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New Poll Shows Virginians Strongly Favor Policies that Make Housing More Affordable

A majority of Virginians want to expand state funding for affordable housing and require utility companies to support efficiency upgrades that help families save on energy bills.

RICHMOND, VA - September 27, 2017

The Campaign for Housing and Civic Engagement (CHACE), a statewide network of housing advocates spearheaded by the Virginia Housing Alliance and the Virginia Poverty Law Center working to elevate housing issues for the 2017 elections, revealed the results of a statewide public opinion survey on housing and energy efficiency issues conducted by the Judy Ford Wason Center for Public Policy at Christopher Newport University.

The poll's findings demonstrate that, by a wide margin, Virginians want a full spectrum of housing opportunities for all their neighbors. 82% of voters strongly believe that people who work in their community should be able to find a home there. 56% of voters agree that housing affordability is vital to their community's economic success. 58% of voters also believe that ending homelessness is an important government priority.

Christie Marra of the Virginia Poverty Law Center stated, "The results of this statewide poll demonstrate exactly what we suspected when we decided to launch the CHACE campaign: Virginians recognize how crucial safe, affordable, energy efficient housing is not only for themselves but for their neighbors as well."

Sim Wimbush, executive director of the Virginia Housing Alliance, added, "[VHA] believes that having access to safe and stable homes is vital for all Virginians. It's encouraging to see with these poll results that Virginians agree and support our belief, recognizing the value of being part of vibrant communities that contain a variety of housing opportunities that can meet a wide range of family budgets."

"We started CHACE to remind everyone running for office this year that people across Virginia know that when a community can provide quality housing to people at all income levels, from the nurse's aide to the police officer to the recent college graduate, it enriches the entire community," explained Marra. "It is my hope that our elected leaders in the General Assembly heed the clear call of voters on these housing issues and prioritize them accordingly in their work and in the state budget," said Wimbush.

This public opinion poll is the first statewide effort to ask Virginians their thoughts on housing, homelessness, and policy solutions. 509 registered voters were interviewed between September 3rd and September 10th, 2017. Questions revolved around the Campaign's three policy priorities: increasing funding for the Virginia Housing Trust Fund, expanding energy efficiency programs, and ensuring support services are available for individuals exiting homelessness. The margin of error for the poll is +/- 4.3%.

78% of those surveyed said they were supportive of the Virginia Housing Trust Fund, a program that works to preserve and create new affordable rental housing in the state and to alleviate homelessness across the Commonwealth. Respondents overwhelmingly supported the continued use of the Housing Trust Fund to address

homelessness (80%) and supported the use of the fund for “aging in place” modifications that help Virginians remain in their homes as they get older (87%).

Voters were also very supportive of mechanisms to expand residential energy efficiency programs, which help families save money and reduce overall demand for new energy. 89% of Virginians favor holding energy companies accountable by requiring them to meet energy saving goals for their customers. Over half (61%) of those surveyed are also willing to pay a 50 cent surcharge on their utility bill to help fund weatherization and energy efficiency programs.

Virginia legislators, housing advocates, and energy efficiency experts shared their reactions to the results, reflecting on the importance of housing and the positive impacts housing policies and initiatives have had on their clients and constituents.

Delegate Chris Peace (R) of Hanover said, “Access to decent, affordable housing is a critical bipartisan issue facing many Virginians today. Not only is it important for family security, stable housing is the cornerstone of a healthy community. I am proud to serve on the House Appropriations Committee, which has supported funding to the Housing Trust Fund over the last few years, recognizing how housing is a pivotal economic engine as well.”

Delegate David Bulova (D) of Fairfax stated, “Safe, affordable housing is at the core of our quality of life. It affects almost every aspect of society, including our economy, transportation, healthcare, education, and the environment. It is not surprising that Virginians recognize this fact and overwhelmingly support initiatives to address housing affordability. As a member of the Housing Commission, I have seen how investments in the Virginia Housing Trust Fund have been used to provide a safety net for families on the verge of becoming homeless and to functionally end homelessness among veterans ... However, much remains to be done.”

Laura Lafayette, chief executive officer of the Richmond Association of REALTORS®, said, “Our most successful neighborhoods are the ones that have abundant housing opportunities. This poll shows Virginians clearly understand why we need to work together to guarantee that every person, whether they’re a firefighter, nurse, or teacher, can live affordably in the same community they contribute to each day.”

Michelle Krocker, executive director of the Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance explained that, “Virginia Housing Trust Fund dollars helped nonprofit developers in Arlington and Fairfax County leverage private debt to create housing for very low income families. In a high cost area such as Northern Virginia, this housing would not have been possible without investments from the Housing Trust Fund.”

Connie Staudinger, president of the Virginia Association of Housing and Community Development Officials (VAHCDO), stated, “The statewide poll results are encouraging and strongly underscore the desire to continue the Virginia Housing Trust Fund. VAHCDO members work every day to house the most vulnerable in our communities. While affordable housing development and preservation is reliant on multiple funding sources, chronic underfunding at the federal level has been a major challenge. Investments in housing by the General Assembly through the Virginia Housing Trust Fund have helped fill that gap and also boosts local economic activity.”

Billy Weitzenfeld, executive director of the Association of Energy Conservation Professionals (AECOP) of Floyd, VA stated, “AECOP has worked in the past to promote some type of Public Benefit Fund (PBF) for Virginia. Public

Benefit Funds traditionally involve a very small charge on a utility bill that everyone pays and collectively can add up to a generous revenue stream that is then used to provide annual funding for energy efficiency programs. Everyone pays and everyone benefits. It was great to see in the CHACE public opinion poll that a majority of Virginians would support this. PBF's have been very successful in other states and because it is an annual revenue stream it has a much more significant impact than one time incentives, grants, and/or rebates."

Elenor Hodges, executive director of Arlingtonians for a Clean Environment, said, "I strongly believe that helping local families improve the energy efficiency of their homes is an important way for them to save money. According to our analysis of utility data in several properties receiving energy retrofits through the Energy Masters program, the residents of the apartments saved an average of \$11 per month on their energy bills. And beyond that, by providing education about ways that residents can make simple changes in their daily routines to save energy, the residents were empowered to reduce their energy use and save money throughout their lives."

In a May 2017 [press release](#), Governor Terry McAuliffe announced the names of Housing Trust Fund award recipients, and explained why investment in housing is important for Virginians. "By focusing on the development and preservation of affordable housing, we are strengthening the foundation of our new Virginia economy and giving Virginians the tools they need to access opportunity," he stated.

Read the full survey report and learn more about the Campaign for Housing and Civic Engagement at www.chaceva.org. For questions, contact Zack Miller, Director of Policy for the Virginia Housing Alliance, at zmiller@vahousingalliance.org or 804-678-8893.

The following organizations are CHACE partners:

Virginia Housing Alliance
Virginia Poverty Law Center
Habitat for Humanity Virginia
Better Housing Coalition
Virginia Supportive Housing
New Hope Housing
Homestretch
FACETS
Shelter House
Virginia Association of Housing and
Community Development Officials
Urban Hope

Housing Opportunities Made Equal
Northern Virginia Affordable Housing Alliance
Virginia Community Development Corporation
Alliance For Housing Solutions
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project:HOMES
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