

Virginia NOW's Legislative Agenda For the 2015 Session

Based on three core principles: increasing economic equality, ensuring women's access to health care and safety, and expanding civil and human rights.

Virginia NOW works to make legal, political, social and economic change in order to eliminate sexism and all oppression and to enact laws, policies and regulations that enable women and girls to achieve their full potential.

The 2015 session of the Virginia General Assembly gets under way this afternoon and this is a quick preview of what's in store for us (yes, it's long...but it's quick to read).

Many great bills have been filed (see below) but both the Senate and the House of Delegates are controlled by Republicans who rarely support NOW priorities. So... even though the outlook for bills on women's rights and equality isn't promising, we can educate, dialogue and build bridges. Join us online or in Richmond.

For more information on any matter concerning our legislative agenda, please contact [Legislative VP Marj Signer](#).

Virginia NOW will follow bills relating to our women's rights agenda throughout the session, report to you each Tuesday, and also let you know when to contact your delegate, senator or members of specific committees. You can read bills at the [General Assembly site](#) and at [VPAP](#) - the non-partisan Virginia Public Access Project. Please take a moment to be sure you have your delegate's and senator's contact information, [which is here](#) (type your address in the right corner). Want to know what your elected officials are up to? [Click on](#) his/her name under House listings and Senate listings.

Come to Richmond for an up-close look at the legislative process. The League of Women Voters (LWV) Legislative Roundtable is held at 8:30 a.m. every Wednesday morning at the [General Assembly Building](#) and is an opportunity to hear legislators and advocacy organizations. Lobby days are held by individual organizations and coalitions.

If you want to contact bill sponsors, or your representatives about these issues, [please use this page](#).

LOBBY DAYS, DATES AND TIMES

- The gun violence prevention coalition, Monday, January 19. Sign up [here](#).
- The ERA coalition, 9:30 am Wednesday, January 21, directly after the LWV roundtable. Contact VA NOW [President Diana Egozcue](#).
- The Pro-Choice Coalition Day of Action, in Northern Virginia, Hampton Roads and Richmond, January 22, the Roe v. Wade anniversary. [RSVP here](#).
- [The Health Care for All Virginians Coalition](#), January 28. This coalition advocates for expanding Medicaid for low-income Virginians.
- VA NOW and League of Women Voters Women's Lobby Day, Wednesday, February 4. Contact [Marj at VA NOW](#) for more information.

Important bills we're supporting this session include:

Economic Equality

Minimum Wage - Women make up a majority of low-wage workers in Virginia, and it's essential to close the pay gap and promote economic security. Bills include HB 1512, introduced by Delegate Marcus Simon, HB 1654, Delegate Ken Plum, and SB 681, Senator David Marsden.

Equal Pay - Virginia women are still paid only 78 cents for every dollar paid to men and African American women and Latinas are paid even less. Several bills would increase the amount an employee can recover as damages for a violation of the existing requirement that employees receive equal pay for equal work irrespective of sex **from double to triple** the amount of wages withheld in violation of the requirement. Bills include SB 772, Senator Donald McEachin, and HB 1823, Delegate and NOW member Charniele Herring.

Health and Safety

Sexual Assault on Campus - Five Virginia universities (UVA, William & Mary, U of Richmond, JMU, VMI) are being investigated for possible violations of federal law over the handling of sexual violence and harassment complaints. Several bills would establish reporting requirements for sexual assault on campuses and expand services for victims of assault. They are SB 734, Senators Richard Saslaw and Janet Howell; SB 712, Senator Richard Black; and HB 1343, Delegate Eileen Filler-Corn.

Leave for Domestic Violence Victims - One in four women will experience domestic violence. HB 1945, introduced by Delegate Jennifer McClellan, would require employers to allow an employee to take domestic violence leave, with or without pay, if the employee or the employee's family member is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

Advisory Committee on Sexual and Domestic Violence - HB 1954, introduced by Delegate McClellan, would establish a committee to advise and assist government entities on the prevention and reduction of domestic violence in Virginia and administration of grant funds.

Repeal of Mandatory Ultrasound Prior to an Abortion - SB 733, introduced by Senator Mamie Locke, and HB1524, introduced by Delegate Jeion Ward, would remove the medically unnecessary requirement that a woman undergo an ultrasound prior to an abortion. SB920, introduced by Senator Jennifer Wexton, would remove the specific mandated time frame of 24 hours prior to an abortion for the ultrasound (unless the woman lives at least 100 miles from the facility where the abortion is to be performed). There is no medical reason for the 24-hour delay and it constitutes harassment.

Breast-feeding - Delegate Dave Albo's bill, HB1499, would allow a mother to breast-feed any place where she is lawfully present. Current law allows breast-feeding only on property owned, leased, or controlled by the Commonwealth.

Removing Firearms From A Person Convicted of Stalking, Domestic Sexual Assault - Senator and NOW member Barbara Favola's bill, SB 943, would prohibit a person who has been convicted of stalking, assault and battery of a family or household member, or sexual battery from possessing or transporting a firearm. The bill provides for a process for a reinstatement of his rights to possess or transport a firearm.

Stalking - HB1453, introduced by Delegate Jackson Miller, provides that a person who on more than one occasion engages in conduct directed at another person to coerce, intimidate, or harass, or when he knows or reasonably should know that the conduct coerces, intimidates, or harasses, the other person or the other person's family or household member is guilty of stalking, a Class 1 misdemeanor.

Civil and Human Rights

The Equal Rights Amendment - A top priority for NOW and our allies. HJ495, introduced by Delegate Scott Surovell, and SJ216, introduced by Senator Adam Ebbin, would ratify the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution that was proposed by Congress in 1972. [Learn more.](#)

Human Trafficking, 21st Century Slavery

Virginia sadly ranks #6 among states in reported human trafficking cases. Northern Virginia is a hub of human trafficking due to Dulles International Airport and Route I-95 - but much trafficking is local, involving gangs and high school students. This is a bipartisan issue! Democratic Senator John Edwards' bill, SB710, and Republican Delegate Timothy Hugo's bill, HB 1964, would expand penalties for trafficking. Delegate Hugo and Republican Senator Mark Obenshain are also introducing a bill to create a stand-alone statute to address key gaps in Virginia law.

Adoption - SB 679, introduced by Senator Janet Howell, would enable a person other than the spouse of a birth or adoptive parent to adopt a child if the child has only one parent. This is important to same-sex couples with a child.

Pregnancy Discrimination - HB 1449, introduced by Delegate Delores McQuinn, would prohibit an employer from discharging any employee on the basis of childbirth or related medical conditions, including lactation. Currently, this protection applies only to employers of more than 5 but fewer than 15 persons.

Nonpartisan Redistricting - Throughout Virginia, election outcomes have been rigged by gerrymandered districts. SB 824, introduced by Senator John C. Miller, would provide a process for a statewide referendum on an independent redistricting commission. The results would be advisory only, and the referendum would be held at the November 2015 general election.