



Budget Testimony for LWV Virginia, January 3, 2024

Joan Porte, President

The League of Women Voters of Virginia appreciates this opportunity, and we request the following considerations during the Budget discussions.

With regards to Affordable Housing, while the needs are rising throughout the Commonwealth, there are no increases for this in the proposed Budget. It is necessary for us to have a steady supply of affordable housing to remain competitive.

When it comes to Child Care, the budget does include the necessary investment to sustain the current number of subsidized child care slots, but it does not account for growth and would require establishing a waitlist. It also does not include any extensions to stabilization grants, which are critical again to assure a stable workforce.

The League wholeheartedly supported Virginia remaining in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, RGGI. In this Budget, climate policies are severely underfunded – or not funded at all. Zero dollars are allocated for the electric vehicle rebate that the Virginia General Assembly passed in 2020. Zero dollars to replace funding from RGGI for low-income energy efficiency programs which will cost us many good jobs, especially when combined with cuts in affordable housing, energy bills, and pollution reduction. Only \$100 million is allocated for flood resilience for 2025 and nothing for 2026. This is an embarrassing fraction of what is required to keep Virginians safe from flooding; and much less than what yearly RGGI auctions had provided. Climate change is a reality. We are encouraged to see funding for several behavioral health initiatives including \$20 million in one-time funding for mobile crisis services and psychiatric emergency programs and \$36m in ongoing crisis services funding.

Regarding Education, Standards of Quality need to be fully funded as the current formulas leave out key staff. The General Assembly needs to make a permanent commitment to fund school construction. Teacher salaries should be at least at the national average. Average teacher salaries in Virginia are \$10,000 less than the national average for teacher pay. Teacher vacancies at the start of the 2023 school year were nearly double those of 2021.

II

Funding for school-based mental health providers should be available and not just for one time only. The funding gap per classroom between rural and poorer communities and more urban and richer communities should be balanced. The funding formulas need to be revised.

The JLARC report identified many problems with school funding in Virginia. The LWV supports JLARC (and Fund Our Schools) recommendations and priorities for the new budget.

Thank you