



1716 East Franklin St. • Richmond, VA 23223 • (804) 643-2474 • virginiainterfaithcenter.org

2020 GENERAL ASSEMBLY ACCOMPLISHMENTS: Progress for workers, immigrants, and the planet

The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP) is pleased with the legislative victories achieved during the 2020 General Assembly. VICPP appreciates the work of faith leaders, congregations, legislators, coalition partners, and volunteers from across Virginia who advocated critical economic, racial, social, and environmental justice issues.

VICPP was a key leader on these winning issues

*** Wage Theft Reforms ***

VICPP championed bills to: Create a private cause of action for wage theft ([HB123](#), Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy and [SB838](#), Senator Adam Ebbin), **add protections against retaliation** ([HB337](#), Delegate Marcia Price and [SB48](#), Senator Lionell Spruill Sr.), **strengthen the ability of DOLI to investigate wage claims** ([HB336](#), Delegate Marcia Price and [SB49](#), Senator Lionell Spruill Sr.), **remove the piece work exemption from minimum wage law** ([SB78](#), Senator Janet Howell).

VICPP also supported bills to create a **private cause of action for misclassification** ([HB984](#), Delegate Karrie Delaney and [SB894](#), Senator Richard Saslaw), establish **prohibitions on noncompete agreements** for low-wage workers ([HB330](#), Delegate Schuyler VanValkenburg and [SB480](#), Senator Bill DeSteph), **remove the domestic worker exemption** from minimum wage ([SB804](#), Senator Jennifer McClellan), and **strengthen enforcement against misclassification** ([SB744](#), Senator Jeremy McPike, [SB662](#), Senator Jennifer Boysko, [HB1407](#), Delegate Jeion Ward, and [HB1199](#), Delegate Kathy Tran). Finally, led by Delegate Paul Krizek (Budget Item 120 #1h), **10 additional wage theft investigators** were included in the budget! VICPP worked on many of these bills for close to four years.

*** Environmental Justice ***

Virginia Interfaith Power and Light, VICPP's environmental program, led efforts to **codify the Environmental Justice Council** ([HB1042](#), Delegate Charniele Herring and [SB883](#), Senator Mamie Locke) and **establish environmental justice as the policy of the Commonwealth** ([HB704](#), Delegate Mark Keam and [SB406](#), Senator Ghazala Hashmi). ***These bills make Virginia a policy leader on environmental justice.***



VICPP played significant leadership roles within these coalition efforts – particularly in mobilizing faith community support

*** Minimum Wage Increase ***

Virginians have not seen an increase in the minimum wage in almost 11 years. The final bills as amended by the Governor (SB7, Senator Richard Saslaw and HB395, Delegate Jeion Ward) have wage increases as follows: May 1, 2021: \$9.50, Jan 2, 2022: \$11, Jan 1, 2023: \$12, Jan 1, 2025: \$13.50, Jan 1, 2026: \$15. Between Jan 1, 2022 and Dec 1, 2023, a robust study will be conducted to examine regionalism options and the General Assembly will have to act again in 2024 to implement the last wage increases and consider regionalism options. The final bill removes many of the bad exemptions of the minimum wage bill. It removes the piecework exemption, which was also passed in a stand-alone bill, the exemption for those with disabilities, the small business exemption, and the domestic worker exemption, another stand-alone bill. These are great steps forward.

VICPP is disappointed with two aspects of the bill. **It continues to exempt farmworkers** from the minimum wage. VICPP will likely seek to remove this exemption in 2021. Also, the bill **creates a training wage** that is 75 percent of the minimum wage for the first 90 days of employment. This provision would not be horrible if it were not abused, but often employers will hire people for 89 days and then fire them to avoid paying the higher wage. Nevertheless, this is a tremendous piece of legislation and we're proud to be a part of it. ***Overall, this bill will lift tens of thousands of Virginians out of poverty.***

*** Comprehensive Predatory Lending Reform ***

VICPP worked closely with the Virginia Poverty Law Center and other partners to finally pass legislation to crack down on predatory lending. Staff, board members, and volunteers of the Virginia Interfaith Center have worked on this issue for decades. This bill will limit the interest people can pay, ensure reasonable repayment periods, reduce car repossessions from title loans, and reduce the chance people will take out more loans than they can repay. The Governor helped by amending the start date of the bills HB789, Delegate Lamont Bagby and SB421, Senator Mamie Locke) from July 1, 2021 to January 1, 2021, so that Virginians can save approximately \$50 million in fees. ***This bill will save low-income Virginians millions of dollars.***

*** Driver's Licenses for All ***

The General Assembly passed and then the Governor amended the bills that give people of differing immigration status the ability to obtain a Driver's Privilege Card ([HB1211](#), Delegate Kathy Tran and [SB34](#), Senator Scott Surovell) and make the cards look more like other licenses so immigrants are less likely to be subject to discrimination. Immigrant advocates still have privacy concerns about the bills that need to be addressed before many immigrants will apply. ***However, this is a great step forward for the Commonwealth and its residents.***

*** In-State Tuition ***

VICPP worked with coalition partners (including VIIA, VACIR, NAKASEC, LAJC, and the DREAM Project) for many years, to pass this law that allows all who meet the Virginia residency requirements to be eligible for in-state tuition ([HB1547](#), Delegate Alfonso Lopez and [SB935](#), Senator Jennifer Boysko). ***This is a great victory for immigrant students.***

*** Energy Burden ***

There were many great energy bills this year. We were particularly engaged in supporting the bills ([HB981](#), Delegate Charniele Herring and [SB1027](#), Senator Lynwood Lewis Jr.) to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) and use some of the revenue to invest in energy efficiency and reduce electricity bills for low-income households. This is ***a great environmental victory!***

VICPP also supported bills (all passed) to make Virginia more welcoming:

Create the Office of New Americans: The bills ([HB1209](#), Delegate Kathy Tran and [SB991](#), Senator Ghazala Hashmi) call for the establishment of this office to welcome and support newcomers.

Protect immigrants in jail: The bill ([HB1150](#), Delegate Alfonso Lopez) provides that jails are no longer required to ascertain the citizenship of any inmate taken into custody.

Create the position, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: The bill ([HB394](#), Delegate Jeion Ward) establishes this position to promote inclusive practices across state government and address systemic inequities.

Create a Commission to Study Slavery and Subsequent De Jure and De Facto Racial and Economic Discrimination Against African Americans: The bill ([HB1519](#), Delegate Delores McQuinn) creates a commission to study the effects of historical discrimination against African-Americans.



VICPP was disappointed with the outcome of the following bills it helped to champion:

Paid Sick Days: VICPP led a statewide effort to get a Paid Sick Days standard in Virginia. The conference committee report on our Paid Sick Days bill (SB 481, Senator Barbara Favola) ***passed the House 52-45, but died in the Senate.*** Special thanks are due to patrons Senator Barbara Favola and Delegate Elizabeth Guzman. VICPP was terribly disappointed with the final vote but will try again next year. By the end of the General Assembly, VICPP had garnered enormous attention to the issue. Based on the Senate floor debate, legislators need to hear more from constituents about why so many people desperately need paid sick days. Perhaps after the COVID-19 pandemic, legislators will understand that is essential for public health that all workers have paid sick days.

Removing the Farmworker Exemption to the Minimum Wage: As mentioned under the Minimum Wage victory, VICPP was disappointed that the farmworker exemption remains in the state minimum wage, which means Virginia farmworkers cannot be guaranteed minimum wage coverage under Virginia's law. VICPP believes that these essential workers deserve minimum wage protection.

Fair Energy Bills Act: Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy has long advocated for policies to support low-income families. Dominion Energy, a monopoly in much of Virginia, has been overcharging all of its customers for years, including countless low-income families. The Electric Utility Regulation bill (HB1132, Delegate Jerrauld Jones) would have required Dominion Energy to justify its rates, which currently have led to over earnings of at least hundreds of millions of dollars over the past decade. The bill passed the House (77-23) but failed in the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee (7-8). This defeat was incredibly disappointing.

Legislative contacts:

Benjamin Hoynes, VICPP Policy Director, benjamin@virginiainterfaithcenter.org

Kim Bobo, VICPP Executive Director, kim@virginiainterfaithcenter.org

Media contact: Roberta Oster, VICPP Communications Director, roberta@virginiainterfaithcenter.org

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The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy advocates economic, racial, social, and environmental justice in Virginia's policies and practices through education, prayer, and action. VICPP is a non-partisan coalition of more than 750 faith communities working for a more just society.