



MY PLAN TO UPLIFT RURAL COMMUNITIES ACROSS VIRGINIA

I know firsthand the disparate worlds that zipcodes can create. During my tenure in the House, I sponsored legislation to strengthen access to affordable healthcare, high speed internet, and safe drinking water, and led the charge to expand education opportunities for rural and Southwest Virginians. As Governor, I will continue to elevate the voices and needs of rural Virginians so that our Commonwealth and economy works for everyone.

As a state Delegate, I:

- Helped expand Medicaid to approximately 500,000 Virginians.¹
- Sponsored legislation directing the Department of Social Services to track data on substance abuse, including opioid addiction, that results in the removal of a child from the home.²
- Supported bills to ensure safer opioid dispensing practices³ and to provide immunity to those who report overdoses.
- Passed legislation to clean up coal ash ponds in Southwest Virginia.⁴ Coal ash is a toxic byproduct of burning coal for energy. It has been stored in unlined coal ash ponds that have seeped into waterways and into people's well water used for drinking.
- Passed legislation allowing local school divisions to enter into College and Career Access Pathways Partnerships with community colleges.⁵
- Passed legislation to allow existing utility easements to be used for broadband deployment.⁶ This bill expanded opportunities for municipal authorities and local broadband providers to provide last-mile services to underserved communities.
- Copatron legislation to enact a statewide eviction moratorium.⁷
- Helped pass a state budget that ensures utility shutoff moratoriums for customers of all utilities and that allocates assistance to those who are late on their payments.

As Governor, I will:

Expand Access To Broadband

¹ [Louise Norris. "Virginia and the ACA's Medicaid expansion." HealthInsurance.org. 12/02/20.](#)

² ["HB 1429: Social Services, Department of." Virginia's Information Legislative System. 02/13/18.](#)

³ ["HB 1173: Controlled substances." Virginia's Legislative Information System. 03/02/18.](#)

⁴ ["HB 443: Coal combustion residuals impoundment." Virginia's Legislative Information System. Last Modified 03/31/20.](#)

⁵ ["HB 2123: School boards." Virginia's Legislative Information System. Last Modified 03/18/19.](#)

⁶ ["HB 831: Utility easements." Virginia's Legislative Information System. Last Modified 04/10/20.](#)

⁷ ["HB 5111: Va. Residential Landlord & Tenant Act." Virginia's Legislative Information System. Last Modified 11/09/20.](#)

- By the end of my Administration, 97 percent of Virginians will have access to high speed internet.
- Increase funding for broadband in underserved areas by directing \$50 million annually to the Virginia Telecommunication Initiative (VATI) between FY22 and FY26, and change the way VATI funding is allocated by removing the “overbuild provision,” a restriction that hurts local broadband providers, while favoring cable incumbents. My administration will also ensure there is adequate funding in order to provide the staff needed to make rural broadband access a reality for all Virginians.
- Expand access to the internet in underserved regions by repealing roadblocks preventing municipal broadband authorities from reaching new regions. My administration will uplift and incentivize local providers that want to serve unserved and underserved populations by addressing unnecessary barriers that prevent municipal authorities and electric cooperatives from deploying broadband.
- My administration will work to recruit new local broadband providers by coordinating with the Office of Broadband, to ensure effective outreach efforts for, and participation from, small, local broadband providers and electric co-ops, who are developing rural broadband solutions in unserved areas of the Commonwealth.
- Accelerate the completion of broadband infrastructure projects by equipping the Virginia Resources Authority to offer full-payment loans to broadband providers approved for Federal Communications Commission (FCC) grant funding to avoid the tremendous delays that Virginian workers, employers, and communities in need currently face.
- Encourage public-private partnerships by convening conferences and summits with school districts, private sector experts, and other stakeholders to share best practices. Additionally, my administration will direct state funding to expand fiber-optic infrastructure in Southwest and Southern Virginia, and I will support the Tobacco Region Revitalization Commission. These measures will help preserve Virginia's statewide competitiveness in attracting data center investment and jobs by maintaining internet and technological incentives.
- Promote internet affordability by passing legislation to authorize localities to offer broadband services to low-income residents and implement a pilot program to subsidize high speed internet access to individuals and families eligible for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.
- Work with the private sector to map broadband access by championing legislation to authorize the Chief Commonwealth Broadband Chief Advisor to develop and maintain a map of private broadband provider service territories, including accurate average broadband speeds in such territories.
- Partner with school districts to tackle the homework gap. My administration will partner with school districts to get access to data on where gaps in service exist in order to build the most efficient strategy to ensure that students, educators, and the communities they serve have access to the high speed internet.

* These policy initiatives were taken directly from the official [Rural Broadband Policy Plan](#).

Expand Healthcare Access

- Continue to ensure affordable access to COVID-19 testing, vaccines, and PPE with a focus on communities facing racial, economic, and geographical disparities. My

administration will also work to monitor and address ongoing needs for manpower in rural hospitals and health centers.⁸

- Invest in mobile health clinics. Accessibility and lack of transportation continues to be two of the top barriers for people to access care. Mobile clinics will help provide care for the most vulnerable Virginians – people who suffer from mental illness, substance abuse, homeless populations, and rural communities.
- Expand broadband access to make telehealth and telemedicine more widely accessible and support legislation to increase services covered by the Department of Medical Assistance Services to include “remote patient monitoring services for rural and underserved populations.”⁹
- Direct state funding to colleges and universities in Southwest Virginia to address critical shortages in healthcare providers. My administration will invest \$2 million dollars over the next two years for the development of a Family Nurse Practitioner program at UVA-Wise.
- Continue to combat the opioid crisis by supporting legislation and measures that direct victims to rehabilitative treatments and services and educate the public on the dangers of opioid addiction.

* For a more in-depth look into these policies, review our official [Healthcare](#) and [Jobs & Economy](#) plans.

Improve the Education System

- Direct state funding to colleges and universities in Southwest Virginia to address critical shortages in healthcare providers. My administration will invest \$2 million dollars over the next two years for the development of a Family Nurse Practitioner program at UVA-Wise.
- Address critical school construction needs by making necessary reforms to the outdated Local Composite Index. My administration will also restructure the way schools are funded to ensure that high-risk students, their teachers, and their schools are getting the resources they need. School districts with high needs receive negligible increases compared to schools in other states.
- Implement full-day preschool for at-risk three- and four-year-olds by expanding VPI eligibility criteria to include three-year-olds and investing more VPI funding per pupil. My administration will ensure dedicated sources through increased state investment and create a set-aside of 40 percent of marijuana sales revenue to the Virginia Preschool Initiative.

* For a more in-depth look into these policies, review our official [Early Childhood Education plan](#) and [K-12 Education Issue Page](#).

Strengthen Infrastructure

- Ensure the funding needed to complete the remaining infrastructure projects and upgrades along the I-81 corridor.

⁸ [Brian Carlton, “Southwest Virginia Has a Virus Problem, Medical Officials Say,” Dogwood, 10/28/20.](#)

⁹ [“SB 1416: DMAS,” Virginia’s Legislative Information System, Last Modified 1/21/21.](#)

- Make additional investments to Virginia Passenger Rail Authority and continue the implementation of Governor Northam’s Transforming Rail in Virginia initiative.
- Support the New River Valley Passenger Station Authority and allocate state and federal funding towards the creation of a rail line to Christiansburg.
- Continue to provide funding for green renovations to existing government buildings, roadways, and bridges.
- Codify an eviction moratorium until 2022. My administration will also work to expand repayment plan requirements, strengthen tenant protections, and build on utility bill protections for impacted renters and homeowners.
- Work to expand affordable housing by supporting zoning reform efforts and increasing state funding for public housing.

* For a more in-depth look into these policies, review our [Transportation Issue Page](#).

Create and Promote Diverse, High-Paying Jobs

- Continue supporting the Virginia Initiative for Growth & Opportunity (GO Virginia), which awards grants based on population for regional and statewide projects. These projects foster collaboration among business, education, and government, to effectively expand economic development in key regional priorities.
- Assemble an extensive, strategic, and robust portfolio of project-ready sites and buildings across Virginia. There will be a special focus on Virginia’s rural and distressed areas to attract more data and supply centers. The lack of shovel-ready sites is one of the main reasons why Virginia loses many economic development projects.
- Direct funding to the Solar Hands-On Instructional Network of Excellence (SHINE) and other programs to expand education and training opportunities for workers interested in solar wind careers.
- Bolster public awareness of union apprenticeship programs in the skilled trades.
- Continue to fund the Green Jobs Tax Credit to help incentivize commercial-scale solar projects in rural communities.¹⁰
- Institute a hiring goal of 25,000 Virginia military veterans hired through the Virginia Values Veterans (V3) Program by the end of my administration.
- Recruit Veteran business owners in post-COVID-19 economic recovery efforts by including them in my Rebuilding Virginia Task Force.

* For a more in-depth look into these policies, review our official [Jobs & Economy plan](#).

Ensure Criminal Justice Reform

- Reduce statutory restrictions on specialty dockets (i.e. Drug Courts, Mental Health, and Veterans dockets) and ensure greater funding for treatment services, including trauma-informed counseling.
- Ensure funding for current and new staff at the state parole board to increase transparency and efficiency¹¹ and restore parole for incarcerated persons who have demonstrated a readiness to re-enter society.

¹⁰ [“HB 408: Green job creation tax credit.” Virginia’s Legislative Information System. 03/23/20.](#)

¹¹ [Denise Lavoie. “Virginia senate defeats bill to restore parole.” WSLs 10. 01/29/21.](#)

- Expand Veterans Court and Dockets in Virginia in order to offer alternatives to incarceration for veterans suffering from addiction and homelessness.

* For a more in-depth look into these policies, review our official [Criminal Justice Reform plan](#).