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his Issue Brief contains descriptions of some of the issues that appear likely to capture the attention of legislators at the 2007 Session of the General Assembly. It is not intended to be a comprehensive listing of every issue that will be considered. Unanticipated issues will undoubtedly surface, and some of the issues discussed in these pages may not be considered during the Finally, and most importantly, these descriptions are not predictions of how the General Assembly will respond to any issue.

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Budget Outlook

The 2007 Session of the Virginia General Assembly will be making its mid-period adjustments to the 2006-2008 Appropriation Act. With the United States and Virginia economies expanding modestly, at least up to this point, the Governor and the General Assembly will be able to increase Virginia general fund revenue estimates to provide approximately \$500-plus million of additional revenue to address Commonwealth's most pressing needs in this

budget period. Although this may seem like a large amount of revenue, it is small when compared to Virginia's \$75 billion biennial budget. The Governor will present his revised revenue estimates on December 15th to a joint meeting of Virginia's money committees, when he will also submit his budget proposals.

One area that is likely to be addressed in the current appropriations act is the area of transportation funding. Some observers believe that it will not be until the 2008 Session, after the November 2007 election of a new House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia, that substantive decisions

be made regarding transportation. The 2007 Session likely will at least authorize expenditure of certain undesignated transportation funds. In particular, the existing appropriation act includes \$339 million of general fund revenue in the first year for undesignated transportation initiatives, and the 2007 Session likely will address exactly how these funds should be spent.

Finally, there is always the need for more state dollars in the areas of education, public safety, health, cleanup of the Chesapeake Bay, as well as tax relief. As in the past, the budget process will determine how to divide the \$500-plus million surplus among these competing needs.

John Garka

Finance/Taxation

Land Conservation Tax Credit

Virginia's land preservation tax credit became law in 1999. The original Act of the General Assembly made available taxpayers an income tax credit equal to 50 percent of the fair market value for donations of conservation easements to public and private conservation agencies. The legislation placed a limit on the maximum amount of credit that a taxpayer could claim on his income tax return in any one year (the annual limitation currently is \$100,000 per year). As a means to help ensure that taxpayers could realize the full financial benefits of their tax credits, the original legislation also allowed taxpayers to carry the credits forward for use in the five years that followed the year of the donation. Legislative changes in 2002 allowed taxpayers to sell any unused but otherwise allowable credits. This change helped to expand use of the tax credit as it allowed donors who sell their credits to recognize up to 50 percent of the fair market value of their donations, notwithstanding the annual limitation placed on such donors in claiming the credit on their income tax returns.

Today, Virginia's land preservation tax credit accounts for most of the land

preserved in the Commonwealth. The tax credit has been seen as one of the more generous programs in place for land conservation. The attractiveness of the credit also led to some questionable donations and increasing amounts of lost revenue. In 2006, the General Assembly and the Governor proposed and enacted several changes to the tax credit including:

- Beginning with 2007, cap the amount of tax credits that can be issued annually at \$100 million with the \$100 million cap annually adjusted for inflation beginning in 2008.
- Provide that any credits approved that would exceed the yearly \$100 million cap would be first in line for issuance in the following calendar year.
- Decrease the tax credit from 50 percent of the fair market value of the donation to 40 percent.
- As part of the credit approval, require the Department of Conservation and Recreation to approve the conservation value of donations that would result in \$1 million or more in tax credits.
- Increase the number of carry forward years from 5 to 10.
- Limit the amount of credit allowed for improved structures.
- Prohibit donations of land that are tied to land development.
- Charge an administrative fee for the sale of tax credits equal to 2 percent of the value of the donation, up to a maximum fee of \$10,000.
- Prohibit a historic rehabilitation tax credit from being taken on property that has been donated under the land preservation tax credit within the last 5 years.

These amendments are effective January 1, 2007, so most likely it will be sometime after the 2007 Session before the full impact of the changes will be known. Citizens will be watching to see if the 2007 General Assembly takes a wait-and-see approach or if it will recommend additional changes to the Governor.

Mark Vucci

Commerce/Labor

Minimum Wage

A number of states have raised their minimum wages to levels that exceed the federal minimum, which has not been increased since 1997. The minimum wage in Virginia conforms to the federal minimum wage, currently \$5.15 per hour.

Credit Freezes

A dozen states have enacted legislation that allows consumers to bar consumer reporting agencies from releasing information in their credit files to a business, until the consumer uses a PIN to unlock access to the credit file. The goal of these laws is to stop persons who have obtained an identity theft victim's personal information from getting credit in the victim's name. Without the victim's credit report and credit score, a business is unlikely to issue new credit to the identity thief.

Payday Lending

Since its enactment in 2002, Virginia's Payday Loan Act has allowed the rapid statewide growth of payday loans, which are short-term loans secured by the borrower's personal check. The fee for a payday loan in Virginia is capped at \$15 per \$100 advanced. Given the short term of the loans, the rate of interest charged by payday lenders can exceed 300 percent on an annualized basis. Efforts to curtail lending from recent sessions payday include "sunsetting" the Act, requiring lenders to confirm through a central database that borrowers do not have other payday loans, and regulating loans to military personnel.

Franklin Munyan

Public Education

Tuition Grants for Students with Disabilities

Legislation introduced in 2006 and carried over to 2007 establishes a tuition assistance grant program for students with disabilities. Senate Bill 545 proposed that students with disabilities are eligible for the \$10,000 per year grant if:

- A student attended public school in the Commonwealth for one year prior to the request of the grant.
- An individualized education program was written for the student and parents are dissatisfied with their child's progress.

Nonsectarian private schools licensed by the Commonwealth may accept students under the program. The Board of Education is charged with the program's implementation through regulation.

During the 2006 Session, opponents of the program emphasized that the federal IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended is working and insisted that the legislature address the problems in the public schools before funneling state money to private schools. Additionally, opponents also stressed that the term "dissatisfied" is not qualified in the bill and could open the door for any reason being used to request a grant. Those in favor of the new program emphasized the difficulties they face in making sure that their children receive the best education possible.

special subcommittee appointed by the chairman of the Senate Committee on Education and Health met twice during the summer to study the issues relating to the bill. During the first meeting, there was extensive public comment and parents of students with disabilities were very supportive of the measure. At the final meeting, the special subcommittee recommended that the full committee report the bill as amended so it may be considered during the 2007General Assembly.

Nikki Seeds

Incentives for Community College Enrollment

Legislation may be offered during the 2007 General Assembly that creates incentives for Virginia students to attend community college for at least two years. As the population grows, there is increased speculation that the future capacity of Virginia's institutions of Higher Education will be inadequate.

Four bills promoting attendance in the Virginia Community College System were considered in the 2006 Session and three of the four were carried over to 2007. The programs created by these bills may:

- Ease transition for students between community college and a four-year university.
- Provide guaranteed acceptance for the student.
- Ease the burden of the extra tuition necessary to attend a four-year institution in some instances.

Nikki Seeds

Courts

Limits on Eminent Domain Power

In its 2005 decision in *Kelo v. City of New London*, the United States Supreme Court held that economic development is a valid public use that justifies the taking of private property. Reaction to the decision was swift and vocal, prompting state legislatures across the country to grapple with the implications of the case. Numerous bills and constitutional amendment proposals were introduced at the 2006 General Assembly Session to clarify the meaning of "public use" in Virginia. The issue was not resolved in 2006 and certainly will be back on the agenda in 2007.

Jescey French

Immigration

Attention is high regarding issues related to illegal immigration in states across the nation, and Virginia is no exception. The issue potentially could surface in several policy areas ranging from identification requirements, to

access to social and medical services, to workforce regulation.

One of the more problematic areas involves enforcement of federal immigration laws. Virginia, along with several other states, may look for ways to involve local and state agencies to assist federal authorities in enforcement, including authorizing law-enforcement agencies to report immigration violations and to create a working relationship with federal agencies.

Amigo Wade

Corrections

Prisoner Reentry Into Society

The joint subcommittee studying Prisoner Reentry to Society (SJR 126) continued its work in 2006, holding three meetings and a public hearing. Members considered many issues while the outlook for the nearly one million inmates returning to their communities each year became a growing national concern. The study produced numerous proposals to improve the outcome of prisoner reentry and to reduce recidivism. Proposals and public comments centered on six areas:

- Provide ID cards to obtain basic needs.
- Address debt loads and child support arrearages.
- Mental health care, counseling, and parenting skills.
- Educational preparation.
- Employment opportunities.
- Improve visitation practices.

To make its recommendations, the subcommittee continues to work closely with the Virginia Prisoner Reentry Policy Academy, which the Governor formally recognized by Executive Order in 2006. In light of the favorable response to the proposals and the support for the federal Second Chance Act, which may provide additional funding, Virginia can expect more legislation in this area.

Ellen Weston

Health

Clean Indoor Air Act

The Governor issued an executive order that will prohibit smoking in state government offices and common areas beginning January 1, 2007. Twenty-two states, including the District of Columbia, limit smoking in state buildings.

Legislation failed in 2006 that would have banned smoking indoors in most buildings and enclosed areas frequented by the public. Similar legislation is certain to be before the General Assembly again at the 2007 Session.

Maria Everett

Mental Health

Legislation concerning mental health issues will again be considered at the 2007 General Assembly Session. The chairman of the Senate Education and Health Committee established a special subcommittee to study Senate Bill 18 and Senate Bill 309, both relating to outpatient treatment for the severely mentally ill. Currently, outpatient treatment is an option in Virginia that is rarely used, and both bills seek to expand the option.

There are also other groups working on recommendations regarding Virginia's mental health system, including:

- ICAAC, the Interagency Civil Admissions Advisory Council, established by House Bill 2037 in 2005, which is looking into emergency custody orders, temporary detention orders, the commitment process, and recommendations to improve coordination and effectiveness within the mental health system. Work groups are studying three top priorities: transportation, community alternatives to hospitalization, and medical screening and assessment.
- Chief Justice Hassell's Commission for Mental Health Reform, which was established in 2006, is also examining the current mental health system in Virginia and will come up with legislative recommendations by the 2008 General Assembly Session.

Medical Decisions Regarding Children

Legislation may result from the legal wrangling in the Starchild Abraham Cherrix case, which received a lot of public attention this year. Cherrix, a 16-year-old Chincoteague boy who has Hodgkin's disease, decided to receive treatment for his cancer with alternative remedies instead of chemotherapy. The boy had the support of his parents, who consequently were found guilty of neglect for permitting him to risk his health by using diet and herbal supplements to treat his condition.

The case captured the attention of local politicians, including Virginia's Attorney General, who filed a brief in support of Cherrix's right to choose his own treatment. Eventually, the two sides compromised, with Cherrix agreeing to undergo radiation treatment, but not chemotherapy. Many people in the community, however, feel that parents should be allowed to make medical decisions for their children without government interference.

Jessica Eades

Childhood Obesity

Growing media attention paid to childhood obesity may very well spur legislation at the 2007 General Assembly Session.

In 2003, Arkansas passed legislation requiring schools to measure each student's BMI, body mass index, annually. While some parents were outraged at first, many later admitted that the BMI reporting caused them to seek a pediatrician's advice on monitoring their child's diet and activity. Arkansas has seen a leveling off of childhood obesity rates.

Last year in Virginia, several bills were offered relating to nutrition and physical education in schools, professional development for school staff in these areas, as well as BMI reporting. During the summer, the chairman of the Senate Education and Health Committee established a special subcommittee to study one of the bills, Senate Bill 206, regarding childhood obesity.

There has been recent federal legislation requiring all school districts that participate in the federal school lunch program, which includes Virginia's public schools, to create a wellness policy. While the General Assembly may wait to see the results of the new policy requirement, childhood obesity is certainly an issue on the minds of citizens.

Jessica Eades

Certificate of Public Need

COPN, Certificate of Public Need, is a document issued by the Commissioner of Health to authorize and regulate new medical care facilities or equipment. Virginia and other states adopted such authorization requirements several decades ago as a means to avoid duplication and efficiently allocate health care facilities and services.

More recently, arguments have been made that deregulation will improve competition in facilities and services, reduce costs, and remove barriers to market entry for both providers and new technologies. Some states have moved in this direction, supported by a federal report released in 2004 by the Department of Justice and Federal Trade Commission. The report concluded that these state COPN programs do not best serve the health care needs of citizens. A legislative task force has been examining these issues to streamline the process and its deliberations may lead to 2007 legislation.

Persons with Disabilities

During the 2006 interim, the Virginia Disability Commission met several times to review the status of disability services and programs. In response to population trends and presentations, the Commission emphasized support for and clarification of state autism services and funding. They also stressed new programs and possible legislation regarding state employment services organizations and federal employment programs for persons with disabilities. The Commission will likely support legislation to enhance housing options for the disabled and outcome measures of state DSBs, Disability Services Boards, and CILs, Centers for Independent Living.

Ellen Weston

State Government

Public-Private Partnerships

Legislation may be offered during the 2007 General Assembly pertaining to the usage of public-private partnerships for the construction of facilities and also for services.

As more and more public entities take advantage of the procurement processes offered by the PPTA, the Public-Private Transportation Act of 1995, and the PPEA, the Public-Private Education Facilities and Infrastructure Act of 2002, concerns have been raised regarding:

- The need for additional oversight if there is a particularly large potential for harm by the public entity based on the amount of money or the number of public employees involved.
- Whether there is sufficient transparency in the process in terms of the public's ability to review records relating to public-private partnerships.

Amigo Wade

Self-Distribution & Delivery Privileges for Virginia's Wineries

After Prohibition, the Commonwealth created a three-tier system separating the functions of producer, distributor, and retailer of alcohol. Over 20 years ago, Virginia farm wineries were exempted from the system and allowed to distribute wine in their own vehicles to resellers (restaurants and retailers), as well as customers.

Over the last decade, the federal courts have struck down such regulatory privileges as a violation of the Commerce Clause of the United States Constitution, because they treat in-state and out-of-state businesses differently. Last year, the General Assembly resolved the issue by passing a bill eliminating certain Virginia farm winery privileges.

Virginia's farm wineries insist that small wineries cannot survive without the self-distribution and delivery privileges. Legislation to restore the privileges and extend them to out-of-state wineries can be expected.

Ellen Porter & Martin Farber

Local Government

The local government committees of the General Assembly will continue to grapple with issues related to land use and growth. Specifically, measures that seek to better coordinate local growth with the provision of adequate transportation infrastructure have occupied the attention of an ad hoc subcommittee of the Counties, Cities and Towns Committee during the interim. These measures, originally introduced during the 2006 Special Session, seek to provide localities with greater control over land use decisions as well as potential additional revenue authority in exchange for promoting more efficient land use patterns and greater responsibility over the maintenance of subdivision roads.

Jeff Sharp

Constitutional Issues

Virginia Constitutional Amendments

Almost 50 constitutional amendment proposals were introduced for first reference during the 2006 General Assembly. Since the amendments cannot be placed on the ballot until 2008, most of the resolutions were carried over. Amendments approved on first reference during the 2007 General Assembly will be before the 2008 Session, and if approved in the identical form will be on the November 2008 ballot. Likely topics for amendments in 2007 include:

- Protections for the Transportation Trust Fund and other special funds so that the revenues placed in the funds are used for the purposes specified in creating the funds.
- Tax exemptions authorizing or requiring tax relief for owner-occupied real estate.
- Measures concerning the use of the power of eminent domain or offered in response to the United States Supreme Court decision in *Kelo v*. *City of New London*.

- Proposals to change the current balance of powers between executive and legislative branches; possible changes include an organizational session, legislative veto of administrative regulations, and increasing to a six-year term or allowing successive terms for the Governor.
- Measures to modify the redistricting process and possibly establish a bipartisan or nonpartisan redistricting commission or procedure.

Mary Spain & Martha Brissette

Campaigns & Elections

Campaign Finance

Audits

Legislation will likely surface again in the 2007 General Assembly Session regarding random audits of campaign finance reports.

Express Advocacy Standard

The 2006 General Assembly directed the State Board of Elections to continue the study of campaign finance disclosure requirements, particularly the issue of which organizations are exempt from registration and reporting requirements in light of litigation concerning the scope of protected First Amendment activities. The State Board of Elections held a meeting on September 25, 2006, to hear public comment. Legislation can be expected clarifying the scope of registration and reporting requirements.

Electoral College

Since 2001, legislation has been proposed to change Virginia's method of allocating votes. A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization began promoting a National Popular Vote Plan in 2005 that involves an interstate compact. California's legislature approved the Plan, but it was vetoed by the Governor. A number of other states are considering the Plan, and legislation may be introduced during the 2007 General Assembly concerning this issue.

Voting Equipment

The reliability and security of voting systems has been an on-going national issue, spurred by events in several states during the 2000 national election. Media, academic, and public attention has focused particularly on electronic voting equipment.

Virginia election officials express confidence in the systems authorized for use in the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, legislation requiring that voting systems provide paper trails and documentation was unsuccessfully proposed in 2006 and almost certainly similar legislation will be back in 2007. Voting experiences during the November 2006 elections no doubt will generate other issues of interest to citizens.

Mary Spain & Martha Brissette

Transportation

How to use Funding

The crisis in transportation funding was not solved, or even partially solved during the 2006 Regular Session or the six month 2006 Special Session.

Many observers believe the 2007 General Assembly Session will again discuss transportation issues. One interesting question involves what to do with the \$339 million set aside out of the first year of the budget to implement transportation legislation approved by November 1, 2006, since no legislation was enacted.

Implementation of the Federal Real ID Act of 2005

The federal Real ID Act of 2005 requires the states to design driver's licenses that comply with federal antiterrorist standards by May 2008. Required changes to Virginia drivers' licenses will have a major impact on the Division of Motor Vehicles, as well as all of its customers. The Act requires that state-issued driver's licenses and ID cards meet minimum federal regulations, including verification of the applicant's identity and legal status, as well as implementation of antifraud security features.

Expected late in 2006, are the Department of Homeland Security's federal regulations governing specific requirements. The 2007 General Assembly may consider legislation to comply with the federal Real ID Act if the federal regulations are issued on time.

Alan Wambold

Clean Special Fuel License Plates

Unless the 2007 General Assembly acts to prevent it, the authority for vehicles bearing the special license plates for clean special fuel vehicles to use HOV lanes will "sunset" on July 1, 2007.

School Bus Safety

Legislation regarding school bus safety will attempt to require the installation of safety belt systems on newly purchased school buses. Bills have been introduced in previous sessions, but have failed to pass due to concerns of liability, cost, and effectiveness. However, rising concerns over children's safety on the roads of the Commonwealth will likely again spark a debate at the 2007 General Assembly Session.

Stephanie Bishop

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Housing

Real Estate Disclosure/Disclaimer

Legislation may be introduced at the 2007 General Assembly Session to change the current Real Estate Disclosure/Disclaimer statement as the current statement is rarely used in the marketplace. The statement will now contain the six minimum disclosures as part of the disclaimer statute conforming to actual usage that requires the buyer to use due diligence.

Housing Trust Fund

Legislation may be introduced re-establishing a Virginia Housing Trust Fund. A portion of each locality's real estate recordation tax would be deposited in a state fund. The moneys would serve as an incentive to localities to provide additional affordable housing funding as a matching component to the Fund.

Uniform Statewide Building Code

In 2007, legislation may provide for increased penalties for owners or other persons that violate occupancy limits on dwelling units in localities where the governing body has excepted the Maintenance Code. Currently, there are 77 of these localities in Virginia. The punishment will increase in severity based on the number of subsequent offenses and may include jail time.

Virginia Housing Commission

Elizabeth Palen

Natural Resources

Menhaden

Menhaden will again be a topic of discussion this session. After years of controversy over the management of this economically and ecologically valuable fish, a compromise has been met. Menhaden are small oily fish that

filter impurities from the Bay waters and serve as the main food source for larger fish such as the striped bass. Menhaden also are a key source of oils used in dietary supplements.

This summer Governor Kaine and Omega Protein agreed to an annual cap on the harvest of menhaden from the Chesapeake Bay. The proposal is consistent with goals set in a recent fishery management plan adopted by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission, a multi-state group designed to oversee fishing management issues along the eastern seaboard.

Legislation will be introduced this session adopting the provisions of the agreement, effective 2006 through 2010, placing an annual cap on menhaden harvested from the Bay for industrial purposes of 109,020 metric tons, which is the average annual harvest from 2001 to 2005. A one-year credit will be granted for the year immediately following a season if the catch falls below the cap with a maximum of 122,740 metric tons.



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Electronic Meetings

Electronic communication meetings—teleconferences and audio visual conferences—have been the subject of legislation for the past several years, especially in regards to whether the rules for conducting government meetings using electronic means should be relaxed. This issue has been the subject of considerable study by the FOIA Council, which has recommended legislation in the last two legislative sessions to strike a balance between the use of technology by governmental bodies and maintaining open government principles.

The FOIA Council will likely again recommend legislation to the 2007 General Assembly, which would allow participation by members of a public body, at both the state and local level, to participate electronically in meetings in the event of an emergency or where the member suffers from a temporary or permanent disability or other medical condition that would prevent physical attendance at the meeting. There are likely to be other bills on this issue.



Maria Everett

JCOIS

Database Breach

Concerns about identity theft and other issues related to the security of databases containing personal information will almost certainly generate legislation again at the 2007 General Assembly Session. Legislation may be proposed to require public bodies and/or private entities doing business in the state that maintain a database of personal information to notify all persons in that database when the security of the database is breached. This legislation became popular after the ChoicePoint and LexisNexis breaches, because consumers did not find out that their personal information was compromised until months after the event occurred. The intent of legislation is to help consumers prevent identity theft by making them aware when personal information may have been stolen.

Photo-red

Photo-red legislation may be considered by the 2007 General Assembly, which would allow localities to install cameras that automatically take a picture of the license plate of a car that has run a red light.



Patrick Cushing



DLS Bulletin Board

- Joint subcommittees should submit an executive summary including their findings and recommendations to DLAS by the first day of the General Assembly's Regular Session.
- Committee action on continued legislation must be completed by midnight on December 8, 2006.
- All requests for drafts of legislation for prefiling to be submitted to DLS by 5:00 p.m. on December 11, 2006.
- All requests for drafts, redrafts, and corrections for legislation creating or continuing a study to be submitted to DLS by 5:00 p.m. on January 5, 2007.
- All requests for redrafts and corrections of legislation for prefiling to be submitted to DLS by 5:00 p.m. on January 5, 2007.
- Covered drafts of legislation to be prefiled available at DLS by noon on January 9, 2007.
- All requests for drafts, redrafts, and corrections for first-day introduction bills to be submitted to DLS by 5:00 p.m. on January 9, 2007.
- Prefiling ends at 10:00 a.m. on January 10, 2007.
- The General Assembly convenes on January 10, 2007, at noon, and a joint session will convene at the Jamestown Settlement at 7 p.m. to receive the Governor's address.

2006 Regular Session

Туре	Introduced	Passed House	Passed Senate	Passed Both	Continued	Failed	Approved	Vetoed
H.B.	1614	701	630	619	193	802	609	10
H.J.R.	557	468	463	463	36	58	2	0
H.R.	42	39	0	39	0	3	0	0
S.B.	732	347	438	339	110	283	334	5
S.J.R.	306	253	263	253	19	34	2	0
S.R.	36	0	36	36	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	3287	1808	1830	1749	358	1180	947	15

2006 Special Session

Туре	Introduced	Passed House	Passed Senate	Passed Both	Continued	Failed	Approved	Vetoed
H.B.	100	29	9	8	0	92	8	0
H.J.R.	178	171	169	169	0	9	0	0
H.R.	8	8	0	8	0	0	0	0
S.B.	27	2	9	2	0	25	2	0
S.J.R.	72	68	70	68	0	4	0	0
S.R.	6	0	6	6	0	0	0	0
TOTALS	391	278	263	261	0	130	10	0

2006 Bill Requests

* 2006 draft requests	2006 bills introduced	DLS Section	
323	177	Commerce & Labor	
63	32	Corrections	
1351	566	Courts of Justice	
88	81	DLAS	
665	317	Education & Health	
459	202	General Laws	
383	168	Local Government	
272	127	Natural Resources	
313	188	Privileges & Elections	
1146	940	Rules, Commending/Memorial Resolutions, Special Projects	
934	415	Taxation & Finance	
70	32	Technology & Science	
720	352	Transportation	
147	81	Welfare & Social Services	

^{*} Includes bill substitute requests.

Virginia Legislative Issue Brief

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E. M. Miller, Jr., Director R. J. Austin, Manager, Special Projects Lynda Waddill, Editor

For information contact:
Special Projects
Division of Legislative Services
910 Capitol Street, 2nd Floor
Richmond, VA 23219
(804) 786-3591

http://dls.state.va.us

Division of Legislative Services 910 Capitol Street, GAB, 2nd Floor Richmond, Virginia 23219