***2019 Virginia State Budget Highlights***

First and foremost, the General Assembly balanced the budget as our constitution requires without raising taxes, unwinding over $1 billion in new spending proposed by Governor Northam and the Democrats. The budget includes **no tax or fee increases** and includes a 3% pay raise for state employees. Our state employees are the backbone of Virginia government and often go without recognition.

**Public Education:** The budget includes funding for a **5% teacher pay raise** and $85.7 million in new funding for K-12 education. The budget also makes targeted investments of $24.9 million in our “at risk” programs; every student deserves a fair shot at an education regardless of their zip code. Finally, the budget returns 45% of the lottery money to local schools with “no strings attached”!

**School/Public Safety:** School safety was a major priority for the General Assembly this year and our budget reflects that, **expanding from $6 million to $12 million in funding for school resource officers, infrastructure, and other initiatives designed to keep our students safe in school.** The budget also increases the school division grant award cap amount for School Security Equipment grants from $100,000 to $250,000 each year. The budget also adds an additional $12 million for elementary, middle and high school counselors in 2020. The budget provides $2.5 million to extend jail mental health pilot and requires the Department of Criminal Justice Services to evaluate the resources required for jails to meet behavioral health standards established by the Board of Corrections.

**Veterans:** The budget adds $250,000 in FY2020 for additional benefits services positions.

**Health Care:** The budget also includes $120 million in healthcare savings in the budget as a result of lower than expected Medicaid costs and updated forecasting language and provides the necessary funding for an additional **1,695 ID/DD Medicaid** waiver slots. The budget includes $31.8 million for behavioral health services and includes longstanding, (the Hyde amendment), language that prohibits taxpayer funding of abortions.

**Higher Education:** In the higher education field, the budget takes a huge step on higher education affordability. We included $57 million to freeze tuition at our colleges and universities, and increased funding for financial aid by $16 million. Virginia has the nation’s best higher education system, but we must continually strive to ensure that it is affordable and accessible.

**Environment:** The State Budget made a major investment in the Water Quality Improvement Fund bringing total funding for non-point sources to $41 million in 2019 and $86.4 million in 2020. The total of $127.4 million is 67% higher than any previous commitment.

**The State Budget also saves for a Rainy Day.**  While the General Assembly made significant investments in several areas, we also deposited an additional $565.5 million into the Revenue Reserve Fund and also deposits $360.4 million into the “Rainy Day Fund”. In combination, these deposits will bring our overall cash reserves to $1.45 billion. This equals approximately 6.7% of our general fund revenues and should preserve Virginia’s “AAA” Bond rating.

**Another very important budget issue this session was tax relief.**The Republican General Assembly passed, and the governor has now signed, a $1 billion tax relief package, the most significant tax relief plan in at least 15 years and the second largest tax cut in Virginia history.  **The tax relief plan prevents a nearly $1 billion tax increase proposed by the governor, and gives that money back to taxpayers.**  The plan will provide $420 million in tax refunds to Virginia taxpayers later this year. This means individuals will receive up to $110 and couples will receive up to $220! The standard deduction will increase by 50 percent, providing another $173 in tax relief to a married couple, bringing the two-year tax relief total to $393 for a Virginia family. **This is meaningful tax relief.**

**I was proud to support this responsible budget! The budget makes critical investments in Virginia’s priorities such as education, healthcare, and public safety, but also provides tax relief and preserves our AAA Bond Rating by depositing surplus funds in our Revenue Reserve fund and Rainy Day Fund.**