



VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE - 2024 SESSION UPDATE

Quick recap of the new General Assembly landscape

The 2023 Elections brought the largest single-year turnover in the General Assembly in modern times. The House has **35** (out of 100) new members, and the Senate has **17** (out of 40) new members, with 8 of the new members being former members of the House. Democrats now hold 21 seats in the Senate (down from 22 in 2023) and 51 seats in the House (up from 49 in 2023). Additionally, it was an historic election that saw the first Black Speaker of the House (Don Scott) and first Black Woman as Chair of SFAC (Louise Lucas). With the retirement of many senior members, especially in the Senate, and control in the House shifting to the Democrats, there are a significant number of new committee chairs the powerful Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee, as well as the Senate Education & Health Committee. And all House committees are now chaired by Democrats. This means the Democrats control the committee dockets and when bills make it to the floor, as well as the legislative side of the budget process.

The 2024 Session

Legislation:

While higher education did not figure prominently on the legislative side this session, with the bigger focus on K12 and early childhood, there were nonetheless several pieces of legislation of importance to the colleges and universities. Notably, HB48 and SB46 which prohibits the use of legacy admissions. In the area of athletics, HB1505 makes a number of significant changes to how institutions address the issue of Name, Image and Likeness.

Other bills include HB713 which was signed by the Governor and requires each public institution to develop and implement policies requiring that a campus safety and emergency preparedness training program by the end of the first semester. SB 506 would have allowed each institution to have its university counsel in lieu of being represented by attorney who report to the Attorney General. However, this was one of 153 bills the Governor vetoed. There was legislation that sought changes to the Virginia Military Survivors Dependent Education program (VMSDEP), but those were carried over until next year. However, several changes are under consideration in the budget and are described below.

Budget:

After receiving Governor Youngkin's only two-year budget in December the House and Senate made a number of notable changes to the Governor's proposed budget, including more funds for internships, military survivor/dependent waivers, financial aid, tuition mitigation funding, as well as faculty and staff pay raises. Additionally, they included more funding on the capital side of \$1.8 billion in general fund cash or general fund tax-supported debt for projects.

On April 8, the Governor released 233 amendments to the conference report. There were a few items of particular importance to higher education. The first includes additional general fund, though less than proposed in the conference report, that is available to institutions that hold tuition increases to no more than 3% or COI, whichever is less. Additionally, the Governor adjusts the funds to support the Innovative Internship Program and requires program results to be assessed in fall 2025. Finally, the Governor removed new language providing some guardrails on the application of the VMSDEP program, as well as reducing some of the additional funds provided to the institutions to offset the growing cost of the program.

Looking Ahead

The legislature will return for a reconvened session on April 17th to address the Governor's actions on bills and amendments to the Budget. Given the number of changes proposed by the Governor and the complexity of the process, it may be several weeks before we know the final outcome on the budget. And a reminder that unless a new budget is approved, the Commonwealth will not have a budget beginning July 1, 2024.

As we wrap up the 2024 Session, it is worth noting that higher education and higher education funding will be the topic of several upcoming conversations. First, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) announced at their December meeting that they will undertake a study on higher education cost efficiency during 2024. Additionally, there is language in the budget that calls for a joint subcommittee to review public higher education funding policies and make recommendations to the House and Senate "money committee." This review will not begin until after December 1, 2024.