

FACT SHEET



virginia interfaith
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Incorporating Community Health in Local Comprehensive Planning

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SUPPORT

[HB 208](#) Del. Simonds

[SB 595](#) Sen. Bagby

The Problem

In past years cities like Richmond saw flash floods, and communities across the United States experienced severe weather that has taken lives, devastated families, and caused economic destruction.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Centers for Environmental Information has estimated **\$165 billion** dollars in damage for 2022 U.S. disaster events, including western wildfires, drought, heatwaves, and tornadoes .

Incorporating community health into planning can benefit a locality by allowing them an opportunity to decrease community health burdens such as reducing pollution exposure, improving air and water quality, ensuring adequate emergency management, and increasing resilience to increased flooding and excessive heat.

Policy Solution

Virginia should allow localities, both cities and counties, to incorporate an increased focus on community health into their regular comprehensive planning processes and efforts.

A locality should have the option to decide that it would like to improve community health and environmental quality should they choose to do so. As a Dillon Rule state, the General Assembly must empower them to do so.

Who Benefits

Communities

Allowing localities to include a healthy communities strategy in their comprehensive plans will positively impact both public safety and public health as it will increase the amount of planning around solutions to remedy health disparities, boosting healthy communities for all.

This bill will allow rural counties to incorporate a healthy communities strategy into their comprehensive planning in order to place an additional focus on the areas of increasing broadband Internet access, job training, access to healthy foods, and aging in place.

Public engagement

This bill will provide opportunities to increase public engagement in planning that is critical for increasing community health outcomes, civic engagement, and reducing health disparities.

Low-income families & communities of color

Frequently polluting facilities are placed near low-income families and communities of color contributing to negative health outcomes through exposure to pollution and toxins. A healthy communities strategy can help to address this increased vulnerability and increase equal protection from environmental and health hazards.

Virginia Interfaith Power & Light collaborates, as people of faith, to grow healthy communities and advance climate justice through education, advocacy, and worship.