2022 ADVOCACY REPORT

The 2022 General Assembly session returned to in-person sessions this year, including face-to-face meeting of legislators at the Pocahontas Building in Richmond. Meeting in-person is so much better than remotely, and to a person, everyone who visited or accessed their legislators this session was grateful for the return of face-to-face encounters, even though COVID 19 was lurking in the building.

As an aside, this should be the last year for the General Assembly offices in the Pocahontas Building, since the new General Assembly Building is reaching completion of a four-year demolition and construction process (https://virginiageneralassembly.gov/GABwebcam.html). A larger and much improved venue for the General Assembly offices, meeting spaces, and other events on Capitol Hill will be open by January 2023.

VCA experienced some successes and at least one failure in this session. Read on for more information. A more complete list of bills that VCA followed and their subsequent fate in the legislative process is available here: 2022 Public Policy Agenda

Bills passed into law

HB 215 and SB 62 (Del. Roxann Robinson and Sen. Barbara Favola) will establish a School Health Services Committee in the legislative branch to review and provide advice to the General Assembly and other policy makers regarding proposals that require local school boards to offer certain health services in a school setting. This committee will have 15 members, 8 of whom will be legislators. The remaining members include a public-school educator, a school nurse, and a public health expert. VCA’s own lobbyist, Becky Bowers-Lanier, was selected as the public health expert to serve on the committee.

HB 242 (Del. Dawn Adams) will add licensed professional counselors to the list of eligible providers who can disclose or recommend the withholding of patient records, face a malpractice review panel, and provide recommendations on involuntary temporary detention orders. This bill puts into law current LPC practice.

Bills failed and not supported by VCA

HB 1034 (Del. Ransone) This bill would have required the Department of Education to develop and each local school board to adhere to guidelines for the provision of counseling services in public schools, which shall include (i) provisions for parental consent; written parental notification; parental involvement, as appropriate; and confidentiality; (ii) procedures by which a parent may limit or prohibit his child's participation; (iii) appropriate exceptions to the procedures by which a parent may limit or prohibit his child's participation such as imminent need, health, or safety or maintaining order in the school; and (iv) any other provision deemed necessary by the Department. This bill was similar to one that Del. Ransone introduced two
years ago, and we were successful in defeating the bill then. The House of Delegates passed the bill, but the Senate Education and Health committee passed it by indefinitely.

**HB 1240** (Del. Phillip Scott). This bill would have permitted licensing of professional counselors with examination. This bill was identical to a bill that was patroned two years ago by Del. Scott’s predecessor, Del. Mark Cole. It failed to be reported out of the House Health, Welfare, and Institutions subcommittee.

**The not-so-good news**

**HB 829** (Del. Wilt) permits school boards to fulfill the staffing ratio requirements for school counselors by employing, under a provisional license for three school years with an allowance for an additional two-year extension with the approval of the division superintendent, any professional counselor licensed by the Board of Counseling, clinical social worker licensed by the Board of Social Work, psychologist licensed by the Board of Psychology, or other licensed counseling professional with appropriate experience and training, provided that any such individual makes progress toward completing the requirements for full licensure as a school counselor during such period of employment. This bill was brought by superintendents who claim they are unable to hire school counselors because of a workforce shortage. Given the workforce shortages in behavioral health clinicians generally, it is difficult to appreciate that this “solution” will actually work.

**SB 257** (Sen. Hashmi. In its original form, this bill would have entered Virginia into an interstate Counseling Compact. Unfortunately, the bill was modified in the Senate, and Sen. Hashmi asked that the bill be struck in the House. VCA will engage on an advocacy path to inform the members of the General Assembly about the need for the compact and will seek reintroduction of the compact measure in the 2023 General Assembly session.

**Other Advocacy Committee Activities**

Responding to VCA members that have concerns about the economic viability of becoming a counselor and progressing through residency, we convened a workgroup to begin identifying key challenges facing new counselors as well as possible deterrents to those seeking a career in the mental health field as counselors. In March, President Wendy Eckenrod-Green appointed a special committee to carry on the work of this group and focus that will set forth strategies for the Advocacy committee to expand residents' access to insurance panels and reimbursement, recommendations to counselor training programs to help prepare students to enter the Virginia workforce, and guidelines for agencies and practices to support and empower residents while they work toward licensure.