



VIRGINIA
PENINSULA
CHAMBER



Public Policy Update – Sept 2026

Key Takeaways From Our First Roundtable and an Early Look at the 2027 Policy Landscape

By Chris Davidson, Government Relations Consultant

The Peninsula Chamber's 2026 Legislative Roundtable Series is officially underway, and if the first session is any indication, there will be no shortage of issues for our Public Policy Committee to consider as we begin developing priorities for the 2027 General Assembly Session.

One Down, Four To Go...

Our opening roundtable on August 11 focused on nonprofits and community-serving organizations, drawing approximately 60 participants and filling the Chamber's conference space. The strong turnout reflected both the economic importance of the nonprofit sector and the range of challenges these organizations are navigating.

Rather than focusing on a single piece of legislation, the conversation highlighted how interconnected many of those challenges have become. Healthcare access and affordability were significant themes, including concerns about changes in insurance coverage and the potential expiration of federal premium tax credits. Participants also discussed childcare availability, housing costs, workforce participation, and the difficulty of helping working families bridge gaps that often fall outside traditional government or employer programs.

For nonprofit employers themselves, workforce pressures continue to be a major concern. Organizations are competing for employees in the same labor market as private-sector and government employers, frequently with fewer resources available for wages and benefits. The discussion also touched on potential tools that could help smaller organizations provide competitive benefits... including collaborative approaches that achieve the scale necessary to make healthcare coverage more affordable.

These conversations are precisely why the Chamber established the roundtable series. Good public policy begins by understanding how laws, regulations, and economic conditions are affecting employers and employees in the trenches.

Looking Ahead to 2027

The Chamber's Public Policy Committee is already beginning to identify several issues likely to command attention when legislators return to Richmond in January.

Workforce and employer mandates will remain near the top of the list.

Virginia enacted a statewide Paid Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program during the 2026 session. The law provides for as much as 12 weeks of paid leave and ultimately will be financed through employer and employee payroll contributions, with benefits currently scheduled to begin in 2028. For the business community, much of the policy discussion now shifts from whether such a program should exist to how it will be implemented... including

cost, administrative requirements, coordination with existing employer benefits and the impact on smaller employers.

Virginia's minimum wage will also increase from \$12.77 per hour in 2026 to \$13.75 on January 1, 2027, keeping compensation and workforce-cost issues in the conversation.

The Public Policy Committee will also continue watching proposals involving Virginia's Right-to-Work law. Attempts to repeal or weaken it have surfaced repeatedly in Richmond, including during the 2026 session, while underlying Right-to-Work protections remain in Virginia law today. Understanding how changes in employment law affect business recruitment, expansion, and workforce relationships are always an important part of the Chamber's advocacy.

Energy, Data Centers and Virginia's Growth

Few subjects are developing faster than the convergence of energy policy, economic development, and digital infrastructure. (Which happens to be the topic of Legislative Roundtable #2)

Virginia is home to the nation's largest concentration of data centers, and policymakers are wrestling with how to balance their extraordinary economic impact against rapidly growing demands on the electric grid, water resources, land use and surrounding communities.

The 2024 JLARC study outlined a series of potential legislative options involving utility infrastructure, cost allocation, water consumption, sound and local land-use authority. The General Assembly has continued that work. Among other actions, Virginia now requires additional site assessments for certain high-energy-use facilities, while lawmakers have established additional studies and work groups examining issues ranging from distributed energy resources to data-center waste heat.

Perhaps most importantly for 2027, a legislative joint subcommittee is reviewing Virginia's data center tax incentives, economic benefits, environmental and quality-of-life impacts, electricity and water use, and potential mechanisms for generating additional state revenue from the industry. Its recommendations are due by December 15, 2026... just weeks before the General Assembly convenes.

Building the Chamber's 2027 Agenda

Over the coming weeks, the roundtable series will continue examining major policy areas affecting the Peninsula economy. Each discussion will help the Public Policy Committee distinguish between statewide issues facing virtually every Virginia employer and those that have particular importance to Hampton Roads. The goal is not simply to react to legislation once hundreds of bills have been introduced in January. It is to enter the 2027 session with a clear understanding of what Peninsula employers and community organizations need, where emerging policy challenges are headed, and where the Chamber can provide a constructive and credible voice.