



March 23, 2026

Governor Abigail Spanberger
1111 E. Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Spanberger:

I am writing on behalf of the Arlington County Civic Federation, consisting of over 80 member organizations, including 53 local civic associations (with a population over 200,000), non-profits, and citizen groups, representing a broad cross-section of the Arlington community. We want to express concerns with SB388 (affordable housing; religious organizations and other nonprofit tax-exempt properties), that is currently on your desk for review. For many years, the Arlington County Civic Federation has worked with Arlington County to support legislation that would increase local authority and control. The Civic Federation continues to believe that local control is in the best interests of each local jurisdiction, especially in regard to community planning and zoning decision-making. In many ways, Arlington County is unique in the Commonwealth, and we are concerned that the trend toward one-size-fits-all zoning will have many unintended consequences when applied here.

The Arlington County Civic Federation would like to register these key concerns with the bill:

1. Removing authority from local government – or introducing a complex “power-sharing” arrangement that splits authority between state and local authorities for land use and zoning at the local levels. We have learned that most residents in Arlington were not aware of this legislation, nor should they have been since we know that zoning has long been only a local action.
2. The transfer of decision making with broad consequences – including the existing Comprehensive Plans of local jurisdictions – from locally-elected officials to unelected administrative officials. This severely reduces public input and review of those who are directly affected.

To address these concerns, we ask that you:

1. Remove the 500-foot provisions in line 320-325 Section D using your line-item amendment power, or require reenactment of these provisions. This language in § 15.2-2288.9, was added in January and was unvetted and unstudied. This removal preserves by-right development (up to 20 units/acre) while allowing local stakeholders the ability to

analyze the impact of by-right proposals tied to nearby density, height and setbacks. This update is critical for areas like Arlington where high density was planned near low-density residential neighborhoods with an understanding that sector plans would guide future development decisions in those edge communities.

2. Amend the bill to let us stay the course when affordable housing targets are being met. Allow local authorities to maintain decision-making power in jurisdictions where a threshold of affordable housing has been met as planned, and is set to achieve affordable housing goals. For example, Arlington is on track to achieve 17.7% of rental housing at 60% AMI or below by 2040, according to Arlington County Staff's recent 10-year report. Statewide standards could incentivize jurisdictions to set and report on their goals.
3. Revise the bill to reconcile conflicts between state and local legislation. Add language that clearly states that this bill does not change local responsibility to implement Virginia laws that establish safety and capacity standards for development and occupancy.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

NJ Giacobbe, Jr.

Nicholas J. Giacobbe, Jr.
President

CC: Senator Barbara Favola
Senator Elizabeth Bennett-Parker
Senator Jeremy McPike
Dan Helmer, Delegate
Joshua Cole, Delegate
Adele McClure, Delegate
Patrick Hope, Delegate
Alfonso Lopez, Delegate
Arlington County Board