



2021 General Assembly Session

LEGISLATIVE REVIEW



FOREWORD

A Note on the Legislative Process

Several bills mentioned here have passed the General Assembly and are on the Governor's desk. The Governor has until March 31, 2021 to sign, amend, or veto the bill. If he signs the bill, it becomes law on July 1, 2021, or later if the bill specifies that. If he vetoes or amends the bill, the General Assembly will act on the veto or amendment when they reconvene on April 7, 2021.



The Center for Economic Justice

Housing

Increased Penalties for Unlawful Eviction

Unlawful evictions rose dramatically during the COVID-19 crisis, with some landlords using illegal lock-outs and utility shut-offs to evict tenants. This session the General Assembly voted to stop these unlawful evictions and require an initial hearing on a tenant's petition for relief from unlawful eviction within five days as well as add a \$5,000 statutory damages provision.

Families Have More Time to Pay Rent and Stay Housed

The General Assembly voted to extend a policy passed during the 2020 special session that requires landlords to give tenants a 14-day notice before filing an eviction and larger landlords to offer tenants a payment plan. The law will expire on July 1, 2022.

When Landlords are Made Whole, Tenants Stay Housed

The General Assembly voted to expand the right of tenants to pay all that is owed to avoid eviction. Under this new law, termination notices must have language explaining this right. An amendment to the original bill means smaller landlords (with four or fewer rental units only) will not have to comply. These landlords must allow the tenant who pays everything owed to stay only one time per year.



Consumer Rights

American Dream Preserved: Better Notice Before Foreclosure, Protections for Manufactured Home Communities

The Preserving the American Dream Act will help homeowners facing foreclosure and preserve manufactured homes, the least-cost entry into homeownership in Virginia. The law will help close the racial wealth gap, improving housing equity throughout the Commonwealth.

Balance in the Electric Utility System

The General Assembly voted to create the Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP), which provides low-income Dominion and Appalachian Power consumers with a limit on their electric bills, energy efficiency programs, and energy conservation education programs to alleviate energy burden. Five other bills designed to give Virginians relief from utility company overcharges passed the House but were all defeated in the Senate.

The Center for Family Advocacy



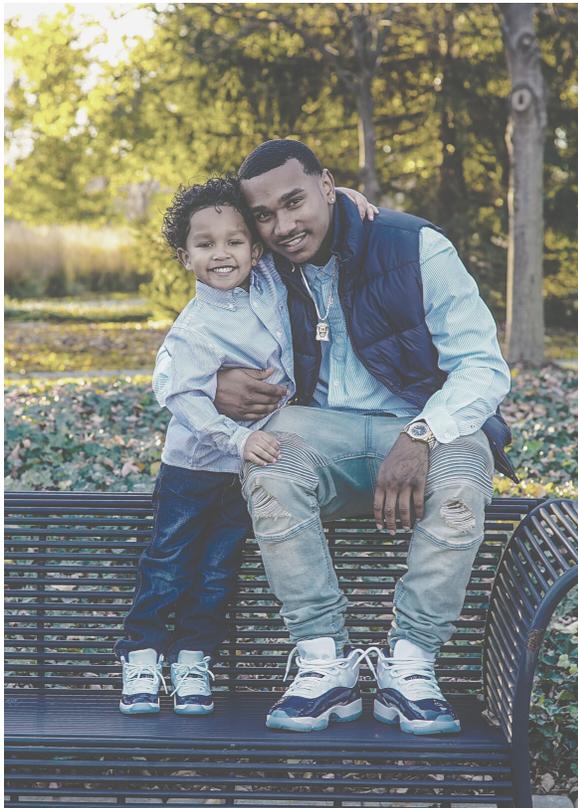
Family & Child Welfare

Virginia to Ensure More Children Receive Health Care Coverage

A new law will require the state to identify whether children are eligible for Medicaid/FAMIS when making child support determinations.

Keeping Families Together: Virginia to Support "Kin First"

The General Assembly voted to require local departments of social services and licensed child-placing agencies to involve a child's relatives and fictive kin when developing a child's foster care plan.



Ensuring Children Have Permanent, Safe, Stable Homes

A new state-funded Kinship Guardian Assistance program will facilitate child placements with relatives, including fictive kin, to ensure permanency for children. Fiscal analysis shows the new law will save the state money. Most importantly, it will provide children with safe, stable, and permanent homes.

Domestic & Sexual Violence

Victims of Sexual Abuse Protected

Current law requires adult victims of sexual violence to report such crimes within 120 hours of their occurrence in order to be eligible for the Criminal Injuries Compensation Fund. This session, the General Assembly voted to exempt such victims from this 120-hour requirement

Victims Protected: Firearm Restrictions for Abusers

The General Assembly passed a bill that prohibits a person who has been convicted of assault and battery of certain family or household members from purchasing, possessing, or transporting a firearm.

Protecting Victims of Sex Trafficking

A new law will establish a procedure for victims of sex trafficking to have certain convictions vacated and the police and court records expunged for such convictions.



The Center for Healthy Communities

Health Insurance

ACA Marketplace Affordability & Stability

The General Assembly voted to reduce Marketplace premiums through reinsurance, a program that assists insurers covering medical services for very high-cost enrollees.

Public Benefits

Virginia Expands Access to SNAP

After years of rejection, SNAP expansion will finally move forward in Virginia. The General Assembly passed a bill that will increase access to SNAP and make 25,000 more families in Virginia eligible for food assistance. The new law will also reduce the growing issue of school meal debt, pump more money into local economies, and help smaller grocery stores.

Families Can No Longer Be Sued Over School Meal Debt

A new law will require each school board to adopt a policy that prohibits the board from filing a lawsuit against a student's parent because the student cannot pay for a meal at school or owes a school meal debt.



Elder Law

Access to Birth Certificates Simplified

The General Assembly voted to make it easier for individuals to make corrections to their birth certificates. This issue particularly impacts low-income older adults with illegible, handwritten birth certificates due to home births and poor record keeping. It has become more urgent as birth certificates are required for Real ID.

Protecting Nursing Home Residents

We were disappointed to see that the General Assembly failed to act on the issue of improving nursing homes in Virginia this session. We plan to address this again next year and look forward to working with legislators on bills that require adequate staffing in nursing homes to ensure safe and healthy conditions for residents.

VPLC HELPLINES

ENROLL VIRGINIA! HEALTH INSURANCE HELPLINE: 888-392-5132

EVICTON LEGAL HELPLINE: 833-NOEVICT (833-663-8428)

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