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June 24, 2020

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The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus Priorities for Special Session

The Commonwealth is past the point for studies on policing and law enforcement—immediate action must be taken to eliminate law enforcement abuse, prevent and punish racist behaviors, weed out institutional discrimination, and increase accountability at all levels of law enforcement. The country and the Commonwealth stand at the threshold of substantial and necessary social and political change. As leaders, the next steps are to ensure that there is a bold swing towards greater racial and social justice and change across Virginia.

The people have taken to the streets for weeks to raise their voices in protest to demand drastic change. Across the Commonwealth, there have been calls to reallocate funding from large law enforcement budgets towards critical areas in communities. There have been calls for greater accountability towards law enforcement who engage in violent, abusive, or unlawful behaviors. And on a larger scale, this moment is calling on leaders to combat institutional racism and societal discrimination that exists in the criminal justice system, economic structures, housing, education, in healthcare, mental health, in environmental policy, and many other areas.

For decades, members of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) have been working to break down systems of oppression, including working to reframe the ways that State government approaches public safety. The pressure created by the protests has generated a larger public shift and facilitated avenues for such changes to be made in new and creative ways. Today, the VLBC announces its policy priorities and proposals.

VLBC Priorities

This Special Session the VLBC plans to introduce legislation to:

Address & Combat Racism Directly by:

- Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis in the Commonwealth of Virginia
- Uncovering Racial Disparities in all Areas of Policy & Creating Solutions to Bridge the Gaps
- Expanding Hate Crimes to Include False 911 Calls Based on Race
- Requiring Courts to Publish Racial and Other Demographic Data of all Low-level Offenses

Hold Police Accountable, Strengthen Regulation, & Improve Transparency by:

- Creating a Civilian Review Board with Subpoena Power
- Ending Qualified Immunity & Making Changes to Sovereign Immunity
- Establishing a Statewide Officer Database
- Standardizing and Reforming Police Administration, Training, and Accountability
- Expanding Police Decertification Criteria
- Expanding the Use of Body Cams
- Requiring Independent Investigations for All Police-Involved Shootings/Deaths

Prevent Law Enforcement Excessive Use of Force by:

- Defining and Restricting Excessive Use of Force
- Banning the Use of Chokeholds
- Restricting the Use of Tear Gas and Militarization Tactics and Weapons Against Civilians
- Passing “Breonna’s Law” to End No-Knock Warrants

Replace Law Enforcement’s Role in Certain Areas with Trained Specialists by:

- Implementing the “Marcus Alert” to Require Behavioral/Mental Health Professionals to Respond to those thought to be having Mental Health Crises
- DIVESTING from Large Law Enforcement Budgets & INVESTING More in Communities
- Reducing SRO Presence in Schools & Replacing them with Mental Health Professionals

Continue the Fight for Criminal Justice Reform by:

- Implementing Automatic Expungement
- Reinstating Parole
- Passing Cash Bail Reform
- Increasing Good Behavior Sentence Credits
- Legalizing Marijuana

Pass COVID-19 Relief & Protections by:

- Expanding Protections Related to Housing & Evictions
- Providing Rent and Mortgage Relief
- Classifying Frontline Workers as Essential Workers
- Requiring Hazard Pay and PPE for Essential Workers
- Guaranteeing Paid Sick Leave

And the work does not stop here. In the coming weeks, VLBC members will be hosting events to engage community members to receive feedback and input on the agenda leading up to the Special Session. The caucus will continue to work with the community to ensure the voices of the people are heard, continue to incorporate community input, and continue to work with the community to pursue these goals. The VLBC understands this evolving list as a part of the work needed to ensure that Black lives truly matter in our Commonwealth.

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The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) is made up of 23 members in the Virginia General Assembly. VLBC is committed to improving the economic, educational, political, and social conditions of African Americans and underrepresented groups in Virginia. A vital part of VLBC’s mission is to raise the consciousness of other groups to the contributions made by African Americans to the Commonwealth and the Nation.

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