



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Office of the Governor

Ralph S. Northam
Governor

October 7, 2020

The Honorable Richard L. Saslaw
The Honorable Janet D. Howell
The Honorable George L. Barker
Senate of Virginia
Richmond, Virginia 23219

The Honorable Eileen Filler-Corn
The Honorable Luke Torian
The Honorable Mark D. Sickles
House of Delegates
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Colleagues:

This special session has proven to be unlike any other in Virginia's modern era, and Virginians appreciate your hard work under unique and trying conditions. So do I. Together, we are continuing the new direction we began this year, demonstrating a united state government that advances a shared agenda, even during a pandemic and a recession. It's a shining note of optimism in a tough year, and we can all be proud of shaping the way ahead for Virginia.

As we discussed by phone, I have reviewed the budgets passed by each house, and I want to thank you for supporting my proposals to address targeted issues that the special session was called for— budgetary impacts related to the pandemic and resulting recession, and social and criminal justice issues. Your budgets also include a number of priorities that do not directly relate to either the pandemic response or social and criminal justice issues. While I support the spirit behind many of these proposals, this is not the time to commit future resources unrelated to the special session, especially when the public and stakeholders largely have been left out of these deliberations.

I am writing today because it is important for Virginia to take emergency special-session budgetary actions now only if they reflect extensive public input that acknowledges the long-term consequences of those decisions. Otherwise, we should preserve financial options for the 2021 regular session, when public health and economic conditions could allow us to make longer-term spending commitments that reflect the people's input.

Right now, the best course is to address the pandemic and the recession by preserving cash and continuing to building capacity to respond if the economy declines further. Doing otherwise threatens to erode the Commonwealth's ability to weather the current pandemic economy without making budget cuts, reducing services, or laying off state workers.

Specifically:

- I ask that you refrain from passing a budget that contains “contingent appropriations.” These measures put certain priorities at the front of the line at the expense of others, and make important policy decisions that the public should rightly be able to weigh in on, which they have not yet been able to do. The public would be able to have a voice in the process during the regular upcoming session.
- I ask you to leave intact the authority that you previously designated for the Executive Branch to respond to the needs of the moment in a flexible manner. An emergency response needs less bureaucracy, not more. As an Army veteran, I know that wars fought by committee are losing battles.
- Lastly, I ask you to maintain the current flexibility for state-level pandemic response funds provided through the existing general fund appropriation. After the federal CARES Act funding expires on December 30, the pandemic will remain and will continue generating new costs--such as a vaccine program—and Virginia will need tools to address these costs.

I need to be clear that I want to sign the budget you send me. But that is not yet possible.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph S. Northam". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ralph" being the most prominent.

Ralph S. Northam

C: The Honorable Aubrey L. Layne, Jr.
Ms. April Kees
Ms. Anne Oman
Mr. Daniel S. Timberlake