



COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA
HOUSE OF DELEGATES
RICHMOND

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ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22314

FORTY-FIFTH DISTRICT

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
HEALTH, WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS
MILITIA, POLICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

April 5, 2019

Dear Neighbor,

Thank you once again for the privilege of serving as your State Delegate. I'm honored to represent your voice in Richmond and to present you my annual letter that I send every year after the legislative session has concluded. As usual, I have a lot to say, but whether you read every word here, or just skim the letter, please know that I'm always available to answer your questions and address your concerns. (See "**How to Contact Me**" at the end of the letter.)

This year, the Virginia General Assembly considered more than 2000 bills and passed almost 900 of them. The Governor vetoed 17 of these bills and proposed amendments on 37 of them. He also proposed an additional 40 budget amendments. We sustained his vetoes and supported most of his recommendations.

To make it as convenient as possible for you to read about what most interests you, I have organized this letter as follows:

- Controversies Involving our Statewide Leadership
- The Budget
- Other Major Legislative Successes (Taxes/Amazon/etc.)
- Partial Successes (Coal Ash/Gerrymandering)
- Not-Yet-Successes (ERA, LGBT Equality, Gun Safety)
- My Bills
- Defense: My Work as Deputy Whip of the Democratic Caucus
- My Extra-Legislative Initiatives (Transparency, Renaming Jefferson Davis)
- Constituent Services
- Elections

Controversies Involving our Statewide Leadership

A summary of what happened this past session would not be complete without mentioning that all three statewide elected officials and the Senate Majority Leader became the center of controversies that underscore just how far Virginia has to go in remedying the racism and sexism that pervades our institutions and culture.

In each case, when controversy broke, I did my best to gather the facts and act in a way that represented the values of my constituents. As a result, I joined my Democratic colleagues

in calling for the resignation of Governor Ralph Northam and Lieutenant Governor Justin Fairfax. I did not call on Attorney General Mark Herring to resign. (My reasons were detailed in my weekly newsletters that you can find archived at **MarkforDelegate.com**.) When our leaders did not heed our call to resign, there was not much more we could do, as I do not believe we have authority under the Virginia Constitution to impeach and remove from office either of them. Whatever I think about their conduct, I will always stand by my oath to uphold the Virginia Constitution and the Constitution of the United States. While the Governor and Lieutenant Governor serve in office, I intend to continue working with both of them to improve the lives of the people I serve in Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax.

I believe there are two ways in which my response to these controversies was different from other members of the state legislature. First, I believe I am the only state legislator who has called on Senate Majority Leader Tommy Norment to resign after it was discovered that he, as managing editor of his college yearbook, authorized the publishing therein of numerous derogatory and virulently racist, antisemitic, and anti-Asian pictures, quotes, and comments, including blackface and the N-word. From what I understand, Norment's conduct long ago appears to have been significantly more involved and egregious than Northam's. I mean no ill will to either man, and, as with Northam, I will continue to work with Norment as is necessary to help our constituents. But I strongly believe we should not hold elected leaders to different standards based solely on their party affiliation.

The second way I responded that was distinct from my colleagues is that I hosted a public listening session in the immediate aftermath of the scandals breaking. I wanted to hear from you -- the good people I represent -- and just as importantly, I wanted each of you to hear from one another. We should never shy away from tough conversations about the systemic racism and sexism that have long infected the life of every Virginian and every American. I know how many of you welcomed the discussion: on only 48 hours' notice, more than 150 of you joined me at Third Baptist Church -- a historically black church that's served our community in Alexandria for more than 150 years -- for a respectful and frank discussion about how best to move forward for the good of the Commonwealth. It was so good just to hear the differing perspectives from the diverse folks assembled, and I think most who attended were pleasantly surprised by the minimal argument and maximum empathy exhibited that evening, as well as by who held which individual view. I will never forget what all of you collectively taught me that night, and I hope it served as a welcome reminder to all of us of the need to re-dedicate ourselves to a common resolve for truth, reconciliation, justice, and mutual understanding.

The Budget

I was quite pleased with the final budget, which I voted for. But that vote came only after the budget had been steadily improved through a lot of hard work. In fact, I voted against the original budget that came to the floor of the House of Delegates because it did not provide

enough education or housing dollars and because it neglected to include funding for Alexandria's combined sewer overhaul, a core priority for the City.

I admit I took a risk in order to greatly improve the budget. Every year, we pass a bill conforming the Virginia tax code to the federal tax code. This allows Virginians to easily fill out their state tax returns based on their federal tax returns. The “tax conformity” bill is usually one of the first bills we pass, so that it can go into effect well before the April 15/May 1 deadline to file taxes. Because its effective date is earlier than July 1 (when most new laws go into effect), such a bill requires 80 votes to pass.

In most years, the tax conformity bill is non-controversial. But this year, the Republicans wanted to use this legislation to double down on the Trump tax scheme. That is, they wanted to give a bigger tax cut to millionaires and billionaires that profited from the Trump plan while at the same time requiring too many middle-class and poor Virginians to pay *more* total tax. This led to some non-traditional resistance to the tax conformity bill, and the sixteen members of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus (VLBC) announced their opposition to it. Doing a little math, I knew that if as few as five more of us (including me) joined their cause, we could defeat the tax conformity bill in its first iteration and hold out for a much better deal on not just taxes but ***on the budget, too.***

It was a big risk. None of us really wanted to defeat tax conformity and have millions of angry Virginians descend upon us because of their inability to complete their taxes in time. It was a legislative game of chicken. But I knew for every bill, we get two bites at the apple, because every bill can be reconsidered one (and only one) time. I reckoned that if we defeated the tax conformity bill in round one, we would then have the leverage we needed to improve both that bill and get a better budget in exchange for our votes.

In addition to the VLBC and me, all we needed were three more members to block the bill from getting the 80 votes it needed to pass. I talked with some of my colleagues, and eight of us outside the VLBC ended up joining with the VLBC to defeat the bill on its first vote. This made everyone nervous. Would Republicans deny tax conformity and blame us? I didn't think they would. I felt tax conformity was too important for all of us on both sides of the aisle. Still, for several nerve-wracking hours in a long day, tough negotiations ensued.

My colleagues and I insisted on more money for affordable housing, higher teacher salaries, at-risk kids, and school counselors. And I personally pressed for the Alexandria sewer money. When changes were finally promised to us, I could then vote for the tax conformity bill in good conscience. In the second vote, 95 of us voted for it. And we got both tax conformity and a better budget for good measure. I'm glad the gamble paid off.

Budget Highlights:

- Raised public school teachers' salaries by 5% (up from the original House proposal);
- Raised state and state-supported local employees' pay by 3%;

- \$94 million for higher education ***with no tuition increases but with an increase in financial aid***;
- \$194 million for K-12;
- \$25 million for at-risk students, which would help school districts like Alexandria with high concentrations of students needing free and reduced lunch (up from the original House proposal);
- \$12 million for additional school counselors (up from the original House proposal);
- \$74 million for water quality;
- \$15 million to expand broadband access (a core cause I've long fought for);
- \$18 million over the next two years to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (substantially up from the original House proposal);
- \$104,050 to study how to reduce eviction (up from the original House proposal); and
- ***My personal favorite: \$25 million for Alexandria's combined sewer overhaul (not included in original House proposal)***¹

The best news about the budget from the reconvene session on Wednesday were the approval of two important Governor's amendments: \$4 million additional dollars going to affordable housing – a critical need, particularly in the wake of Amazon -- and language to stop the suspension of driver's licenses for Virginians with unpaid court fines and costs. The latter requires some explanation.

A Major Step Towards Decriminalizing Poverty

Virginia will reinstate driving licenses to more than 627,000 Virginians who currently have suspended licenses, not because of unsafe driving habits but because they haven't fully paid all their fines or court fees. These fines are still owed and collectible, but for too many people, losing their license meant losing their job and making it virtually impossible for them ever to earn enough money to pay back the fines and fees they owe.

While African-Americans make up roughly 20% of Virginia's population, they account for nearly half of all people whose licenses had been suspended under this policy. No doubt this is due to a greater rate of poverty among African-Americans in Virginia and the USA, itself a legacy of slavery, Jim Crow, unequal pay, and systemic racism. This budget language was an important step toward ending some of the unfair consequences of that legacy. We are not supposed to have debtors' prisons in America anymore. So folks shouldn't lose their jobs

¹ After the General Assembly voted to require Alexandria to overhaul its 19th-century sewage system two years ago, I insisted to the Governor and to House Appropriations Chair Chris Jones that it was only fair that Alexandria -- like Richmond and Lynchburg before us -- get our fair share of state funds for this very expensive effort. I'm pleased to say we did. But it wasn't easy!

because of inability to pay a fine. I drove home to Alexandria on Wednesday knowing we had taken a critical step forward in criminal justice reform.

Other Major Legislative Successes

Taxes

As I described above, Virginia Republicans, in a break from standard procedure, initially held up tax conformity (allowing Virginians to file their taxes and collect their refunds on time) in order to double down on the Trump Tax Scheme and funnel tax revenue from Virginia's working-class and middle-class taxpayers into the pockets of Virginia's millionaires and billionaires.

But Democrats stopped them. We insisted on a compromise measure that gives substantial tax relief to nearly 2 million Virginia taxpayers by **boosting the standard deduction by 50 percent**: from \$3,000 to \$4,500 for individuals and from \$6,000 to \$9,000 for married couples. This is the first increase since 2005 for people who choose not to itemize deductions on their state returns.

The package also allows those paying Virginia taxes to diverge from Trump's tax law by removing for state tax purposes Trump's \$10,000 federal cap on deductions for local property taxes. But we kept the cap, removed by the Trump tax law, on total deductions by wealthy Virginia taxpayers earning more than \$313,000.

This tax compromise took weeks to reach. And once it did, as noted above, I joined with about half the Democratic Caucus in delaying final passage of the tax conformity bill a few hours longer in order to insist on a better budget, which we happily achieved.

Amazon HQ2

The legislature passed the pay-for-performance incentives package to codify the administration's agreement with Amazon to bring their HQ2 to the Arlington/Alexandria area. I supported this bill for reasons I have laid out in detail in my email newsletters. Check out the summary in my March 21 newsletter at **MarkforDelegate.com**.²

Although I voted for the bill, I continued to press Amazon to do the right thing for our communities. For example, I was the only state legislator to attend the Arlington County Board's public hearing on the project. While there (and in the days leading up to the meeting), I spoke to Amazon and made clear that I would withdraw my support for the deal unless Amazon agreed on the record to consent to a workforce (project labor) agreement that ensured those constructing HQ2 would be paid fair wages and benefits. Thankfully, they did so. I will continue to work with organized labor to hold Amazon accountable to their now-public promise. I also

² Don't get my newsletters? Sign up! Just enter your email address at **MarkforDelegate.com**. I never give your email away to anyone.

will continue to urge Amazon to be more transparent and communicative with the community they plan to join.

Animal Rights – We passed legislation protecting tethered animals from weather extremes and increasing punishment for severe animal cruelty (a variation on a bill I introduced).

No-Excuse Absentee Voting – Beginning in November 2020, Virginians will be able to vote without excuse two weeks prior to an election.

Raising the Age to Purchase Tobacco – from 18 to 21.

Partial Successes

Cleaning Up Coal Ash

One of our biggest achievements this year was making responsible coal ash cleanup mandatory (SB1355/HB2786). The new law requires Dominion to close its multiple toxic coal ash ponds over the next 15 years, either by removing the ash for recycling or depositing it in a lined landfill. I believe this legislation marks the first time that Virginia has adopted a policy that is more protective of the environment than the minimum standards required by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In addition to requiring the removal of more than 28 million tons of coal ash currently stored in four locations, the legislation requires Dominion to recycle approximately 25% of the total coal ash. Many of us pressed for 75% of it to be recycled, but the bill is still a huge step in the right direction. Coal ash that isn't recycled would be moved to EPA-certified landfills or into modern pits at the site of power plants, lined to prevent contamination. (Again, not perfect, but much better than before.)

The deal does allow Dominion to recover from ratepayers the full cost of the project, estimated at \$2.4 billion to \$5.7 billion, including financing costs and a profit. Estimates are that the project will add \$5 to the monthly bills of average households for the next 15 to 20 years.

Unfortunately, this is the only big environmental legislation we were able to pass. Republicans still refuse to act on climate change. This session, I joined the Green New Deal coalition to move Virginia towards renewable energy as quickly as possible. A Democratic majority would act more seriously and quickly on climate change.

Gerrymandering

A constitutional amendment for redistricting reform cleared its first hurdle as the General Assembly voted in favor of HJ615/SJ306. I have long argued we need an independent commission deciding our legislative boundaries. District boundaries should reflect the political will of the People of Virginia. I think the voters of Virginia should pick their elected state representatives. Not the other way around.

Many people celebrated this “success.” But I always believe the devil is in the details. And while I supported the original measure, I did not like the Republican amendments. I still voted in favor of the flawed measure this session, because it must be passed by the General Assembly in two successive sessions and pass a referendum by the people of Virginia to become part of the state’s Constitution. But I am not ruling out voting against it next year, for reasons I’ll explain below. The measure does some good things:

- It establishes a redistricting commission of legislators and citizens and requires a supermajority of each group to approve the district map;
- It requires public hearings and full transparency of all meetings, minutes and data;
- It provides that the General Assembly can only do an up-or-down vote on the district maps. The General Assembly cannot offer any amendments to the maps.

So far so good. And if the Commission comes up with maps supported by a supermajority, I'd be fine with those maps. But the plan has some serious flaws:

- It doesn’t explicitly ban gerrymandering;
- It excludes the Governor from the approval process;
- And most importantly, **it requires the Virginia Supreme Court to step in and draw the maps** if the Commission does not reach agreement or if the General Assembly rejects the Commission’s agreement.

This is emphatically not the "independent commission" I wanted to see. The Governor, who is excluded from the process, *is* elected by the People of Virginia. But the members of the Virginia Supreme Court, which can step in and draw the lines if Republicans refuse to compromise, are *not* elected by the people. Every current member of the Supreme Court was chosen by the Republican majority. (In fact, this year, a Republican Senator even helped install his sister on the Virginia Supreme Court.) That’s because the party that lost the Virginia elections – recall that 55% of Virginians pulled the lever for Democratic legislators in 2017 and only 45% for Republicans -- nevertheless currently controls the General Assembly solely due to their 2011 racial gerrymander that’s been declared illegal by the United States Supreme Court.

We could end up in a situation where, even if voters choose Democrats to represent them in the Legislature and the Governor's office in 2019, the 2021 lines would still be drawn by partisan Republicans on the Virginia Supreme Court. To give you an idea of how **unrepresentative** that court is, **none** of the seven justices on the Virginia Supreme Court (or the eleven jurists on the Virginia Court of Appeals) hale from Northern Virginia, despite the fact that the population of Fairfax, Arlington, Alexandria, and Loudoun comprises one quarter of Virginia and half its economy. And thus, a group of judges chosen by a legislative body in power due to an illegal racial gerrymander in 2011 could continue defying the will of Virginia voters until 2031. If this happened, it would actually be a step backward on gerrymandering.

I remain open-minded on this proposed amendment, which is why I voted for it in round one. But absent a dramatic change in the Virginia Supreme Court, I just don't see how we can trust it to be a fair arbiter in this process, unless we give it much clearer criteria on how to draw the lines fairly. I'm hopeful we can do this through future legislation, but I remain skeptical.

Over the next year, I will be very deliberate in reviewing the proposal through the lens of "one person, one vote." **It is essential to me that Virginia redistricting lines reflect the Virginia polity.** And if that cannot be done under this proposed Constitutional Amendment, I will vote against it in 2020.

Not-Yet-Successes

I like to say that a good idea never fails. It just hasn't succeeded *yet*. We unfortunately had many not-yet-successes this year. I don't believe we will ever reach success on the issues described below unless and until Democrats take the majority in the Virginia House and Senate.

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)

We did not ratify the ERA this year. Republican House leadership blocked its passage despite 81% of Virginians supporting its ratification. The House Democratic Caucus employed creative procedural measures to bring it to the floor for a vote, but as I expected, just enough Republicans who had signed on as co-patrons of the measure backed away from their loudly proclaimed support at the last minute to ensure its failure.

Rainbow (LGBT) Rights

My comprehensive Rainbow-Rights legislation (see below), like other Rainbow-Rights bills, was denied even a committee vote by the Republican House majority. Some advocates said it would have passed if a vote had been allowed, but I don't believe that for a second. In fact, to prove that the claims by some Republican delegates to support equality for the Rainbow community were untrue, I attached a very modest LGBT-rights state employment non-discrimination amendment to the budget to force a floor vote on it. And lo and behold, even the Republican who had been praised by some gay-rights groups for introducing her own gay-rights bill (which, like all the other Rainbow-rights bills, never even received a hearing in the House) suddenly flip-flopped and voted to support discrimination.

Neither the ERA vote nor the LGBT vote surprised me. Virginia Republicans who proclaim to be against discrimination consistently vote *for* discrimination when their votes would otherwise make a difference in the outcome. Republicans in swing districts must feel a political need to loudly proclaim their support for equality. But by forcing votes on the issue, we made them show the true colors of their empty promises.

Gun-Violence Prevention

Just like every other year, Democrats proposed numerous pieces of sensible legislation to curtail the epidemic of gun violence in our state and our nation. And just like every other year, Republicans blocked our measures and instead voted to make it *easier* for dangerous, disturbed, and violent people to get their hands on mass-killing machines. A Democratic majority would easily pass reasonable gun-violence prevention measures that the vast majority of Virginians support. Indeed, this is one of the committees or subcommittees I would seek to lead if Democrats take control this November.

My Bills

I introduced 15 bills this year (the maximum allowed during the short session), one constitutional amendment, and two budget amendments. They are summarized below:

Increasing Transparency in Health Care:

- Requiring health-care facilities to monitor and report information regarding infections received in health-care settings to the Virginia Department of Health (HB2425)
(This bill passed and is now law)
- Requiring pharmacies and physicians to disclose the cost of a medication *prior* to dispensing it, to increase competition and allow consumers to make the most price-conscious choice (HB2426)
- Requiring health-care providers to disclose the cost of non-emergency medical services *prior* to performing those services, to allow consumers to save money and avoid unwelcome surprises (such as when their insurance doesn't cover a service consumers thought it did) (HB2427)

Increasing Transparency in Criminal Justice:

- Mandating the adoption and establishment of written policies for the operation of body-worn camera systems by police departments (HB2424)

Banning Discrimination:

- Comprehensive legislation to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, banking, insurance, apprenticeships, and every other place I could find in the Code of Virginia (HB2421)
- Budget amendment to ban LGBT discrimination in Virginia state employment
- A bill to ensure the cost of cleaning women's clothes would not cost more than the cost of cleaning men's clothes (or vice versa), unless a particular article of clothing legitimately cost more for the establishment to clean (HB2423)

Protecting Vulnerable People and Animals:

- Allowing courts to consider domestic violence and child abuse in determining the best interests of children in custody disputes (HB2650 — Tyler's Law)
- Allowing people deemed mentally incapacitated (for example, Alzheimer's patients) to have visits from family members and other loved ones, unless good cause is shown to prevent these visits (HB2430)
- Making it a felony to use cruelty toward animals to threaten, intimidate, or terrorize a household or family member (HB2642)

Improving Access to Protective Orders

- Permitting courts to utilize two-way electronic video and audio communication system that would enable victims to appear before the court if they are unable to be physically present in the courtroom (*e.g.*, if they are hospitalized) (HB2428)
- Allowing courts to consolidate protective-order hearings with a defendant's related criminal offense (HB2429)
- Allowing court victims-services to provide services to those seeking a protective order and other victims of domestic violence and similar misdemeanor crimes (HB2695)
(This bill will be sent to a commission for further study.)

Strengthening Our Democracy

- Changing our national system of electing the President of the United States from the Electoral College to the National Popular Vote (HB2422)
- Introducing a constitutional amendment to permit the Governor of Virginia to be re-elected and to serve two consecutive terms (HJ672)
- Protecting election recounts from partisan manipulation by clarifying that in recount procedures, no candidate from either party should be able to game the system and unseal previously sealed boxes during a recount to "find" more votes (HB2757)

Raising the Minimum Wage

- Allowing localities to set their own minimum wage (HB2631)

Increasing Transparency in the General Assembly (Budget Amendment)

- A budget amendment to pay for the cost of live-streaming and archiving legislative subcommittee hearings

You can find a complete list of my bills and amendments at **MarkforDelegate.com**, along with video of my shepherding each bill through subcommittee, committee, and/or the House Floor and a detailed accounting of what happened to each bill or amendment.

Defense: My Work as Deputy Whip of the Democratic Caucus

In legislating, as important as it is to write and advocate for important new laws, it is equally vital — if far less glamorous — to carefully examine legislation to find concealed flaws, bring those flaws to light, and ultimately block bills that would harm the people of Virginia. In my four years of service here, I have often played the informal role of "Caucus Goalie" -- defending the people of Virginia from bad laws. This year, I was recognized by the Caucus for my successful defensive role in my appointment as **Deputy Whip**.

I am happy to say that this was my most successful year ever in stopping bad bills from becoming law. As I serve in the minority, playing defense successfully often doesn't mean killing legislation right on the spot but rather raising enough questions or concerns about a bill that it convinces the Governor to veto or amend bad bills. The Governor vetoed or amended 18 bills at my request, including several I spoke against on the floor, such as a bill to expedite concealed carry permits for non-Virginians and another forcing local police to help Immigration and Customs Enforcement deport our neighbors.

In my role as Caucus Goalie, my staff and I devoted long hours to poring over bills on the "uncontested calendar" just before they went to the floor for a vote of all 100 delegates in the House. Bills get on the uncontested calendar when no one votes against them or abstains in committee. In other words, these bills had only gotten yes votes and were speeding their way to becoming law unanimously, with no roadblocks in front of them until I got involved. On our busiest day, there were more than 100 bills on the uncontested calendar.

Most of the time, these bills are solid and uncontroversial. (That's why no one votes against them in committee.) But every now and then, you find a terrible bill that, in the rush of getting business done, escaped scrutiny.

That's where I come in. It's my job, as I see it, to catch the bad bills and put up any necessary roadblocks. This year, I believe I moved more bills from the uncontested to the regular (contested) calendar than any other delegate in the House.

I know I stopped at least seven bills from being passed unanimously. At least two bills I removed from the uncontested calendar in the House died in the Senate: HB1947 (mandatory minimums for even young children convicted of making a school threat) and HB2127 (a badly written child-custody bill). I helped kill a third bill in committee: HB2043 (a bill that made it easier for bad child-care providers to escape background checks). I pulled four other bills from the uncontested calendar just before the floor vote and then successfully lobbied the Governor and my colleagues to defeat them:

- SB1782, which would have permanently banned people with certain felony convictions from serving as a public notary, even after their rights were restored;
- SB1150, which would have limited the authority of our magistrates to arrest police officers;

- SB1592, which would have expanded the state's already way-too-broad definition of "small business" so as to crowd out legitimate small businesses from getting the aid they need; and
- SB1581/HB2234, which would have prevented foster parents who were state employees from having access to paid family medical leave (PFML). I'm proud to say that on this bill, after I flagged it, the House of Delegates switched from a unanimous vote against foster parent PFML to unanimous support *for* foster parent PFML.

Extra-Legislative Initiatives

Try the front door first to get home. But if you misplace your keys, look for an open window.

When I can't get a measure to become law directly through the legislative process (which is difficult when you're in the minority), I often look to see if I can find other creative ways to make something happen. For example, one of my first extra-legislative accomplishments, when I could not get budget money for round-the-clock forensic and medical care for survivors of sexual and domestic violence in Northern Virginia, was to work with my colleagues in state and local government to obtain a federal grant to do this.

Legislative Transparency

Probably my most successful extra-legislative initiative has been my work as Co-Founder of the Virginia Transparency Caucus with Republican Senator Amanda Chase. Since my second day in office, she and I have worked together to make sure that every legislative session of the House and Senate and every committee hearing is live-streamed and archived (and captioned for the deaf and hard of hearing). We also caused every dispositive vote taken in committee or subcommittee to be recorded. We accomplished this without legislation. When proposed legislation failed on these basic transparency measures, we circumvented the legislative process by submitting a letter from the entire General Assembly to the Senate and House Clerks that was signed by 60% of legislators in 2017.

This year, after my budget amendment to fund livestreaming and archiving of subcommittees was rejected, we circulated a letter that was signed by ***more than two-thirds of the House and more than two-thirds of the Senate*** – a bipartisan majority so large it could overturn a Governor's veto! – that urged the clerks of the House and Senate to livestream and archive subcommittees. More than half of House bills die in subcommittee. (Subcommittees are much rarer in the Senate.) And we believe our constituents, not just the lobbyists paid to be in the room, have a right to know what happened to legislation they care about.

Renaming Jefferson Davis Highway

In Arlington County, one of the most diverse and progressive localities in the nation, we are saddled with a primary highway that honors a racist traitor and slaveowner from Mississippi who led the fight to take up arms against our nation in order to preserve the brutal system of

slavery. Why? Because in 1922, at the heart of the Jim Crow Era, the Virginia General Assembly responded to a request by the United Daughters of the Confederacy to build a Southern transcontinental highway "in honor of the only President of the Confederates [sic] States of America."

Like most of my constituents, I have long been offended by seeing this man honored in this way. Alexandria, to its credit, changed the name just last year, but the Arlington County Board believed it had no legal power to do so without legislative approval. They based their opinion on an informal, unofficial letter written by a member of the Attorney General's office years ago. The Arlington Board even asked its delegation to ask the General Assembly to change the name for two years, but the Republicans who control our legislature refused.

This is where I stepped in.

I studied the legal reasoning of the unofficial opinion carefully, did some legal research, and determined the opinion to be incomplete and therefore wrongfully drafted. I then contacted the Attorney General, explained my reasoning, and requested from him a new *formal* legal opinion on the issue. To my delight, Mark Herring agreed with my legal analysis and issued the formal opinion I had requested: he clarified that the Arlington County Board *does* indeed have the legal authority to change the highway name without legislative approval. Arlington can change the name by going through the Commonwealth Transportation Board, whose members are appointed by the Governor.

If all goes well, Arlington street signs could be changed as early as this summer.

Constituent Services

Whoever says being a Virginia Delegate is a part-time job does not see the dozens of emails we get every single day. Many of these emails request constituent services, such as helping someone resolve a problem with the Department of Motor Vehicles, get a disability check, or even appeal to reduce an unfair healthcare bill.

I've done such diverse things as help negotiate contracts for the Alexandria Symphony and the Alexandria Harmonizers, help obtain aid from Fairfax local government when constituents living in a condominium sustained damage due to lack of maintenance on a collapsed foundational column of the building, and made the Virginia Department of Transportation return tens of thousands of dollars in misallocated funds to the coffers of Alexandria and Arlington local governments relating to a proposed Four Mile Run Bridge.

I've fought for Fairlington constituents concerned about a chemical plume beneath their homes caused by a dry-cleaning establishment in the general area decades ago, and I've helped celebrate several historical markers for centuries-old African American churches. I've fought for labor rights for school custodians and bus drivers in Alexandria and for Amazon workers in Arlington. And that's just a little of what I've done and continue to do.

I also spend a lot of time writing really long newsletters. (Can you tell?) I believe that my constituents deserve this level of detail (and know how to skim when they want to). And if you don't get my email newsletters, you should sign up for them at **MarkforDelegate.com**.

How to Contact Me

If you ever need help with a State Agency or want to express your support for or opposition to a bill, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Email me at **DelMLevine@house.virginia.gov** or contact my Alexandria office at (571) 234-8481.

You can also send a letter to Delegate Mark Levine, 301 King Street, Alexandria, VA 22314, but sending a written letter is not recommended if you require a quick response.

There's also an easy way to do all of this informally and to discuss your ideas personally with me. Every month, typically on the last Sunday of the month, I host **Mark's Monthly Meet-Ups**, at the Los Tios restaurant in Del Ray (Alexandria), 2615 Mt. Vernon Avenue, from 2 to 4 pm. You can get the exact scheduled dates and times at **MarkforDelegate.com**. You don't have to have a particular concern. Feel free to just join us. Come, eat, chat with me, and hang out with your neighbors.

Elections

I will be running for re-election on November 5, 2019. I do have a Republican opponent this year. Please remember to vote. In Virginia, we have elections every single year.

As always, it is my honor and privilege to serve you.

Sincerely,



Delegate Mark Levine
Serving Alexandria, Arlington, and Fairfax