quarter of these households receive voucher subsidies.⁴¹ The situation is even more dire in the Commonwealth, where only about 12% of our low and extremely low income households benefit from the existing federal housing choice vouchers.⁴²

States—including Virginia—have considered the development of state-funded housing vouchers to address the need for affordable housing through the rental market. During its last session, Virginia's Senate asserted its readiness to explore the development and funding of such a program if the level of revenue at the end of the fiscal year was sufficient. Because Virginia currently enjoys a fiscal surplus, **VLAB recommends that the Administration support legislation that creates state-funded housing choice vouchers.**

Irrespective of political differences, it is undisputed that undocumented workers are an integral part of the economy in Virginia. They must procure rental housing and it is preferable that they do so through legitimate methods, which normally requires a social security number, which they don't have. Therefore, **VLAB recommends that the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development accept applicants to the program whose financial and moral history can be corroborated using Individualized Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs).** ITINs are tax processing numbers available to non-U.S. citizens who have established their identity to the Internal Revenue Service.⁴³ ITINs are used like Social Security numbers to file and pay taxes, verify one's identity, obtain driver's licenses, open bank accounts, establish financial and credit history, and to help demonstrate "good moral character" as part of citizenship application processes.⁴⁴ Housing Authorities in other states such as Wisconsin and Illinois have been accepting ITINs and we encourage the Administration to follow suit.

⁴⁰ 2022 Special Session I, Budget Amendments - HB30 (Conference Report), available at <https://budget.lis.virginia.gov/amendment/2022/2/HB30/Introduced/CR/4-14/3c/>

⁴¹ Will Fischer, Sonya Acosta, and Erik Gartland, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, MORE HOUSING VOUCHERS: MOST IMPORTANT STEP TO HELP MORE PEOPLE AFFORD STABLE HOMES (REPORT), available at <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/more-housing-vouchers-most-important-step-to-help-more-people-afford-stable-homes#:~:text=Housing%20Choice%20Vouchers%20and%20other,families%20due%20to%20funding%20limitations.>

⁴² VIRGINIA HOUS. DEV. AUTHO. AND VIRGINIA DEP'T OF HOUS. AND COMTY. DEV., "HB854 Statewide Housing Study: Current Efforts, Future Needs, New Strategies," p. 214, available at <https://dmz1.dhcd.virginia.gov/HB854/pdf/hb854-full-report-print.pdf>.

⁴³ U.S. Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Services, *Individual Taxpayer Identification Number*, available at <https://www.irs.gov/individuals/individual-taxpayer-identification-number#:~:text=What%20is%20an%20ITIN%20used,eligible%20for%20Social%20Security%20numbers.>

⁴⁴ *Id.* See also U.S. Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Services, Immigration, *Employment and Tax: Laws* (presentation, 2014), available at www.irs.gov/pub/irs-utl/20-Immigration%20and%20Taxation.pdf.

3. Support legislation that affords residents of manufactured/mobile homes a realistic opportunity to participate in bids

VLAB recommends that the Department of Housing and Community Development undertake the appropriate rulemaking and/or guidance procedures to ensure that an owner's mandated consideration of additional offers to purchase under Va. Code § 55.1-1308.2 is not illegally curtailed by punitive contract provisions that prevent it.

The crux of the issue is as follows. When mobile-home park owners put their park for sale, the Code mandates that they give notice to each tenant, who may or may not join forces with outside financiers to make an offer on the park. The Code requires park owners to "consider" these offers. Corporate investors, led by private equity firms and real estate investment trusts, are buying mobile home parks because they present the strongest returns in real estate.⁴⁵ These institutional investors increase rents, assess new fees, and squeeze profits out of the people who can least afford it.

These "absentee owners" present attractive offers to owners, who then sign Letters of Intent that carry stiff penalties for breaches thereof. Given the possibility of losing thousands of dollars, park owners do not seriously consider any offer that does not make up for the penalty. Therefore, if tenants want owners to consider their offer, the offer must be significantly higher than that presented by the institutional investors.

Pro-tenant advocates in some states push for rent caps. Other community leaders push for amending Va. Code § 55.1-1308.2 to include a right of first refusal to the tenants. Although we urge the Administration to consider those options, we expressly propose only that the Administration promulgate regulations that level the playing field for tenants by prohibiting punitive contract provisions in offers.

More than 350,000 Virginians live in mobile homes.⁴⁶ The estimated 184,000 mobile homes in which they live represent about 5.4% of the Commonwealth's total housing stock.⁴⁷

Mobile homes are the most affordable option available to those living close to or below recognized poverty levels. According to Fannie Mae, the median income of manufactured homeowners is about half that of traditional homeowners and stands only at \$40,000.⁴⁸ One fifth of mobile homeowners and one third of mobile home renters earn less than \$20,000 per year.⁴⁹ Complicating matters is their lack of access to affordable capital.

Depending upon whether they meet home construction and safety standards, mobile homes may be deemed chattel (i.e., personal property) and not real property. Unlike most real estate, chattel

⁴⁵ <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/rents-spike-as-large-corporate-investors-buy-mobile-home-parks#:~:text=The%20plight%20of%20residents%20at,to%20buy%20mobile%20home%20parks.>

⁴⁶ Virginia Poverty Law Center, Reimagining Virginia' Mobile Home Parks, available at <https://vplc.org/reimagining-virginias-mobile-home-parks/>.

⁴⁷ Manufactured Home Community Coalition of Virginia, Manufactured Housing Communities: Understanding the Conditions, Challenges, and Opportunities, available at https://mhccv.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/mhccv_centralva_report.pdf.

⁴⁸ Fannie Mae, DUTY TO SERVE: UNDERSERVED MARKETS PLAN: 2022-2024 (REPORT), available at <https://www.fanniemae.com/media/43411/display#page=14>.

⁴⁹ Id.

quickly depreciates in value. Repayment periods for chattel homes are shorter and their interest rates are higher than for real property.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Interest rates have changed a lot since 2018, but to illustrate the difference, consider that the average interest rate for loans backed only by the manufactured home was 8.5% compared to 5.4% on loans secured by both the manufactured home and the land on which the home is located. (Please further consider that the average interest rate for on site-built single-family homes mortgages was 4.7%.)

Conclusion

The Virginia Latino Advisory Board wishes to thank Governor Youngkin, the Office of the Governor, his Cabinet, the Deputy Secretaries, and all administration staff that have worked on behalf of Latinos in the Commonwealth to make this 2022-2023 Annual Report possible. The recommendations of this report reflect the insight, dedication, and commitment of many hard-working public servants that partnered with VLAB to examine the most urgent health, social, education, economic, and cultural issues affecting Latinos in Virginia. The work of the board throughout the entire year would not have been possible without their support, collaboration, and thoughtfulness.

A special thanks goes to Suzanne Holland, Gloria Senecal, Emma Jensen, Fernando Espinoza, Carmen Williams, Michael Perez, Christian Martinez, Justin Bell, and Deputy Secretary Jenna Moon.

VLAB also wishes to thank the many organizations, Latino leaders, community advocates, and elected officials that took part in the crafting of this Annual Report, and the board's work throughout the year. These individuals and groups participated in VLAB meetings and shared the conversation that drives solutions. CASA Virginia, Edu-Futuro, the Virginia Coalition for Immigrant Rights (VACIR), Radio Poder, LULAC, VLLC, Sacred Heart Center, VACOLAO, Sin Barreras, Marymount University, Shenandoah University, Scholars Latino Initiative, Iglesia Mana del Cielo, and many others all contribute to the vibrancy of Latino community in the Commonwealth and are valued partners to VLAB.

VLAB looks forward to a continuation of this joint effort to implement stronger Latino worker protections, help entrepreneurs innovate and grow their businesses, improve public school student outcomes, welcome new immigrants and undocumented individuals to Virginia, keep families safe in their homes from eviction, and continue to expand access to affordable health care. These recommendations are respectfully submitted in the spirit of virtue, liberty, steadfastness, and renewal.

Appendices of 2023 Annual Report

Additional documents referenced in the report are listed below and attached to the end of this report.

Appendix A - Meeting Agendas & Minutes

Appendix B - Listening Session Notes

Appendix C - Statements

All documents are already publicly available either on Virginia's Commonwealth Calendar ([commonwealth.calendar.gov](https://www.commonwealth.calendar.gov)) or on the Virginia Latino Advisory Board's website (vlab.virginia.gov).