

2022 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



CENTER FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE

CONSUMER RIGHTS

- Allow college students unrestricted access to their transcripts.
- Improved control over consumer data.

AFFORDABLE ENERGY

- Drive down upcoming electric utility costs through better regulatory tools. Support continued efforts to reduce costs for utility customers and work toward greater balance between the need for consistent energy access and the need to protect consumers' finances.

HOUSING

- Fair access to appeals in eviction cases. Allow the court to waive high fees so that low-income tenants have access to an appeal like all other civil cases and eliminate the dismissal of appeals without a hearing.
- Safe and Healthy Homes Act: Enact a warranty of habitability defense to nonpayment of rent, allowing tenants to raise unsafe or unhealthy conditions as a defense to nonpayment of rent as long as they gave the landlord notice of the condition.
- Community enforcement of health and safety rental housing laws to help tenants living in unsafe or unhealthy conditions who lack the means to enforce their rights. Empower cities, counties, and towns to file suit against slumlords to force compliance with the health and safety standards of the Virginia Residential Landlord Tenant Act.
- Keep the 14-day pay or quit notice requirement: Allowing residential tenants 14 days to pay rent after receiving a late notice, rather than five days as required pre-pandemic, helps more tenants avoid eviction and provides rental and late fees income to landlords without payment of court and lawyer fees.

CENTER FOR FAMILY ADVOCACY

FAMILY & CHILD WELFARE

- Court oversight of foster care placements to ensure decisions made are in the best interests of the child.
- Give relatives of children in foster care an opportunity to appeal the denial of foster placement.
- Create two pilot parent representation centers to increase access to justice for parents, improving outcomes for children in foster care.

DOMESTIC & SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Promote bills that support victims' access to services and fight bills that infringe on victims' rights (such as SB 174, Senator Peake's bill, which unconstitutionally imposes restrictions on victims in the very protective orders designed to protect them from abuse, and HB 69, Delegate Davis' bill, which diminishes longstanding "Best Interests of the Child" factors judges must consider in making custody and visitation decisions).

CENTER FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

HEALTH INSURANCE

- Improve immigrants' access to healthcare by creating a state-funded Medicaid-like program to cover children who are ineligible for Medicaid based on their immigration status.
- Streamline Medicaid processes by removing administrative barriers that keep low-income children from getting coverage.
- Reduce Marketplace costs through increased funding. Oppose any larger role for non-ACA compliant health plans (such as Association Health Plans), which are risky for consumers and undermine the ACA risk pool.
- Improve language access in hospital charity care programs.

PUBLIC BENEFITS

- Increase access to SNAP by allowing incarcerated individuals to apply for SNAP prior to their release so they have access to SNAP and education and training programs upon release.
- Strengthen cash assistance for children living in poverty by repealing full family sanctions within TANF, which take away assistance to the entire family if the parent doesn't meet TANF's work or other requirements.

ELDER LAW

- Improve nursing home conditions through increased staffing ratios, particularly for Medicaid nursing homes, which have the lowest rates of staffing in Virginia.
- Guardianship reform: Increase access to the public guardian program and change the role of court-appointed guardians ad litem to increase use of less restrictive options when feasible.