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Benjamin Raab
Mariam Rasooli

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THE WAY FORWARD: A REVIEW OF VIRGINIA’S 2023 REGULAR GENERAL ASSEMBLY SESSION

Benjamin Raab* & Mariam Rasooli**

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* Benjamin Raab is a third-year law student at the University of Richmond School of Law. Mr. Raab plans on pursuing a career in policy and government law upon graduation. As a student, Mr. Raab serves as the General Assembly co-editor on the Public Interest Law Review and is a member of the Phi Alpha Delta law fraternity. Mr. Raab has interned in multiple legislative offices at both the federal and state levels, as well as with the Surface Transportation Board.

** Mariam Rasooli is a third-year law student at the University of Richmond School of Law. Ms. Rasooli’s career has centered around public interest, through her legal work with the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Solicitor General; and the Prince William County Commonwealth’s Attorney’s Office. As a student, she serves as the General Assembly co-editor of the Public Interest Law Review, and the Vice President of the Public Interest Law Association. Ms. Rasooli previously explored policy and legislation through internships with the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House of Representatives.
The 2023 General Assembly Session can best be defined by the success of bipartisanship. In an era of heightened polarization, Virginia legislators were able to meet across the aisle on a number of relevant issues. This article will provide a summary of key bills that were passed during the 2023 Regular and Special Sessions. The other articles within this issue touch upon the following topics: the Virginia Commission on School Construction and Modernization, family law, and the opioid and addiction crises. This article summarizes legislation passed with bipartisan support in the areas of: drugs, mental healthcare, labor and commerce, public schools, criminal justice, child welfare, animal welfare, transportation, insurance, and elections.

INTRODUCTION

The 2023 General Assembly was the second consecutive legislative session in which Virginia was governed by a split government. With a shortened, thirty-day session beginning in January, it would not be easy to pass new legislation. Nevertheless, the General Assembly came together to pass more than 1,600 bills. This article will explore some of the legislation that passed with bipartisan support in the following areas: drugs, mental healthcare, labor and commerce, public schools, criminal justice, child welfare, animal welfare, transportation, insurance, and elections.

I. DRUGS

A. Fighting Fentanyl

In an effort to combat the devastating effects of the state’s growing fentanyl crisis, Virginia lawmakers passed S.B. 1415. Fentanyl is a powerful synthetic opioid that is 50 to 100 times more potent than morphine. Historically used for late-stage cancer treatment, the intense effects of the

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drug have made it popular for illicit use. Although it can be bought and used illegally on its own, the highest risk posed by fentanyl is its use as an additive to other drugs, such as heroin and cocaine. Due to its relatively low cost, some drug dealers attempt to increase their profits by mixing fentanyl into more expensive drugs, and then selling it to unsuspecting customers. Fentanyl is virtually indistinguishable from other drugs when in powder form, therefore buyers have no way to know of its presence before it is ingested. Overdose is most likely to occur when users unknowingly ingest high levels of the drug. A national study conducted in 2022 by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration found that six out of ten fentanyl-laced, fake prescription pills contained a potentially lethal dose of fentanyl. The drug is lethal in very small doses—two milligrams to be exact. By comparison, standard sugar packets found on restaurant tabletops generally contain 1,000 milligrams per packet.

According to a public awareness campaign led by Virginia’s Office of the Attorney General, drug overdoses have been the leading cause of unnatural death in the state since 2013. Of those overdose deaths, fentanyl contributed to 76.4% of them. Given how easy one could fatally overdose on fentanyl—in some cases where the user does not even know of its presence—legislators knew something had to be done. S.B. 1415 removes restrictions related to naloxone and other opioid antagonists, which are used to rapidly reverse narcotic overdoses in emergency situations. The legislation allows any person to possess and administer naloxone with a hypodermic needle or syringe, in accordance with protocols developed by the Virginia Board of Pharmacy. This is a big shift from the current law, which only allows employees or others acting on behalf of a public place, who had completed a

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6 See e.g., Delia Dima et al., The Use Of Rotation To Fentanyl In Cancer-Related Pain, 10 J. PAIN Rsch. 341, 341 (2017).
7 Fentanyl DrugFacts, supra note 5.
8 Id.
10 Id.
12 Opioid Facts, supra note 9.
13 Id.
15 Id.
18 Id.
training program, to possess or administer naloxone.\textsuperscript{19} Additionally, S.B. 1415 directs the Department of Health, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, and the Department of Corrections to collaborate in developing a statewide plan to distribute naloxone throughout Virginia.\textsuperscript{20} Lastly, the bill requires the Department of Corrections to train every inmate on how to administer naloxone upon their release.\textsuperscript{21}

\textit{B. Restrictions on Advertising Marijuana}

Despite support from the former administration to loosen restrictions, the sale of marijuana for recreational use remains illegal in Virginia, and the current administration has no intention of peeling back restrictions.\textsuperscript{22} Marijuana can only be sold legally through pharmaceutical processors or cannabis dispensing facilities.\textsuperscript{23} The General Assembly imposed stricter regulations on the sale of marijuana for legal use during the past session, passing H.B. 2428, and the corresponding bill, S.B. 1233.\textsuperscript{24} Under these bills, it is a Class 1 misdemeanor to advertise marijuana, its products, and any substance containing tetrahydrocannabinol (“THC”) for recreational use.\textsuperscript{25} Pursuant to this new legislation, advertisements related to sales for legal marijuana use must: (1) identify the person responsible for its content, (2) include the statement, “for use by adults 21 years of age and older,” and (3) verify that the advertisement’s recipient is at least 21 years old if it involves direct communication or dialogue.\textsuperscript{26} The bills prohibit advertisements from: (1) being broadcasted through any medium unless at least 71.6\% of the audience is at least 21 years old; (2) being misleading; (3) targeting persons under 21 years old; (4) implying the products enhance athletic abilities or are government endorsed; (5) being displayed on a billboard; (6) making reference to intoxicating effects; and (7) promoting overconsumption and depicting the consumption of the products.\textsuperscript{27} The legislation also establishes numerous distance and zoning restrictions on outdoor advertisements, the violation of which qualifies as a Class 4 misdemeanor.\textsuperscript{28} These restrictions

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{19} Id.
\textsuperscript{20} Id.
\textsuperscript{21} Id.
\textsuperscript{23} See VA. CODE § 54.1-3442.5 (2023).
\textsuperscript{25} See Id.
\textsuperscript{26} Id.
\textsuperscript{27} Id.
\textsuperscript{28} Id.
\end{flushleft}
include the placement of advertisements near schools, playgrounds, and places of worship.\textsuperscript{29}

II. MENTAL HEALTHCARE

A. Support for Gambling Addiction

Growing incidents of Virginians struggling with gambling addiction was the issue at the heart of S.B. 836 and corresponding H.B. 1465.\textsuperscript{30} This legislation establishes the Problem Gambling Treatment and Support Advisory Committee to prevent gambling addiction by promoting collaboration among treatment providers and operators of legal gaming in Virginia.\textsuperscript{31} According to Senator Bryce Reeves, who introduced S.B. 836, Virginia has seen a rise in youth gambling rates—citing a 2021 survey that showed that “nearly a quarter of Virginia highschoolers had gambled within the past year and nearly two-thirds of Virginians aged 18-25 had gambled within the past month.”\textsuperscript{32} The rise in gambling rates has grown in tandem with the number of people seeking help for gambling addiction.\textsuperscript{33} The Virginia Problem Gambling Hotline has seen a 143% increase in calls over the last few years.\textsuperscript{34} Furthermore, with the opening of Virginia’s first casino last summer, and other casinos slated to open in 2024, gambling was a ripe issue during the 2023 session.\textsuperscript{35}

B. Mental Health Treatment for Veterans

This past session, the General Assembly also focused on veteran’s mental health. The General Assembly passed S.B. 1082 to support the treatment of veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”) and traumatic brain injuries (“TBI”).\textsuperscript{36} The bill allows the Department of Veterans Services to contract with U.S. Food and Drug Administration-approved hyperbaric

\textsuperscript{29} Id.
\textsuperscript{31} Id.
\textsuperscript{33} Id.
\textsuperscript{34} Id.
\textsuperscript{35} See generally id.
clinics in Virginia that use medical-grade oxygen to treat TBIs. The bill further permits contracting with facilities that treat PTSD and TBI through comprehensive treatment programs that may include medication, psychotherapy, and hyperbaric oxygen therapy. The bill further requires that participating hospitals and clinics collect data in order to assess the efficacy of these treatments.

III. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A. Notifying Parents of Bullying

Bullying is a common issue that many of us have seen or experienced in some way. Virginia defines bullying as “any aggressive and unwanted behavior intended to harm, intimidate, or humiliate the victim,” that involves a power imbalance that is repeated over time, or causes severe emotional trauma. Ordinary teasing, horseplay, argument, or peer conflict does not constitute bullying, although cyberbullying does. According to the Virginia Department of Education, cyberbullying is the “willful and repeated harm inflicted through the use of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices.”

The former law required school principals to notify parents within five school days of their child’s involvement in an alleged incident of bullying. S.B. 1072 and corresponding H.B. 1592 change that parental notification requirement. Under the new law, principals or their designee must notify parents within twenty-four hours of learning of such allegations. This change has received support from organizations like Parents Against Bullying Virginia, whose Founder expressed that, “[s]o much can happen in...
between the amount of 24 hours and five days. We can be proactive and hit right on it and put things into place.\footnote{Matthew Torres, \textit{Virginia Schools Now Must Notify Parents of Bullying Incidents Sooner}, WUSA9 (June 29, 2023), https://www.wusa9.com/article/news/local/virginia/new-virginia-laws-july-1-schools-to-notify-parents-of-alleged-bullying-sooner/65-5437632-2301-4bd1-ac6c-c4d756c95e2.}

\textbf{B. Greater Protections for Students}

The General Assembly added an additional barrier to hiring public school employees. H.B. 1822 prohibits public schools from employing or contracting with anyone convicted of an offense “involving sexual molestation, physical or sexual abuse, the rape of a child, or \textit{the solicitation of any such offense}.”\footnote{See generally H.B. 392, 2023 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Va. 2023).} Prior to H.B. 1822, the language regarding the “solicitation of” such offenses had been absent from the text.\footnote{See generally H.B. 392, 2023 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Va. 2023).}

\section*{IV. CRIMINAL JUSTICE}

\textbf{A. Greater Transparency for the Virginia Parole Board}

Prior to this year’s legislative session, the Virginia Parole Board was exempt from the mandatory disclosure provisions of the Virginia Freedom of Information Act.\footnote{E.g., S. 1361, 2023 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Va. 2023) (signed into law during the 2023 Reenconvened Session).} Notably, the Parole Board was not required to provide information reflecting the application of any policy, policy change, or clarification of policy to an individual inmate.\footnote{E.g., id.} For all intents and purposes, the Board operated with almost complete secrecy regarding the decision-making process used to decide whether to grant parole—leaving both inmates and victims in the dark.\footnote{See Graham Moomaw, \textit{Youngkin's Parole Board Chair Calls For 'Over-the-Top' Transparency}, VA. MERCURY (Jan. 9, 2023), https://www.virginiamercury.com/2023/01/09/youngkins-parole-board-chair-calls-for-over-the-top-transparency/.} This lack of transparency attracted criticism for years, especially because Virginia has one of the most restrictive parole policies in the nation.\footnote{See Isabela Dias, \textit{Chances for Parole Go From Bad to Worse Under Virginia's New GOP Leadership}, BOLTS (May 10, 2022), https://boltsmag.org/glenn-youngkin-virginia-parole-board/; Jorge Renaud, \textit{Grading the Parole System of All 50 States}, PRISON POL’Y INITIATIVE (Feb. 26, 2019), https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/grading_parole.html.}

Discretionary parole—available in 34 states—allows for a state’s parole board to decide to release an inmate prior to the completion of his court-
mandated sentence. Parole boards decide whether or not to grant discretionary parole based on an assessment of the inmate’s case, with the release subject to various conditions, or “rules”, given by the board. In 1995, Virginia abolished parole almost completely. Today, the only individuals that can be considered for parole include: those convicted before 1995; inmates convicted between 1995 and 2000, in trials where jurors were not informed of the abolition of discretionary parole; geriatric and terminally ill inmates; and individuals that were convicted as juveniles, sentenced to life without possibility of parole, and have served at least 20 years.

For the few inmates that are eligible for parole, S.B. 1361 and corresponding H.B. 2169 lift the curtain from the Parole Board’s decision-making process. Under the new legislation, the Board is required to open their final deliberations to the public and vote regarding whether they will grant parole to an inmate. Additionally, at the time of casting their votes, each board member must identify the reasoning for their decision. Both inmates and victims are permitted to attend; and victims are given the opportunity to participate through written or recorded testimony. Finally, the Board must conduct a live interview with the inmate during their periodic review of the inmate’s case for release on parole. These reviews typically take place at least annually once the inmate is eligible for parole. The board cannot decide to release an inmate unless a live interview has been conducted within the prior calendar year.

The legislation further directs the Board to publish more comprehensive data surrounding their decisions. The Board must publish a statement of their actions by the fifteenth of each month, and include in these statements, “individualized reasons for the granting or denial of parole and the vote of

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55 Id.
57 See id.
60 Id.
61 Id.
62 Id.
63 See id. (noting that an interview with the inmate must be conducted within the prior calendar year once the inmate is eligible for parole).
64 See id.
each member. The Board must also provide inmates and their counsel with information obtained during their investigations, with the exception of victims’ personal information. Finally, the legislation affects the eligibility requirements for the granting of parole. Going forward, the Board must consider “the prisoner’s demonstrated rehabilitation, economic and educational development, commitment to prosocial behavior, and community and family supports,” in addition to the other requirements that render someone parole eligible.

Taking effect on July 1, 2024, this piece of legislation was not passed without its difficulties. Leading up to the 2023 General Assembly, the Parole Board was at the center of a partisan battle to balance public safety with rehabilitation of offenders. In January 2023, Republican Attorney General, Jason Miyares, released an investigative report alleging that in 2020, the Parole Board—comprised of mostly Democrats—acted in a “parole-granting frenzy” by working in secret to release offenders of violent crimes on parole. Shortly after, Democrats in the state Senate blocked one of Governor Glenn Youngkin’s appointees to the Parole Board—citing data that indicated he almost always voted to deny parole. All the while, S.B. 1361 and H.B. 2169 were being considered. After going through several revisions, Democrats and Republicans were able to agree on the final version of the bill, and it was passed in the final days of the 2023 session.

B. New Duties for the Attorney General

The General Assembly also passed S.B. 1259 and corresponding H.B. 2165, introduced by Senator J. Chapman Petersen and Delegate Wren Williams, respectively. The bills require the Attorney General, upon the appellate court receiving the record after a notice to appeal was filed, to appear and represent the Commonwealth in all criminal cases before the Court of Appeals or the Supreme Court of Virginia in which the Commonwealth is a party or has a direct interest. For pretrial petition appeals, the legislation establishes that the Commonwealth’s Attorney will represent the Commonwealth. Finally, the legislation mandates that any

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65 Id.
66 See id.
67 Id.
68 Graham Moomaw, supra note 56.
70 Graham Moomaw, supra note 56.
71 E.g., id.
73 Id.
action collaterally attacking a criminal conviction will be heard in the Supreme Court of Virginia.  

V. LABOR AND COMMERCE

A. Preventing Internet Ticketing Scams

Anyone attempting to purchase tickets for a popular artist these days should understand the potential for getting scammed.  With the passage of S.B. 1249 and corresponding H.B. 1857, certain strategies used to defraud innocent concertgoers will now be prohibited under the Virginia Consumer Protection Act.  The new law prohibits online ticketing platforms and resellers from using any trademarked identifiers of an officially licensed ticket seller or primary ticket provider without their consent.  Online ticketing platforms and resellers can be less secure due to their third-party status, and consumers are being cautioned against buying from them.  Under the new law, they cannot trick consumers by using the same URL, symbols, or images as officially licensed ticket sellers or primary ticket providers—which consumers are recommended to purchase tickets from.  The law also prohibits these platforms and resellers from using or displaying text and images that are substantially similar to an operator’s website, such that they could reasonably be expected to mislead purchasers. In essence, internet ticket platforms and resellers will no longer be able to purposely make themselves appear similar enough to a website like Ticketmaster without consequences.

B. Returning to Work Under Retirement

In the past, certain public school employees have been allowed to receive their full retirement benefits even if they return to work full-time after retirement.  Previously, to be eligible for this, the retiree must have taken a
twelve month “break in service” between retirement and returning to work, during which they time they could hold no job. During the 2023 session, legislators voted to reduce the number of months required for a break in service that allows a retiree to receive their retirement allowance while employed by a local public school board. Under H.B. 1630, individuals must have a six-month break in service, rather than twelve months, between retirement and returning to work full time. Employees that are eligible to return to work under this law include teachers, bus drivers, school administrators, and school security officers.

VI. CHILD WELFARE

A. Preventing Child Abuse

In Virginia, April is designated as “Child Abuse Prevention Month.” Each year in the United States, 1,700 children die as a result of abuse or neglect. H.B. 1768, carried by Delegate Chris Head, received bipartisan support to address jurisdictional gaps in the child welfare system. Under this bill, if a local multidisciplinary team determines that a child needs an interview with a child advocacy center (“CAC”), and such interview cannot be completed in the child’s local jurisdiction within fourteen days, then the local department of social services must facilitate an interview between the child and a CAC located in another jurisdiction.

The purpose of these interviews is to obtain information when there are concerns of possible child abuse. According to the Virginia Department of Social Services, this bill codifies current best practices, as CACs are best equipped to handle these interviews. This bill received wide bipartisan support, passing the House of Delegates by a vote of 97-0-1 and the Senate unanimously. In a committee hearing, Senator Barbara Favola made a quick

83 Id.
84 Id.
85 Id.
86 Id.
88 Id.
90 Id.
remark that she “likes this bill,” at the end of Delegate Head’s testimony.94

B. Protection of Minors

S.B. 1033, pioneered by Senator Jeremy McPike, authorizes general district courts to appoint a discreet and competent guardian ad litem (“GAL”) to represent a minor who’s been subpoenaed to testify in a case before the court.95 This should only be necessary in very rare circumstances, as GALs are typically appointed when the minor herself is the subject of the case.96 The purpose of a GAL is to protect the interests of the child.97

Senator McPike pursued this legislation following an incident in Virginia’s 31st Congressional District, where a minor witnessed a non-domestic assault, and there was pressure to keep the child from testifying at all.98 The bill also provides for a GAL to be compensated from the funds for court-appointed counsel.99 Furthermore, if the matter is appealed to a circuit court, the circuit court may continue the GAL’s appointment.100 S.B. 1033 reinforces the court’s duty to protect the interests of minors even in cases where they are only tertiarily involved.101

VII. ANIMAL WELFARE

A. Quarantining Rabid Animals

H.B. 1577, authored by Delegate Otto Wachsmann, allows a local health director to access any dog or cat that is being confined by any person, when the dog or cat is suspected of having rabies.102 Moreover, the local health director can access any animal, regardless of species, that is confined and suspected of having rabies, if that animal may have been exposed to a

100 VA. CODE § 8.01-396.2 (C) (act passed in Mar. 2023).
The bill passed the House of Delegates and the Senate unanimously. Delegate Wachsmann proposed this legislation to close a loophole in the law that twice endangered citizens in his district. During two separate dog-bite incidents, the local health director had authority to order the dog be confined for a period of time, but the local health department was not authorized to observe the dog when the dog’s owner refused access to the dog. As a result, the people that sustained the dog bites had to get the rabies vaccine, which is painful and can have serious side effects.

B. Protecting Animals from Inhumane Conditions

Virginia has a storied history with animal testing facilities. In July 2022, the United States Department of Agriculture announced that 4,000 beagles needed to be rescued from a facility owned and operated by Envigo RMS in Cumberland, Virginia, due to animal welfare violations. Over 300 beagles died in the facility from unknown causes. Moreover, the facility failed to take any additional steps to investigate the deaths or prevent similar losses in the future.

Ultimately, the General Assembly acted by passing several pieces of legislation, including H.B. 2348 and S.B. 1271, which ended up being identical to each other. H.B. 2348 was introduced by Delegate Michael Webert and S.B. 1271 was introduced by Senator Jennifer Boysko. The bills require an animal testing facility to provide a link to its annual report, as submitted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture pursuant to the Animal Welfare Act, on the homepage of its website.

While both bills passed with strong bipartisan support, there was some difficulty agreeing on the exact language of the bills between the House of Delegates and the Senate. On February 23, 2023, both chambers held

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103 Id.
104 Id.
106 Id.
107 Id.
109 Id.
110 Id.
conferences to reconcile their differences. The Senate appointed Senators Boysko, McClellan, and Stanley to represent them, while the House appointed Delegates Webert, Wilt, and Shin to represent them. On February 25, 2023, the Joint Conference Committee proposed what would become the final text of the bills. The bill passed the Senate unanimously and the House of Delegates by a vote of 91-3.

VIII. TRANSPORTATION

A. Improving Public Transportation

H.B. 2338, and its companion bill, S.B. 1326, directs the Commonwealth Transportation Board to use up to 30 percent of available funds for the Transit Ridership Incentive Program, which was designed to support local, regional, and state entities in improving the access to transit bus passenger facilities. The program was also designed to prevent crime and improve public safety for transit passengers, operators, and employees. The bills also direct the Board to develop guidelines for grant applications to any local, regional, or state public entity that supports a transit system.

While the bills did pass with bipartisan support, Governor Youngkin recommended amendments be made to the bills prior to their passing. Governor Youngkin removed any reference to transitioning the current public transit bus fleets to zero-emission bus fleets. He replaced these references with language related to safety and crime prevention on public transport.
The House of Delegates and the Senate adopted his recommendations on both bills with bipartisan support. \(^{124}\)

**B. Transporting the Commonwealth**

S.B. 1106, and its companion bill, H.B. 2302, significantly impact funding for transportation projects. S.B. 1106 was introduced by Senator Stephen Newman, while H.B. 2302 was introduced by Delegate Les Adams. \(^{125}\) These bills authorize the Governor to direct funds from the Transportation Partnership Opportunity Fund to the Commonwealth Transportation Board for specific, pre-designated initiatives. \(^{126}\) These include transportation projects deemed necessary to support major economic development initiatives or to enhance the economic development opportunities recommended by the Secretary of Transportation and Secretary of Commerce and Trade. \(^{127}\)

The bills also require the Secretary of Transportation to submit a report to the Chairmen of the Senate Committee on Finance and Appropriations, and the House Committee on Appropriations, within 30 days of any transfer of funds exceeding of $5 million. \(^{128}\) If a transfer of funds exceeds $35 million, it must be submitted to the MEI Project Approval Commission for review within 14 days. \(^{129}\)

While the bills did pass with bipartisan support, there was some dispute between the House of Delegates and the Senate over the content of the bills. On February 21, 2023, the House of Delegates requested a conference to finalize the text of the legislation. \(^{130}\) The Senate agreed to the request the next day. \(^{131}\) The House of Delegates was represented by Delegates Adams, Austin, and Murphy. \(^{132}\) The Senate was represented by Senators


\(^{131}\) Id.

IX. INSURANCE

A. No More Uninsured Vehicles

The 2023 General Assembly pioneered significant changes in the law regarding motor vehicle insurance. S.B. 951, proposed by Senator Frank Ruff, repeals a longstanding Virginia law allowing drivers to forego obtaining motor vehicle insurance, and to instead pay an “uninsured motorist fee.” Virginia was one of only two states, along with New Hampshire, that did not require all drivers to obtain car insurance. Approximately 5,000 of the 7.5 million vehicles in Virginia are uninsured. According to Senator Ruff, “most uninsured drivers have limited assets to either pay for their repairs at the time of accident or assets for others to attach. Therefore, they are doing the repairs partially themselves or junking the vehicle.” While most drivers have insurance that will cover them if they are hit by an uninsured vehicle, many insurance companies will still fight over who has to pay.

Senator Ruff was surprised to see the legislation pass, especially with bipartisan support, because the law allowing drivers to pay a fee instead of obtaining insurance had been in place for decades. The bill passed the Senate 36-3 and the House of Delegates 82-16. The bill will also impact the Uninsured Motorist Fund. Historically, the uninsured motor vehicle fee

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Newman, Jeremy McPike, and Surovell. On February 25, 2023, the House of Delegates and the Senate adopted the text proposed by the conference.

137  Nathaniel Cline, Bill Proposes Requiring All Virginia Motorists to Have Insurance, VA. MERCURY (Feb. 16, 2023), https://www.virginiamercury.com/2023/02/16/bill-propses-requiring-all-virginia-motorists-to-have-insurance/.
138  Id.
139  Id.
141  Nathaniel Cline, supra note 137.
was deposited into the Uninsured Motorist Fund, which was then distributed to insurance companies to reduce the cost of coverage for uninsured motorists.\textsuperscript{143} In FY 2022, the fee accounted for $650,000 of the $5.3 million deposited into the fund.\textsuperscript{144} Senator Ruff hopes that this bill will push down insurance premiums in the future.\textsuperscript{145}

\textbf{B. Insurance During a Mental Health Crisis}

H.B. 2216 and S.B. 1347 are identical bills, proposed by Delegate Jay Leftwich and Senator John Cosgrove, respectively.\textsuperscript{146} Both bills passed the House of Delegates and the Senate unanimously.\textsuperscript{147} The bills require health insurance providers to cover mobile crisis response services, as well as stabilization services provided by residential crisis stabilization units.\textsuperscript{148} Mobile crisis response services are “services delivered to provide for rapid response to, assessment of, and early intervention for individuals experiencing an acute mental health crisis that are deployed at the location of the individual.”\textsuperscript{149} A residential crisis stabilization unit is “a short-term residential program providing support and stabilization for individuals who are experiencing an acute mental health crisis.”\textsuperscript{150} This bill is designed to allow Virginians to obtain access to important mental health resources, and ensures consistent health insurance coverage.\textsuperscript{151}

The bill also requires the State Corporation Commission, in consultation with the Secretary of Health and Human Resources, to form a work group to examine network standards for both mobile crisis response services, and the current availability of mobile crisis response services in the Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{152}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textit{Id} (fiscal impact statement).
\item VA. CODE § 38.2-3412.1 (2023).
\item \textit{Id}.
\item \textit{Id}.
\item VA. CODE § 38.2-3412.1 (2023).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
X. ELECTIONS

A. Time to Vote

H.B. 1683, proposed by Delegate Margaret Ransone, requires local, generally circulated newspapers to publish the last day of voter registration. The notice must also be posted on the official website of every county or city. In an era of stark partisanship, it is rare to see legislation pass with broad bipartisan support, but that is exactly what happened here. The bill passed the House of Delegates by a vote of 85-13 and the Senate by a vote of 38-1.

The bill did have a floor amendment to change the language to make some delegates more comfortable with the bill. Some delegates, in committee, expressed concern with the language “if applicable.” This caused concern because some delegates felt this language gave county registrars the choice of posting notice in a newspaper instead of requiring it. Delegate Ransone proposed changing the language to read “if one is available” with a floor amendment. The amendment was agreed to by a voice vote.

B. Expanded Absentee Voting

Absentee voting has become increasingly popular. In fact, the 2020 election was the first time that voting by mail was the most popular form of voting. In an attempt to ease absentee voting requirements, the General Assembly passed H.B. 1948, introduced by Delegate Robert Bloxom. As passed, the bill removes the witness requirement for absentee ballots and instead requires a voter to provide the last four digits of their social security number and their birth year. If a voter has never been issued a social security number, they must provide their unique identifier assigned to them in the voter registration system, and sign an affirmation stating they have...
never been issued a social security number.\textsuperscript{164}

While the bill passed unanimously by a block vote in the House of Delegates, and the Senate by a vote of 35-4, both chambers had to vote on the bill again due to a Governor’s Recommendation.\textsuperscript{165} It was Governor Youngkin’s request to include the aforementioned statement of affirmation to the text of the bill.\textsuperscript{166} This was approved unanimously by both chambers, and Governor Youngkin signed the bill.\textsuperscript{167}

CONCLUSION

The 2023 General Assembly wrapped up its thirty-day session in February, having passed many bipartisan bills. The General Assembly passed 43\% of all bills introduced in the 2023 session.\textsuperscript{168} The House of Delegates passed 39\% of bills unanimously, while the Senate passed 48\% of bills unanimously.\textsuperscript{169} Even in a divided Virginia, the General Assembly worked together to pass new laws. These changes ranged from closing small loopholes in laws to ensuring every driver has car insurance. Legislation in these areas will continue to develop over the coming years. In an era of strong politicization, the General Assembly has demonstrated their ability and commitment to working together to pass new laws.
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