

VirginiaGrassroots

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Virginia Grassroots Coalition Announces Legislative Priorities for 2021

At a press conference on January 12, the Virginia Grassroots Coalition made clear it expects legislators to pass progressive legislation that serves the interests of all Virginians, not just those with the greatest access or loudest voice. Joined by the patrons of key bills, the Coalition highlighted its legislative goals for 2021 (found at <https://www.viriniagrassroots.org>):

- Promote fairness and transparency in our elections and politics.
- Create environmentally healthy communities and protect against the impact of climate change.
- Make Virginia safer and healthier for all, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Promote equity, support our workforce, and advance the rights of all Virginia residents.

Coalition Leader, Luisa Boyarski, urged lawmakers to take the call to action seriously. “2020 was a very challenging year for all of us, and as we embark on 2021, we must ensure that Virginia is prepared to face upcoming challenges, whether they be the COVID-19 pandemic, systemic racism, or the existential threat of climate change, to name a few.”

The Coalition believes Virginia must join the **National Popular Vote Interstate Compact**. Explaining how critical the bill is for protecting our democracy, Delegate Mark Levine forcefully asserted that , “All the principles that set up the electoral college are wrong, archaic, outdated, out the window... I think it’s time that the American people choose the American president.”

Paid family and medical leave is paramount for a more equitable Commonwealth. Senator Jennifer Boysko emphasized that “The majority of our Latinx and Black workers are unable to take unpaid leave because either they aren’t eligible for it in their jobs or because they can’t afford it. These structural, discriminatory barriers prevent families of color from being able to afford time off to care for themselves or for their loved ones which puts their health and economic wellbeing in jeopardy.”

We must have **paid sick leave** to keep our workers safe and healthy, especially during a crisis like the COVID-19 pandemic. Delegate Elizabeth Guzman highlighted the challenges faced. “The essential workers of Virginia deserve time off to go to the doctor. We have gotten information that essential workers are not showing up for their vaccination appointments because they can’t get a commitment from their employers to be compensated for getting the vaccine and being given the time to recover from side effects.”

Supply chain disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic show the importance of strong local food systems. According to Delegate Sam Rasoul, “**The Local Food and Farming Infrastructure bill** will expand

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grants to have local farmers band together and invest in processing facilities where they can achieve certain economies of scale. Some of these local farmers may not be able to go out and buy some of that larger capital equipment - but if they band together, and through these grants and their localities, they'll be able to do some of that work."

Climate change is an existential threat to our Commonwealth. Grassroots activist Sharon Shutler, Co-Chair of the Coalition's Clean Energy and Climate Committee, explained that "personal vehicles emit nearly 37% of all carbon pollution in Virginia. We can reduce these CO2 emissions and also improve human health by adopting the **Clean Car Standards bill** which will mandate that auto manufacturers provide more Zero Emission Vehicles to our state."

Finally, Virginia is one of only 5 states with no limitations on campaign contributions from individuals, PACs, or corporations. Delegate Samirah asserted that the fight to **limit campaign contributions**, "is a combination of not just a fight for our environment, not just a fight for our democracy – but also for our access to public goods overall. Things like broadband, that are desperately needed today."

On Monday, January 18, 2021, the Coalition will share with legislators other specific bills it expects the General Assembly to pass to ensure that Virginia is more healthy, safe and equitable for all of its residents.

The full video of the event can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/Bc9IPIEH08>

About the Virginia Grassroots Coalition

The Virginia Grassroots Coalition, formed in April 2017, is made up of more than 50 Indivisible, Swing Left, Huddle, Our Revolution, and other groups. Coalition members have been involved in Virginia elections for the past four years. Collectively, we developed a progressive legislative agenda for 2021. On Nov. 24, 2020, the Coalition sent a letter to legislators listing its top legislative priorities, found here: <https://www.viriniagrassroots.org/> We will follow up with a second letter on Monday, Jan. 18, 2021, highlighting these and other specific bills we urge lawmakers to pass.