Legislative Program
2024

1. *Support the Freedom to Read.*

The freedom to read is essential to our democracy, and VLA opposes efforts to suppress in any way any Virginian's freedom to read, and with this, attempts to remove or limit access to reading materials, to censor content in schools, to label "controversial" views and materials, to distribute lists of "objectionable" books or authors, and to remove valuable materials and content from libraries.

Recent activities across Virginia have attempted to limit the freedom to read and remove titles from libraries in violation of local policies. We oppose these efforts at all levels in Virginia and will defend the freedom to read as articulated in "The Freedom to Read Statement", American Library Association, July 26, 2006.
http://www.ala.org/advocacy/intfreedom/freedomreadstatement (Accessed January 25, 2024)

2. *Strengthen State funding for public libraries to improve childhood literacy and invigorate STEAM-focused instruction in schools.*

VLA proposes that the Commonwealth strengthen State funding for public library materials and programs that target childhood literacy and STEAM instruction before and during school-age years, using traditional library materials as well as contemporary digital library materials including ebooks, audiobooks, streaming media, and electronic databases. VLA proposes the Legislature should fund the third phase of our proposed phase-in of full funding with a $2.5 million increase for FY 2025 and to continue that increase in the base for FY 2026 for a total of $5 million increased revenue over the biennium. This follows a $3.6 million increase obtained in FY 2024 last year.

FY2025 $2.5 million

Recent studies document significant improvement in childhood literacy that result from summer reading programs and strong access to print and digital materials provided by public libraries. Data from Virginia public libraries also show strong demand for and use of print and digital materials that extend STEAM learning outside the classroom and support STEAM-focused curricula. This funding will help Virginia's public libraries provide the 21st century library materials needed by school programs focused on foundational literacy and STEAM education throughout Virginia.

This funding also would represent a modest step forward in restoring the viability and vitality of the State Aid program, which the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) found in 2001 to be an effective investment that leverages local spending and achieves cost efficiencies and economies of scale. Since last achieving full-funding in 2001, State Aid to Public Libraries was deeply cut over the next ten years, declining by over $5 million in constant dollars to a level last seen in FY 1999. State Aid remained essentially flat for the next decade, continuing to remain at least $11 million short of full-funding through FY 2020. With the increases we have achieved over the last four fiscal years, State Aid now falls about $4.1 million short of full-funding and represents 85 percent of the $28.22 million in funds required under the formula funding program established under state law.

3. *Support the Library of Virginia.*

In addition to supporting increased funding for local public libraries, VLA also supports the Library of Virginia' legislative and budgetary priorities and proposes that the General Assembly continue to strengthen its financial foundation.