

# Capitol Contact

Virginia Association of Counties

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## VACo contacts

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## General Assembly OK's 70 out of 83 governor's budget amendments

On April 8, Gov. Mark Warner released 83 amendments to HB/SB 30, the budget that had been approved by the General Assembly. During yesterday's veto session, the General Assembly approved 70 of the 83 amendments. The only amendments rejected by the General Assembly that have any potential bearing on local governments are two education programs outlined below; school divisions may ask local governments involved in the programs to provide local funds to restore the state funding cuts which Gov. Warner tried to reinstate but which were cut nonetheless by the General Assembly pursuant to their action of April 17:

### • At-Risk Funding

Gov. Warner had wanted to reinstate the 7% and 8% funding cuts to the At-Risk program. However, the General Assembly rejected this amendment, which means that the At-Risk program cuts will stand.

### • Jobs for Virginia Graduates Program

The General Assembly rejected Gov. Warner's amendment to add back funding to this program in FY 03.

The budget amendments that were approved that are of benefit to local governments are:

- Streamlining the language in the budget related to the certification requirements in the car tax audit. The new language will help ensure that personal property tax relief is not granted to vehicles used for business purposes, while relieving both taxpayers and local officials from extra paperwork

- Adding 29 new deputy sheriffs (using provisional population estimates) to meet the 1 to 1500 ratio of deputies to population.

- Fully funding bonuses for teachers meeting the National Board of Professional Teaching standards (\$5,000 initial bonus and \$2,500 bonus every year thereafter for continuing to meet the standards).

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## Budget amendments

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- Restoring \$1.3 million for two Best Practice Centers, one in Southwest Virginia and one in Southside Virginia.
- Funding Drug Courts in 12 localities.
- Clarifying the use of funding for non-custodial foster arrangements under the Comprehensive Services Act.

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## N.Va. transportation referendum approved

Yesterday, the General Assembly approved the governor's amendment to SB 668 (Williams). As amended, SB 668 now authorizes a regional referendum that will ask Northern Virginia voters if they would like to increase their sales tax by a half-cent to pay for major transportation improvements.

Prior to the governor's amendment, SB 668 only authorized a similar referendum in Hampton Roads. The localities participating in the Northern Virginia referendum will be Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William counties; as well as Alexandria, Fairfax City, Manassas City and Manassas Park.

For all eight jurisdictions combined, the approval of the \$2.8 billion bond package will depend upon a majority of the aggregate number of voters casting their ballots in favor of the measure. The referendum will take place in the next scheduled election on Nov. 5. As amended, SB 668 identifies 23 transportation improvement projects, and also authorizes \$150 million in bonds for secondary road improvements. In addition to authorizing the bond referendum, the bill also establishes the Northern Virginia Regional Transportation Authority, which will be responsible for issuing the bonds. The governor's amendment to SB 668 was approved by a 67-30 vote in the House, and a 34-5 vote in the Senate.

For Hampton Roads, SB 668 authorizes a regional referendum with \$5.9 billion in transportation projects. Affected jurisdictions include the counties of Isle of Wight, James City and York; as well as the cities of Chesapeake, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Suffolk, Virginia Beach and Williamsburg. Similar to the Northern Virginia referendum, the approval of the bond package will depend upon a majority of the aggregate number of voters (in all 12 jurisdictions) casting their ballots in favor of the measure.

## Senate defeats Warner's proposal for \$5 surcharge on solid waste

In the April 17th reconvened session the Senate voted to recommit the amended version of SB 592 (Hanger) to Senate Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources. This was the bill with the governor's proposed amendment to impose a state surcharge of \$5 for every ton of solid waste received by a landfill in Virginia. Since this initiative was put in the form of an amendment and attached to a Senate bill, it was first debated in the Senate. Since it was defeated in the Senate, it failed to reach the House for a vote.

The Senate's action means that although the \$5 per ton state surcharge is defeated for this year, it is likely to be studied by a legislative panel in the months leading up to the 2003 session.

As passed by the General Assembly, SB 592 allowed the State Water Control Board and Waste Management Board to increase environmental permit fees by as much as 300 percent. These fees are charged by DEQ to operators of certain facilities that require environmental permits (such as sanitary landfills, wastewater treatment plants and industrial treatment plants with discharges.) Revenues from these fees are primarily meant to cover administrative costs associated with Virginia's waste and water permitting programs. Even though SB 592 is now – in effect – carried over, its original provisions will still be enacted on July 1. This is because the governor signed HB 1257 (Dillard), a bill that – as passed by the General Assembly – has the exact same provisions as SB 592 prior to being amended by the governor.