

After weeks of negotiations, the House of Delegates and Senate of Virginia passed a budget on Wednesday. Perhaps most notably, the budget includes language to begin the process of expanding Medicaid in Virginia. The passed budget also includes a few other important initiatives related to [Blueprint Virginia 2025](#), the Virginia business community's long-term economic development plan. As we continue to work to improve our ranking in national business climate surveys, these items will help improve Virginia's economic competitiveness grow our economy. Here are some of the highlights of the budget passed earlier this week:

### **Business Climate**

*Blueprint Virginia 2025* recommends creating several programs at the Virginia Economic Development Partnership (VEDP) to help Virginia reclaim its spot as the best state for business:

- a customized, turn-key workforce program
- a business ready sites program
- and a marketing, branding, and site consultant program.
- The budget provides funding for each of these programs at VEDP, which will help Virginia reclaim its stops as the best state for business.

Prosperity for all regions continues to be a key priority of the Virginia Chamber's and the current budget includes additional funding for the **Virginia Initiative for Growth and Opportunity in Each Region (GO Virginia)** program.

### **Workforce and Education**

A key recommendation of *Blueprint Virginia 2025* is to attract, retain, and expand **high-need credentials and degrees** that are linked the needs of business and are crucial to the economy. The budget includes increased support for higher education operating funds for **targeted degrees** in data science, technology, engineering, health care and education. In addition to targeted degree attainment, the budget includes increased funding for the **Fast Forward** program – a pay for performance program in Virginia's Community College and Higher Education Centers to incentivize enrollment and attainment of industry recognized workforce credentials. The budget also includes language and funding in the second year to develop and launch the **Commonwealth Cyber Initiative**, which will help Virginia capitalize on its potential for growing its cyber security industry.

Connecting business to students in Virginia's postsecondary and secondary education systems is another key recommendation of Blueprint, and the budget includes a pilot program at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to incentivize our colleges and universities to create **internship programs in partnership with Virginia's business community**. The budget includes funding to **strengthen Virginia's dual enrollment system** and implement HB919 - a legislative priority of the Virginia Chamber's passed during the regular session.

### **Transportation**

*Blueprint Virginia 2025* calls for the widening and deepening of the **Norfolk Harbor Channels at the Port of Virginia** to retain its competitive advantage as the East Coast's deepest port. The budget contains funding to accomplish this recommendation of Blueprint.

### **Health Care**

*Blueprint Virginia 2025* advocates for **innovative solutions to expand health care coverage that reduce health care costs** for Virginia's business community. The budget expands Virginia's Medicaid program through a business-oriented approach that embraces a work or job training requirement for recipients.

The Governor is expected to sign the budget soon.