

CLIMATE CHANGE, ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMISSION
c/o Department of Environmental Services
2100 Clarendon Blvd., Suite 705, Arlington, VA 22201

9/26/2024

The Honorable Libby Garvey
Chair, Arlington County Board
2100 Clarendon Blvd.
Arlington, VA 22201

Re: 2025 State Legislative Priorities

Dear Chair Garvey:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our views on Arlington's priorities for the 2025 Virginia legislative session. Last year was the hottest year ever globally, and so far this year monthly temperatures have hit new highs. Locally, Arlington has seen more intense and damaging storms, increased flooding, and higher temperatures due to the climate crisis. The need to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions becomes increasingly urgent with every day that goes by.

Statewide policies, investment, and programs play a crucial role in addressing the climate crisis and helping local jurisdictions to transition to clean, renewable energy and build the infrastructure for sustainable communities in the face of more extreme weather and rising sea levels. While it will remain important for the County's legislative agenda to continue to defend against the efforts to rescind or weaken key climate legislation passed in 2020 and 2021, C2E2 urges the County and our legislative delegation to adopt an ambitious climate legislation agenda that addresses funding for needed transportation and infrastructure investment, regulatory reform, incentives, and expanded authority to local jurisdictions. Even though prospects of progress remain limited for next year's legislative session, pursuing such an agenda will help develop a legislative packet and support from legislators and other jurisdictions for a more productive 2026 session, depending on the outcome of the statewide elections in 2025.

Transformation of the Electric Grid Phasing out fossil fuels, primarily through electrification and achieving the County's goal of meeting 100 percent of its electricity needs through renewable energy, will require major upgrades and transformations of the electric grid to ensure Arlington users have access to clean, reliable, and affordable electricity. Legislation should address:

- **Rejoining RGGI**: Virginia's short tenure in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative clearly demonstrated its value with carbon emissions in Virginia dropping 22 percent between 2021 and 2023 according to the Environmental Defense Fund. After leaving RGGI, emissions soared almost 28 percent in the first quarter of 2024 compared with the same period in 2023. Revenues from RGGI, which raised \$800 million from 2021-2023, have supported energy efficiency upgrades for low- to moderate-income households and community efforts to mitigate flooding and sea level rise.

- Utility Incentives and Regulatory Reform: Legislation and regulatory reform is needed to ensure that Dominion and other utilities adhere to the VCEA’s renewable energy portfolio standards, prioritize energy efficiency programs, development of distributed energy resources, battery energy storage systems, and virtual power plants, and adoption of demand management strategies over expensive new capabilities. Regulation should also ensure that ratepayers are protected from bearing the costs of meeting the accelerating electricity demands for data centers and other energy-intensive industries.
- Competition in Renewable Electricity Markets: Provide both residential and commercial properties with choice in selecting a renewable energy provider for their home/facility, including the ability of jurisdictions to implement Community Choice Aggregation to facilitate community transition to electricity powered by renewable energy. The ability of utilities to set excessive rates for connecting small scale solar projects to the grid needs to be reined in.
- Solar-Ready Schools. Require net-zero energy standards and solar-ready roofs for new schools and those undergoing major renovations, enabling renewable energy adoption and long-term savings.

Decarbonization of Buildings About 60 percent of greenhouse gas emissions in Arlington result from the heating and cooling of buildings. Legislation to strengthen building codes and allow local jurisdictions greater ability to advance energy efficiency and decarbonization are crucial to getting to carbon neutrality. Such programs include:

- Local Authority to Establish Energy Conservation Requirements: Localities should be authorized to adopt measures that are more stringent than the minimum standards of the Virginia Energy Conservation Code. One approach could be to include the option for localities to adopt residential and commercial “stretch codes” that are compatible with local climate and energy goals.
- Stronger Energy Conservation Code: The County should support legislation to reform the process of updating the Virginia Energy Conservation Code. International Energy Conservation Code updates should be adopted promptly without weakening amendments each time a new iteration is adopted by the International Code Council (within two years of its adoption) and should reflect Virginia’s commitment to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 or sooner.
- Benchmarking: Localities should be authorized to require commercial buildings 50,000 square feet and larger to disclose annual energy usage to the locality, to help drive policies to improve energy efficiency and reduce GHG emissions.
- On-Bill Financing/On-Bill Repayment: The General Assembly should establish on-bill financing (ways for customers to pay for utility-funded improvements over time) and/or on-bill repayment (similar but for third-party funded improvements) programs for energy efficiency upgrades to residential and commercial properties. These programs are offered by 110 energy utilities across the nation. They help address energy equity by providing

low interest rates, long pay-back periods, performance-based improvements, and pre-qualified contractors.

Decarbonization of Transportation. Vehicles with internal combustion engines are a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution. Funding and legislation that simultaneously support the electrification of vehicles and expansion of public transit and other multimodal options are needed to rapidly reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this sector.

- Increased Funding for Local Public Transit Systems: State funding for transportation should shift from prioritizing highway and road construction to supporting public transit, transit-oriented development, and rail and other inter-city transportation. Consistent, stable funding for the Metro system in metropolitan DC is a particular concern.
- Grant Funding for Electric School and Transit Buses: Priority funding should be given to support the transition of both school and transit bus fleets to zero emissions vehicles.
- Protect the 2021 Clean Car Standards: These standards ensure that Virginians have access to an increasing number of both cleaner gas-powered cars and zero-emissions vehicles. Governor Youngkin has announced his intent to unilaterally withdraw Virginia from these standards at the end of 2024.
- Electric Vehicle Rebates: The General Assembly successfully created a strong EV rebate program in 2021 but has not provided any funding to implement the program. The GA should supply substantial funding for this program to encourage EV purchases.

Other Environmental Issues: Clean air and water, access to parks and open spaces, healthy natural areas, and less waste and litter are key elements of a healthy environment and community. Arlington would benefit from greater authority and support from the State to advance its goals in these areas, including:

- Urban Forests: Funding and legislation to preserve and promote the growth of healthy, vibrant urban forests—including combating invasive species in our natural areas—essential to the environment and quality of life by reducing heat island effects, improving water and air quality, reducing stormwater runoff, and combating climate change.
- Producer Responsibility: Measures to pave the way for Extended Producer Responsibility legislation and reduction in single-use plastics.
- Composting: Legislation to support the development of composting infrastructure to allow for the diversion of food and other organic waste from landfills and incinerators and converted to soil-enhancing compost. This year the General Assembly passed and the Governor vetoed SB329, which would have allowed municipalities to require large generators of organic waste to separate and divert this waste from landfills and incinerators to composting facilities.

- Regulation of Leaf Blowers and other Lawn Equipment: Legislation allowing localities to ban or regulate gasoline-powered leaf blowers and other equipment that contribute to noise and air pollution.

Thank you for considering these recommendations. We would be happy to answer questions or provide additional information

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cindy Lewin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Cindy Lewin
Chair, Climate Change, Energy and Environment Commission

cc: Arlington County Board
Jennifer Fioretti, Assistant County Manager for Climate Policy
Ilana Creinin, State Legislative Affairs Liaison