

Laws

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System. A total of 1,289 of those measures cleared the legislature and were signed by Gov. Ralph Northam, the most since the governor assumed office in 2018.

The General Assembly will reconvene in August to address COVID-19's impact on the state budget, while tackling police reform following protests prompted by the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis police custody.

"I will look for policy proposals that protect our communities, increase accountability, transparency and diversity in law enforcement and improve the way we handle our response to people in a mental health crisis," Northam said Thursday. "These are serious issues and will require a thoughtful, serious process to create real reform that works for our communities."

While the majority of new laws take effect Wednesday, several of the big-ticket measures lawmakers passed, including a minimum wage increase and allowing public employees to collectively bargain, won't become law until 2021.

Here's a look at some notable legislation that takes effect Wednesday:

Abortion

Legislation rolling back abortion regulations, including the mandatory 24-hour waiting period, the required ultrasound and the requirement that a woman be given certain printed materials before she could undergo the procedure, will become law.

Casinos

Lawmakers voted to legalize casino gambling in five Virginia cities, including Richmond, with voter consent. The state's share of gaming revenues would go toward school repair, modernization and construction. The legislation would let Norfolk, Portsmouth, Danville and Bristol approve casino gambling in local referendums on Nov. 3. Richmond has the option of scheduling a later referendum because the city has not gotten as far as the others in selecting a potential casino operator.

Cellphones

Holding cellphones while driving will be banned, which goes further than the current law that outlaws typing text or numbers into a phone while driving. The law carries with it a \$125 fine for a first offense and a \$250 fine for a subsequent violation or a violation in a highway work zone. Richmond's hands-free driving law has already taken effect.

Confederate statues

Localities will have the authority to decide



JOE MAHONEY/TIMES-DISPATCH

Beginning Wednesday, state laws will impose stricter limits on gun sales, such as those typical at gun shows like this January event at Richmond International Raceway.



BOB BROWN/TIMES-DISPATCH

Richmond police Lt. Edward Capriglione talked in May about a city law banning cellphone use while driving. It preceded a similar state law to go in effect Wednesday.

the fate of Confederate monuments in their jurisdictions, an issue that's gained even more attention in recent weeks. The Richmond City Council has pledged to take down the four Confederate statues it owns on Monument Avenue. Local governing bodies, under the new law, are allowed to hold a non-binding referendum on the future of the statues.

Driver's license suspensions

Virginians won't have their driver's licenses suspended for unpaid court costs and fines. The bipartisan bill came after a temporary measure in 2019 helped restore tens of thousands of suspended licenses and prevented many more from losing theirs.

Education

Courts in Virginia will no longer find students guilty of disorderly conduct for actions in school. The state is also eliminating the requirement that principals report misdemeanors committed at school to police.

Parents will receive at least 24 hours' notice before a school conducts a lockdown drill. Schools will give parents notice if testing at their child's school finds high amounts of lead in the building's water.

In higher education, student loan servicers will be regulated more like other servicers, such

as mortgage lenders. The companies must obtain a license from the State Corporation Commission, among other things.

Energy

Democrats advanced landmark legislation to make Virginia dependent solely on renewable energy by 2045, setting annual energy production and efficiency targets for the state's utilities. They also backed proposals to widen the door for solar projects, both private and utility-owned, and to urge regulators to approve a massive offshore wind development that Dominion Energy plans off the coast of Virginia Beach.

Dominion has already begun to mull compliance with the new law. In a May regulatory filing, the company said its customers should expect to see their bills rise by as much as 3% a year until 2030. Those projected increases are pending regulatory approval.

Gaming

Thousands of electronic "skill games" will remain in restaurants and stores across the state for another year to help offset the economic fallout of COVID-19. Lawmakers initially planned to ban the games, which have been operating without regulation or taxation. Northam gave them another year of life and plans to tax them heavily to generate money

for the state's Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Guardianship

In response to a Richmond Times-Dispatch investigation, a new law will bar a lawyer representing a health care provider or other entity who argues that a person is incapacitated and in need of a guardian from then serving as the person's guardian, unless a judge decides there is no acceptable alternative.

Guns

Starting next week, Virginians should expect: stricter penalties for "recklessly" exposing minors to guns; a requirement to report lost or stolen firearms within 48 hours; a ban on the possession of firearms by people subject to restraining orders; expanded local control to let localities adopt firearm-related ordinances; a new requirement calling for background checks on all firearm sales; a limit on handgun purchases to one a month; and new power for the courts, which will now have the ability to temporarily remove firearms from people in crisis.

Health insurance

Insurers are limited to charging a maximum of \$50 per month for insulin.

The state is also creating a state health insurance exchange instead of relying on the federal marketplace for people to buy health insurance with federal subsidies for monthly premiums and out-of-pocket costs. The health exchange, created more than a decade after adoption of the Affordable Care Act, will operate at the SCC Bureau of Insurance.

Housing

Public housing residents will be notified 12 months before their housing authority files permits to demolish or redevelop their housing. The bill came as a result of complaints by residents of Richmond's Creighton Court, which the city plans to demolish.

Immigration

People in the U.S. illegally will have access to driver privilege cards that look like driver's licenses and will be eligible for in-state tuition at Virginia's public colleges.

LGBTQ

Just weeks after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protects lesbian, gay and transgender people from discrimination in employment, Virginia is set to enact its own protections. Virginia is also set to become the first Southern state with comprehensive laws outlawing LGBTQ discrimination, with a law that prohibits discrimination in public and private employment and housing, among other things.

The practice of conversion therapy on minors will also be banned.

Marijuana

Possession of small amounts of marijuana in Virginia will no longer

carry jail time or a criminal conviction. People found with less than an ounce of marijuana will face a \$25 civil fine. Criminal records related to simple possession of marijuana will be sealed, with some exceptions. Most employers and educational institutions will be banned from asking applicants about any past simple possession convictions.

School buildings

Lawmakers created a commission to study school construction and modernization, an issue for hundreds of schools across the state. The commission will submit a report every year.

Sports betting

Virginians will be able to legally bet on sports, with the Virginia Lottery regulating the issue. Betting on in-state colleges is prohibited.

Transportation

Lawmakers raised the gas tax by 7.6 cents per gallon and created the Central Virginia Transportation Authority.

The regional authority will oversee and finance transportation projects in nine localities — Richmond, Ashland and the counties of Chesterfield, Henrico, Hanover, Goochland, Powhatan, New Kent and Charles City.

Voting

Virginians will no longer need to state an excuse in order to vote absentee and will no longer need to show a photo ID at the polls.

The legislature also voted to scrap Lee-Jackson Day as a holiday on the state calendar in favor of Election Day.

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