

FIELD REPORT : Q3 2020

VIRGINIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY AND THE FREEDOM TO VOTE



BUSINESSFORWARD
FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION



This report looks at what businesses across Virginia have to say about voting rights, transparency in government, and keeping money out of politics. It is meant to serve as a resource for local, state, and Congressional officials and media.

These business leaders share a simple, but powerful, point: State officials passing laws to suppress the vote and protect special interests in Virginia are putting our remarkable record of attracting new investment and creating jobs at risk.

State legislators in Virginia introduced seven bills this session that would have made voting more difficult. The slate of election laws included provisions to create stricter voter ID and notarization requirements, prohibit same day registration, and decrease the number of ballot drop-off locations.¹

For years, large corporations and dark money groups have dominated politics and overshadowed the voices of voters and small business owners who understand the political and economic needs of their communities. The *For the People Act* would level the playing field and ensure a Virginia government that reflects voters' vision to prioritize local investments.

Business Forward has worked with more than 5,250 entrepreneurs, executives, and small business owners across Virginia. If you are interested in learning more, we encourage you to reach out at info@businessfwd.org and participate in one of our trainings.

KEY THEMES FROM BUSINESS LEADERS ON DEMOCRACY REFORMS

SMALL BUSINESS LEADERS WANT MONEY OUT OF POLITICS MORE THAN ANYONE.

We're tired of being asked for contributions — and tired of being criticized for the ones we give. The only people who like the current system are incumbents and entrenched, special interests. Our system will work better if we take big, dark money out of campaigns.

TRANSPARENCY IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN BUSINESS. WE NEED MORE OF IT IN GOVERNMENT.

We're responsive to our stockholders, employees, and customers. Government should be more responsive to its citizens. Increased disclosure of political donations would ensure a government that listens to Main Street — not just big, corporate donors.

IF WE ALLOW CORRUPTION IN ELECTIONS, IT WILL SPREAD TO THE REST OF GOVERNMENT.

Protecting the integrity of our elections is key to preventing corruption in government. Gerrymandering and voter suppression are both ways to stay in office. An official without fear of her next election is more likely to break the rules.

WE BENEFIT FROM OPERATING IN THE WORLD'S "SAFE HAVEN" FOR BUSINESS. WE NEED TO PROTECT THAT.

Ignoring government corruption will make us look like the rest of the world, and that will make it harder for us to attract investment, open new markets, and create new jobs.

OUR EMPLOYEES, CUSTOMERS, AND SUPPLIERS WORK HARD EVERY DAY. WE SHOULDN'T MAKE IT HARDER TO VOTE.

Restrictive voter laws are messing with something that isn't broken. My employees manage long commutes, second jobs, night school, and family. They're not lazy. They're just busy — and responsible. We should make it easy for them to vote.

RESTRICTIVE VOTER LAWS DIVIDE OUR COMMUNITIES, AND NO ONE WANTS TO INVEST IN DIVIDED COMMUNITIES.

States compete with one another for new investment and jobs, and companies look for a talented workforce, sound infrastructure, good schools, and a strong community. These election laws send the wrong signal and will turn off investors. Once you start losing bids, it gets harder to catch up.

CORRUPTION AND RESTRICTIVE VOTING LAWS HIT VIRGINIA WHERE IT HURTS – NEW INVESTMENT



For years, Virginia has prospered because it welcomed investors, workers, and their families. It enjoys one of America’s strongest populations and economies, and its workforce is among the most talented and educated in the country.

But recent efforts by state legislators to suppress the vote and protect special interests threaten to divide our communities, make it harder for us to cooperate, and discourage new investment and jobs.

Companies looking to invest in new cities — for example, by building a new lab or factory, or opening a new call center — tend to look for a talented workforce, good schools, sound infrastructure, and a strong community. These self-interested bills send a “closed for new business” message to the rest of the country.

#1

MOST TALENTED
WORKFORCE (2019)²

#1

QUALITY OF HIGHER
EDUCATION (2021)³

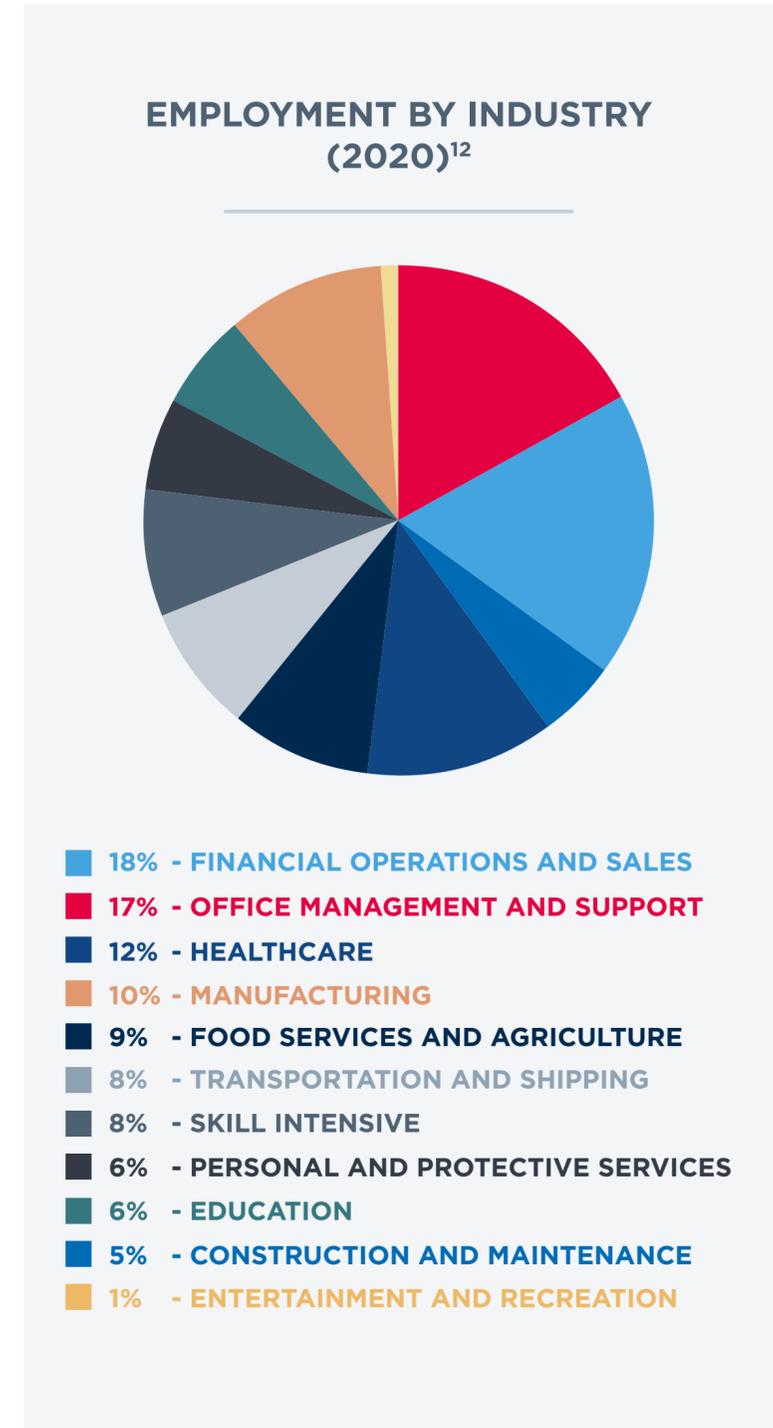
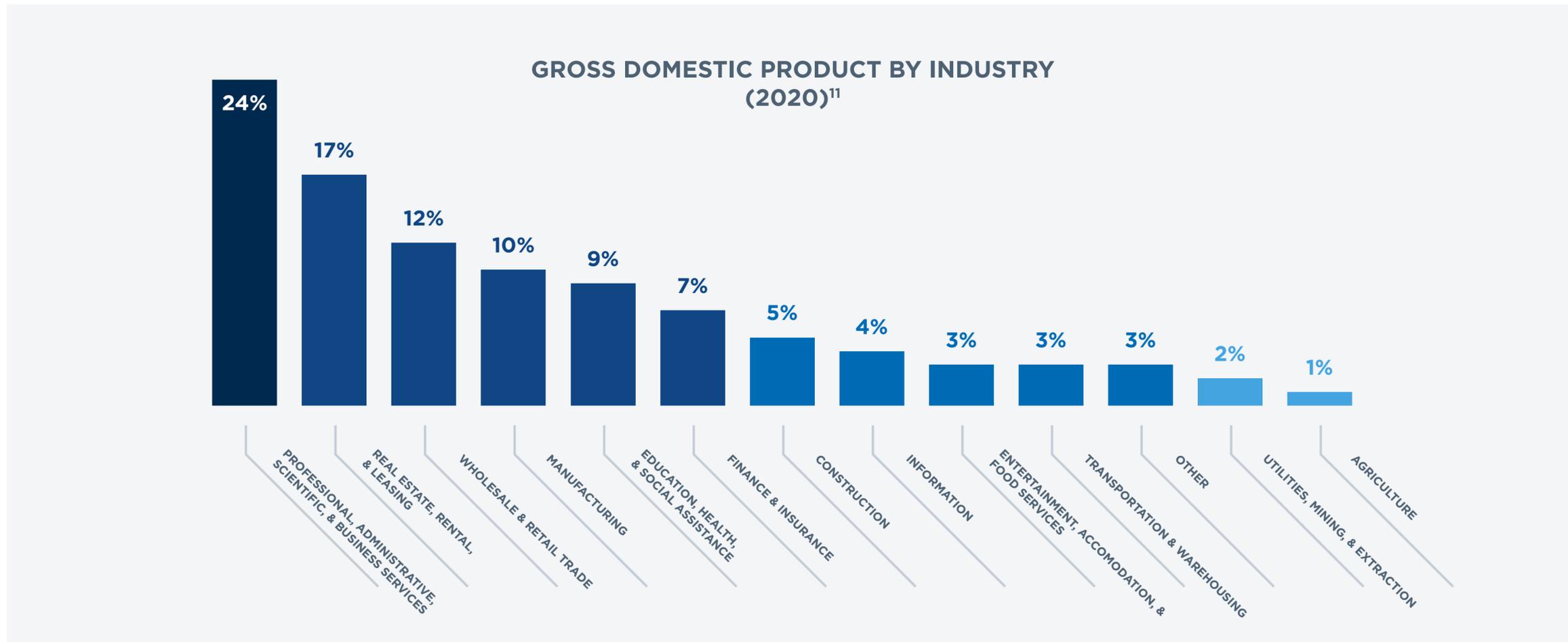
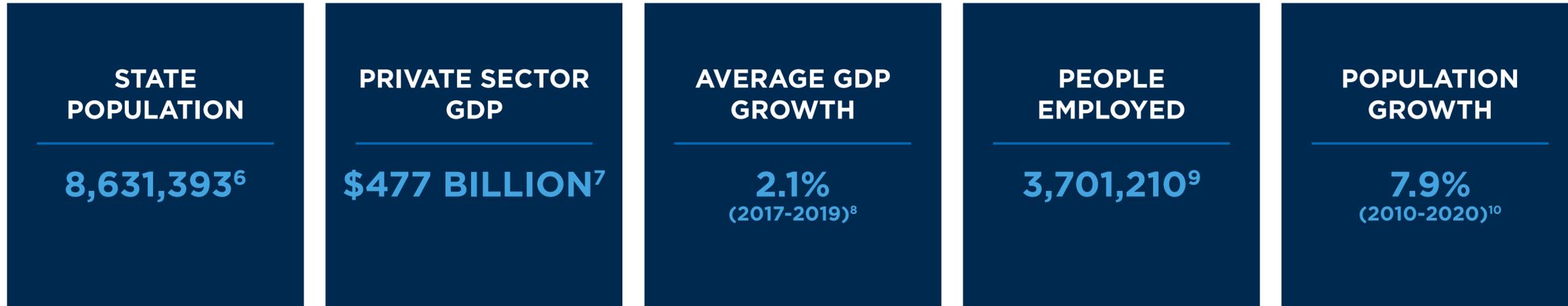
#9

BEST GDP
PERFORMANCE (2020)⁴

#18

POPULATION
GROWTH (2010-20)⁵

A SNAPSHOT OF VIRGINIA'S ECONOMY



VIRGINIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Headquartered in Richmond, Altria is a Fortune 500 company with thousands of Virginia employees.¹³

“ We believe voting is a foundational democratic process and should be a non-partisan issue. All eligible individuals should have their voices heard at the ballot box... Legislation impacting voting rights should advance principles of equality, fairness, and transparency, and should encourage more, not fewer, eligible voters to register and vote.¹⁴ ”

- TODD WALKER
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT, ALTRIA CLIENT SERVICES



American Express operates banks and offices throughout Virginia.¹⁷

“ Ensuring equal and easy access to vote, for all those who are eligible to participate in each state, is critical to upholding the principles our country was founded upon. Unfairly limiting that right is wrong... As a company and leadership team, we support this message and stand against any efforts to suppress voting which is a fundamental right that belongs to all Americans.¹⁸ ”

- STEPHEN J. SQUERI
CHAIRMAN & CEO, AMERICAN EXPRESS



American Airlines operates frequent flights to and from Norfolk International Airport, Richmond International Airport, and Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport.¹⁵

“ To make American’s stance clear: We are strongly opposed to this [anti-voter bill]... We value the democratic process and believe every eligible American should be allowed to exercise their right to vote, no matter which political party or candidate they support... Any legislation dealing with how elections are conducted must ensure ballot integrity and security while making it easier to vote, not harder.¹⁶ ”

American Airlines 

Apple has eight stores and 1,101 employees in Virginia.¹⁹

“ Apple believes that, thanks in part to the power of technology, it ought to be easier than ever for every eligible citizen to exercise their right to vote. We support efforts to ensure that our democracy’s future is more hopeful and inclusive than its past.²⁰ ”

- TIM COOK
CEO, APPLE



VIRGINIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Bank of America has 64 financial centers across the state, including 20 in the greater Richmond area.²¹

“

The right to vote should be distributed in the broadest sense and anything that goes against that should not be tolerated... it's [the states'] decision, but if we had a standard we could hold people to, that would be good.²²

”

- BRIAN MOYNIHAN
CEO, BANK OF AMERICA

BANK OF AMERICA 

Capital One Financial is a Fortune 500 company headquartered in McLean.²⁵

“

[There is] a responsibility we have as your neighbors, colleagues and fellow citizens to ensure each and every vote is counted... As an organization, we believe nothing is more powerful than the progress which comes from our freedom to express ideas, exercise discourse and choose our own leadership to guide our communities and this great nation forward.²⁶

”

- ANDY NAVARRETE
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS, CAPITAL ONE

CapitalOne 

Best Buy, one of the state's major electronics retailers, employs Virginians at its 32 retail locations across the state.²³

“

An election cannot be free nor fair if every eligible voter is not given a full chance to vote, or if laws exist that make it harder to do so. To the extent that proposed pieces of legislation are designed to make it more difficult for eligible Americans to cast a ballot, we offer our strong opposition and urge legislators to vote no.²⁴

”

**BEST
BUY** 

With 18 stores and a long history of providing low-income families with Internet access via “Lift Zones,” Comcast has strong community partners in Virginia.²⁷

“

We believe that all Americans should enjoy equitable access to secure elections and we have long supported and promoted voter education, registration and participation campaigns across the country to achieve that goal. Efforts to limit or impede access to this vital constitutional right for any citizen are not consistent with our values.²⁸

”


COMCAST

CASE STUDY: VIRGINIA AND CIVIC ALLIANCE PROTECT VOTING ACCESS



The Civic Alliance is a nonpartisan group of businesses working to build a future where everyone participates in our democracy. On April 2, it issued the following statement protecting voting access. More than 280 businesses have signed on, including more than 35 operating in Virginia.²⁹

THE RIGHT TO VOTE IS THE CORNERSTONE OF OUR DEMOCRACY.

We believe every American should have a voice in our democracy and that voting should be safe and accessible to all voters. We stand in solidarity with voters — and with the Black executives and leaders at the helm of this movement in our nonpartisan commitment to equality and democracy. If our government is going to work for all of us, each of us must have equal freedom to vote and elections must reflect the will of voters.

Our elections are not improved when lawmakers impose barriers that result in longer lines at the polls or that reduce access to secure ballot dropboxes. There are hundreds of bills threatening to make voting more difficult in dozens of states nationwide. We call on elected leaders in every state capitol and in Congress to work across the aisle and ensure that every eligible American has the freedom to easily cast their ballot and participate fully in our democracy.



VIRGINIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Delta Air Lines operates frequent flights in and out of Virginia, at Norfolk International Airport, Richmond International Airport, and Roanoke-Blacksburg Regional Airport.³⁰

“ The right to vote is sacred. It is fundamental to our democracy and those rights not only need to be protected, but easily facilitated in a safe and secure manner... [The claim of widespread voter fraud] is simply not true. Unfortunately, that excuse is being used in states across the nation that are attempting to pass similar legislation to restrict voting rights...we stand together in our commitment to protect and facilitate your precious right to vote.³¹ ”

- ED BASTIAN
CEO, DELTA AIR LINES



Intel employs Virginians at its office on Monument Corner Drive, in Fairfax.³⁴

“ Our country is stronger with more voting, not less, and with the evolution of technology, voting can be more secure, equitable and accessible. We oppose any legislation that seek to reduce the voting rights or opportunities of American citizens.³⁵ ”

- PAT GELSINGER
CEO, INTEL



General Motors' social investments have impacted nearly 3,700 Virginians. GM invests more than \$167 million a year in its 72 state suppliers. Last year, the automaker paid \$14.4 million in taxable wages to Virginians.³²

“ We are calling on Michigan lawmakers and state legislatures across the nation to ensure that any changes to voting laws result in protecting and enhancing the most precious element of democracy.³³ ”



Hyatt operates hotels across the state, including in Virginia Beach, Richmond, Charlottesville, and 13 in the Northern Virginia area.³⁶

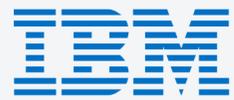
“ At Hyatt, we firmly believe that voting, a cornerstone of our democracy, is a fundamental right. Hyatt's purpose is to care for people so they can be their best, and we see voting as an important way to help citizens care for our communities — independent of an individuals' race or political affiliation. This is consistent with our longstanding commitment to equity and inclusion, and our belief that it is important for every voice to be heard. We look to our elected officials to ensure that every voter has a voice and to bring confidence to election results.³⁷ ”



VIRGINIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

IBM has been doing business in Virginia since 1920 and has major offices across the state. In 2014 alone, IBM contributed more than \$800,000 in cash, technology, and services to Virginia.³⁸

“ IBM believes that fair and equal access to voting is critical to our democracy. We urge elected officials nationwide to pursue policies that promote voter participation and build confidence in our voting infrastructure through processes that are fair, reliable and secure.³⁹ ”



The largest hospitality chain in the world, Marriott operates more than 190 hotels in Virginia.⁴²

“ Access to voting should not be eroded or made harder but rather, enhanced. Expanding access to voting will increase voter participation, strengthen our democracy, and ensure that more voices are heard in our quest to create what the Preamble of the Constitution called “a more perfect union.” We oppose any effort to restrict voting rights or access to polls as contrary to the spirit of democracy.⁴³ ”



Virginians across the state drive for Lyft — and nearly 50% of riders report that it would be “difficult or even impossible” to access essential services without the ridesharing option.⁴⁰

“ Lyft is firmly opposed to any laws limiting voting by mail, reducing the number of days people can vote, or pushing any other restrictions on access for eligible voters — particularly those disproportionately impacting Black and Brown communities... At Lyft, we will continue to look for ways to make access to transportation less of a barrier to voting, and speak out against voting restrictions that make it harder for Americans to participate in their democracy.⁴¹ ”



Microsoft has four office locations in Virginia: Reston, Glen Allen, Arlington, and Tysons Corner.⁴⁴

“ We share the views of other corporate leaders that it’s not only right but essential for the business community to stand together in opposition to the harmful provisions and other similar legislation that may be considered elsewhere... We hope that companies will come together and make clear that a healthy business requires a healthy community. And a healthy community requires that everyone have the right to vote conveniently, safely, and securely.⁴⁵ ”

- BRAD SMITH
PRESIDENT, MICROSOFT



CASE STUDY: VIRGINIA AND BLACK ECONOMIC ALLIANCE DEFEND DEMOCRACY



The Black Economic Alliance is a nonpartisan alliance of Black business leaders and allies focused on driving economic progress for the Black community through public policy and advocacy. The group issued the following statement on April 14. Hundreds of executives, lawfirms, nonprofits, and corporations have signed on, including more than 40 businesses operating in Arizona.⁴⁶

WE STAND FOR DEMOCRACY.

A Government of the people, by the people. A beautifully American ideal, but a reality denied to many for much of this nation's history. As Americans, we know that in our democracy we should not expect to agree on everything.

However, regardless of our political affiliations, we believe the very foundation of our electoral process rests upon the ability of each of us to cast our ballots for the candidates of our choice.

For American democracy to work for any of us, we must ensure the right to vote for all of us. We all should feel a responsibility to defend the right to vote and to oppose any discriminatory legislation or measures that restrict or prevent any eligible voter from having an equal and fair opportunity to cast a ballot.

Voting is the lifeblood of our democracy and we call upon all Americans to join us in taking a nonpartisan stand for this most basic and fundamental right of all Americans.



VIRGINIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

One of seven class one railroads operating in the U.S., Norfolk Southern Railway was founded in Norfolk in 1990 and has nearly 20,000 miles of rail.⁴⁷

“ Norfolk Southern believes that democracy is good for all businesses. But more than that, we believe in a foundational and fundamental right to fair, accessible, and secure elections at all levels and for all citizens. Two of our core values are Integrity and Respect, which mean doing the right thing and valuing the ideas and beliefs of everyone. We promote these values among our employees and in the communities in which we operate.⁴⁸ ”



United Airlines is one of the largest carriers in Virginia and flies to and from both Norfolk and Richmond international airports.⁵¹

“ Some have questioned the integrity of the nation’s election systems and are using it to justify stricter voting procedures, even though numerous studies have found zero credible evidence of widespread fraud in U.S. elections. Legislation that infringes on the right to vote of fellow Americans is wrong. We believe that leaders in both parties should work to protect the rights of eligible voters by making it easier and more convenient for them to cast a ballot and have it counted.⁵² ”



Southwest frequently flies in and out of Virginia at both Norfolk International Airport and Richmond International Airport.⁴⁹

“ The right to vote is foundational to our democracy and a right coveted by all. We believe every voter should have a fair opportunity to let their voice be heard. This right is essential to our nation’s success.⁵⁰ ”



With 166 facilities in more than 50 cities, UPS employees ship packages all over Virginia. The company has several thousand employees in the state.⁵³

“ UPS believes that voting laws and legislation should make it easier, not harder, for Americans to exercise their right to vote. UPS will continue to work with elected officials across the country to strengthen our democracy by facilitating equitable poll access and voting.⁵⁴ ”



VIRGINIA EMPLOYERS DEFEND DEMOCRACY

Verizon Wireless operates call centers and stores in Virginia. From Stafford to Fairfax, the service company has employees at more than 110 store locations.⁵⁵

“

We strongly oppose the passage of any legislation or the adoption of any measure that would make it harder for voters, including historically marginalized groups -- people of color, seniors, students and people with disabilities -- to exercise their fundamental right to cast a ballot... Voting is a civic action that not only brings us together, it also shapes our future. We call upon all policymakers to be guided by these fundamental principles, which are the cornerstone of democracy.⁵⁶

”

verizon^v

Wells Fargo has the nation's largest network of branches and operates close to 230 in Virginia. It also has call centers in the state and donates millions of dollars per year to local nonprofits, schools and community organizations.⁵⁷

“

Wells Fargo supports the right of every American to exercise their voice by voting. This is a key pillar of our democracy and we oppose legislation that attempts to limit this right or is discriminatory in nature. We also encourage Congress to establish Federal Election Day as a national holiday, thereby establishing the importance of this right.⁵⁸

”

**WELLS
FARGO**

DEMOCRACY REFORMS MATTER TO SMALL BUSINESSES

We are small business owners, executives, entrepreneurs, and investors from across the United States, and we are writing to urge you to support the For the People Act, a set of reforms for protecting and improving American democracy. The bill strengthens voting rights, promotes accountability in government, enhances election security, and increases transparency in political spending.

Rebuilding trust in elections is a critical step toward assuring voters that their votes will count and voices will be heard. Key reforms to democracy would ensure a government that reflects voters' vision to increase local investment, create good jobs, and foster equitable economies. Local business leaders understand what their communities need to achieve these goals.

Americans want a system that works for every voter. For far too long, barriers to voting have undercut the power and representation of Black, Latinx, AAPI, Native Americans and people with disabilities. As businesses committed to supporting the communities our employees live and work in, we urge Congress to take immediate action.

JOIN VIRGINIA BUSINESS LEADERS IN SUPPORT:

[CLICK HERE TO SIGN](#) 

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President
GFG Consulting
Reston

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Martha Jane Ripple
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Matt Erskine
Principal
Booz Allen Hamilton
Arlington

Sue Overton
Chesapeake

Teodora Elliott
Financial Specialist
SCDHC
Chesterfield

Tim Simmons
Consultant
Fairfax

Tracy Conard
Owner
Rouss Theatre and
Center for the Arts
Edinburg

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