

Mayors and Chairs of the Counties of Arlington, Fairfax, Loudoun, and Prince William, and the
Cities of Alexandria, Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, and Manassas Park

February 17, 2016

Northern Virginia General Assembly Delegation
General Assembly Building
Capitol Square
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Northern Virginia General Assembly Delegation Members:

As the Mayors and Chairs of Northern Virginia, we are writing to you about an issue of great importance to our region – funding for Cost of Competing Adjustment (COCA) for school support positions in the 2016-2018 biennium budget. We thank you for your efforts to restore COCA funding in previous years. As you know, Governor McAuliffe included full restoration for COCA in FY 2018 in his 2016-2018 biennium budget, which is a significant positive step in returning to full funding levels. We respectfully urge you to support full restoration of COCA for K-12 support positions in FY 2017 as well, which would be approximately \$41 million for all COCA recipients (a figure which includes recipients of the “phased-in” COCA – the Counties of Clarke, Culpeper, Fauquier, Frederick, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and Warren, and the Cities of Winchester and Fredericksburg). We appreciate your work on budget amendments requesting this funding, which is particularly critical as localities and school divisions prepare their budgets for the upcoming fiscal year.

As you know, the Cost of Competing Adjustment is an additional factor that has historically been used in the state K-12 funding formula, recognizing the higher salaries required in certain high-cost areas of the Commonwealth to attract and retain highly qualified teachers and support staff. COCA was first proposed as a specific factor in Virginia’s education funding formula in a 1988 JLARC report to address the salary school divisions must pay in order to compete in a regional labor market, and was reaffirmed as essential in a 2012 JLARC report. The COCA factor merely reflects the reality of running school systems in our region – hiring and retaining employees is simply more expensive in the Northern Virginia area than in other parts of the state.

According to the ACCRA Cost of Living Index (widely used by the federal government, economists, researchers and corporations to measure relative cost of living), the cost of living in Northern Virginia is *35-66% higher* than other regions of the Commonwealth. In fact, the Commonwealth utilizes a broader pay scale for state employees working in Northern Virginia, which includes a potential pay supplement of up to 20-30%, reflecting the increased cost of hiring and retaining high quality employees in our region.

As you know, through the bipartisan efforts of our region’s legislative delegation, numerous efforts to eliminate COCA for support positions were defeated, and funding was partially restored in prior years. However, during the unexpected and massive revenue shortfall the state experienced at the end of FY 2014, COCA funding for support positions was totally eliminated from the budget. The

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elimination of COCA was all the more troubling following the 2009 imposition of a cap on K-12 support positions, which cut approximately 40 percent of funding for support positions statewide.

It is essential to note that the localities that receive COCA funding have approximately 485,000 school children, or 39 percent of the school children in the Commonwealth. These 18 school divisions are also those that have an increasing number of children. The jurisdictions being harmed by the elimination of COCA lost nearly \$73 million in COCA funds over the 2014-2016 biennium, while they also gained a projected 16,000 school children over that time.

Full funding of COCA would ensure that our localities remain competitive for vital support positions, which include assistant superintendents, instructional professional staff, security, technical, clerical, attendance, health and technology staff, and operations and maintenance staff. It would be impossible to operate a school system without such staff.

Strong public schools are vital to our region maintaining its economic competitiveness. For these reasons, we strongly support full funding for Cost of Competing funding for K-12 support positions in both years of the 2016-2018 biennium budget, and look forward to working with you to strengthen the local-state partnership, ensuring that our public education system is the first class system Virginians deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

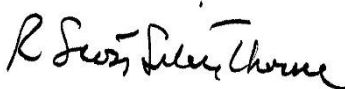
Sincerely,



Allison Silberberg
Mayor, City of Alexandria




Libby Garvey
Chair, Arlington County Board



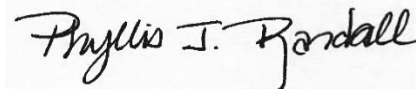
R. Scott Silverthorne
Mayor, City of Fairfax



Sharon Bulova
Chair, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors



David Tarter
Mayor, City of Falls Church



Phyllis J. Randall
Chair, Loudoun County Board of Supervisors

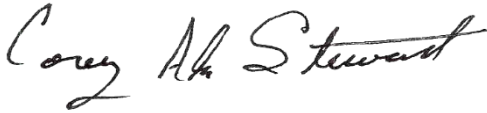
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Harry J. Parrish II
Mayor, City of Manassas



Frank Jones
Mayor, City of Manassas Park



Corey A. Stewart
Chair, Prince William County Board of County Supervisors