In August of last year, the senior Environmental Studies majors at the University of Richmond began working on an intensive yearlong study of invasive species. The students completed a broad-based study of invasives from global to local levels. Compelled by the harmful affects of invasives such as zebra mussels, the snakehead fish, Hydrilla, West Nile virus, tree-killing pests, and many others, the students used their knowledge and insight acquired from their research, fieldwork, and interactions with invasive species experts to act locally on the issue.

After discussing a number of perspective ideas regarding how they could best apply their knowledge, the students decided to focus on House Bill 2436, which mandates the creation of an Invasive Species Council in Virginia. The Invasive Species Council will be made up of 9 state agency heads and will accompany an Advisory Committee that will draft a management plan. With Delegate James Dillard (Republican, Fairfax) signing on as the bill’s sponsor, the students set out to get the legislation through the State Assembly.

Since returning to school in January, the students educated themselves with regards to Virginia politics in order to productively lobby for the bill. Their efforts included writing opinion editorials for state newspapers, presenting the bill to the Virginia Conservation Network, and building a website for public education. Most of their time was spent at the General Assembly building with senators and delegates, educating them on the details of the bill and lobbying for their support. Also, the students were presenters at both House and Senate Committee meetings regarding the bill.

Presently House Bill 2436 has unanimously passed the Virginia House and Senate and has been approved and signed by Governor Warner.