

Northern Virginia Business Community

January 11, 2017

Dear Members of the Virginia General Assembly:

On behalf of the business organizations listed on this letter, we urge your strong support for protection of the following budget priorities that were included in the budget that was passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor in 2016.

GO Virginia Grant and Research Funding. The GO Virginia initiative earned overwhelming, broad-based, bipartisan support during the 2016 General Assembly session from legislators and the business community thanks to its innovative model for regional collaboration focused on economic growth. As our region is making significant progress in bringing business, government and education stakeholders together to implement GO Virginia and create more higher paying jobs, we were very disappointed to learn of the Governor's request to significantly reduce the GO Virginia regional grant and research funds in his budget proposal. While we understand there is a budget shortfall that needs to be addressed, we believe that ***cutting GO Virginia funding is particularly shortsighted given that growing our economy and creating more high-paying jobs in each region across the Commonwealth is the best way to prevent future budget shortfalls.*** For that reason, we strongly urge your support for maintaining the full \$35.5 million in funding for GO Virginia.

Workforce Credentials Program Funding. Workforce development is a top priority for the Northern Virginia business community. Last session, we were pleased to support passage of Virginia's first statewide program to provide non-credit workforce training for industry certifications and occupational licenses. This program is focused on preparing future and current job seekers with workforce credentials to access the more than 175,000 available jobs in Virginia that require a credential beyond the high school diploma, but not a college degree. ***At just over 180 days into FY17, more than 2,200 Virginians had enrolled in a credential training program leading to a high-demand occupation, and of those, 1,000 have already completed training and many have earned their industry credentials.*** This is helping to ensure that Virginia, like neighboring states competing with the Commonwealth for economic development projects, has the statewide structure in place to rapidly stand up and expand non-credit workforce training for in-demand credentials to fill many of the jobs that the business community is finding most challenging to fill. We strongly support maintenance of the \$4 million in funding allocated for FY17 to allow this important program to continue.

Cost of Competing Adjustment (COCA) for school support positions. As business leaders, we recognize that having a world class K-12 education system is critically important to our economic success, as well as our region's ability to attract and retain businesses. As you are aware, COCA is an additional factor that has historically been used in the state K-12 funding formula, recognizing the higher salaries required in certain high-cost areas of the Commonwealth to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and support staff. The COCA factor reflects the reality of running school systems in high cost regions where hiring and retaining employees is more expensive than in other parts of the state. ***The Commonwealth must continue to recognize the unique challenges associated with finding and retaining top talent in high cost regions to support those school systems and the children they educate.*** For this reason, we strongly support retaining the 25 percent increase in Standards of Quality

(SOQ) payments for support positions in the second year of the COCA rates paid to school divisions in Planning District Eight.

Salary Increase for Teachers and Instructional Staff. The Northern Virginia business community is committed to working with the Commonwealth and our local school divisions to attract and retain the highest quality teachers to educate the Commonwealth's future workforce. It is critical that there be adequate state funding to enable competitive and innovative compensation and benefits. For this reason, we strongly urge your support in preserving the two percent salary increase for teachers and other instructional personnel that was approved during the 2016 budget process.

Thank you for your leadership and for your consideration of our thoughts on these critical business community priorities.

Sincerely,

Northern Virginia Chamber Partnership:
Dulles Regional Chamber of Commerce
Greater Reston Chamber of Commerce
Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce
Mount Vernon Lee Chamber of Commerce

Arlington Chamber of Commerce

Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce

Prince William Chamber of Commerce