



**Testimony of Brian Paul, Research and Policy Coordinator,  
Common Cause/NY  
On NYS State Information Technology Infrastructure  
Before the Assembly Standing Committee on Governmental  
Operations  
Tuesday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012.**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Brian Paul and I'm the Research and Policy Coordinator of Common Cause/New York, a nonpartisan advocacy organization founded as a vehicle for citizens to make their voices heard in the political process and to hold government accountable. For more than thirty years, dedicated to representing the public interest, Common Cause/NY has worked at the state, federal, and municipal level to bring about honest, open and accountable government.

We appreciate the opportunity to engage with the Assembly in an open discussion about the state's information technology infrastructure. New York has a valuable opportunity to upgrade its information technology in a way that can improve the efficiency and accessibility of government. Many state and local governments across the nation are increasingly using the internet to make government data more accessible. Improved transparency and reporting of data can allow the public to better understand and evaluate government programs and how public money is spent.

We'd like to focus on two specific recommendations that fall within today's broad topic of discussion: first, the potential creation of an inter-agency online statistics dashboard, and second, the need for major improvements to the JCOPE and Board of Elections websites in relation to online access to lobbying expenditure and campaign finance data.

Last fall, Common Cause/NY worked with Professor Dennis Smith at NYU Wagner on a white paper examining the potential for improved performance reporting in New York State<sup>1</sup>. While the paper focused specifically on performance reporting for the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, it also included a review of current best practices in performance reporting overall. On the State level, we

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<sup>1</sup> Common Cause/NY. "An Approach to Performance Reporting on New York State Services to the Neediest Citizens: A White Paper." November 2011. [http://www.commoncause.org/atf/cf/%7BFB3C17E2-CDD1-4DF6-92BE-BD4429893665%7D/TANF\\_FINAL.PDF](http://www.commoncause.org/atf/cf/%7BFB3C17E2-CDD1-4DF6-92BE-BD4429893665%7D/TANF_FINAL.PDF)

recommend looking to Virginia's Virginia Performs<sup>2</sup> as a model for creating an inter-agency statistics dashboard at the state level.

Virginia Performs is a web-based interface that collects and displays standardized performance measures from more than eighty Virginia state agencies<sup>3</sup>. All of the underlying state data is entered directly by the line workers at the agency level and uploaded to a centralized system. Virginia Performs aggregates this state data with relevant data from the federal level and displays it online in easily understandable text, graph, and map forms. The "Scorecard" section of the site aggregates the data, compares Virginia's measures to other states, and reports on progress from previous years, while the "Agency Performance" section provides key statistics, goals, and budgets for each individual agency.

In addition to increasing transparency and promoting the public interest by allowing data sets to be meaningfully reviewed and utilized by the citizenry, Virginia Performs also connects different state agencies with common metrics that measure progress towards common goals.

New York State could also look closer to home to the example of New York City's "Citywide Performance Reporting System<sup>4</sup>" as an example of how to create an interactive dashboard of governmental statistics. But we believe Virginia Performs offers the strongest template and we recommend that this committee take a serious look at what it would take to create a similar system for New York State.

Our second area of recommendations for today's hearing is for a major overhaul to the JCOPE and Board of Elections websites. Regarding online access to lobbying expenditure and campaign finance data, these websites have not been substantially updated in many years and are now far behind the best practices standards. The first basic standard for both websites to meet is to make all data available in easily downloadable database/spreadsheet formats (Excel, CSV, XML).

For searching lobbying expenditures, the current JCOPE website is difficult and unintuitive for the average member of the public to use. There is no explanation of the difference between a "lobbyist query" and a "client query." Users are left on their own to discover that one leads to a bimonthly report filed by the lobbyist and the other to a bi-annual report filed by the client. Procuring an organization's report requires clicking

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<sup>2</sup> Virginia Performs Website. <http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/index.php>

<sup>3</sup> Lemuel C. Stuart Jr. "Virginia Performs - Virginia's Performance Leadership and Accountability System" NASCIO Award Submission Category: Data, Information and Knowledge Management. June 2009. <http://www.nascio.org/awards/nominations/2009/2009VA3-NASCIO%202009%20VA%20DIKM%20VA%20Performs.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> New York City Mayor's Office of Operations. "Citywide Performance Report." <http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/cpr/html/home/home.shtml>

through multiple confusing dialogues before arriving at the report page, which can only be printed. Reports cannot be exported to Microsoft Excel or another database program for analysis, or even directly saved as a PDF. The site only works properly in Microsoft Internet Explorer.

The basic structure of the database is also problematic in that there are no uniform categories for the “purpose” field of itemized expenditures. As a result, different lobbyists often report the same expenses in very different ways, creating a barrier to public engagement and accurate analysis of the data. Purpose descriptions should be made uniform via pull-down menus for categorization.

The State Board of Elections’ campaign finance database also has a major problem with its basic structure. The current system relies on manual entry of the contributor’s name. As a result, some organizations and individuals have multiple entries based on multiple spelling variations, making it difficult to properly identify the full scope of activity. For example, New York State United Teachers has at least three dozen different entries in the system<sup>5</sup>. It is nearly impossible for a member of the public to use the existing website for accurate analysis.

For best practices in internet campaign finance databases on the State level, we recommend taking a look at the State of Connecticut’s “eCRIS” (Campaign Reporting Information System) website<sup>6</sup>. The Connecticut eCRIS home page offers very clear links to six different types of search. The system allows the user to search in great detail by specific types of receipt and expenditure and fills in potential search terms in a drop down menu as you type (for example, typing “Mac” into the Committee Search leads a drop down menu to appear with “MacDonald 2010” and “Machado for State Rep” as options). This relieves the user of the burden to perfectly spell the search term. Once the desired set of data is reached, it can be re-ordered by any field and easily exported to Excel, CSV, or MDB format.

We again thank the Assembly for arranging this open forum to discuss the important issue of how to improve state government’s use of information technology. Common Cause/NY looks forward to continuing to work with the Assembly on all issues relating to improved government transparency and public engagement.

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<sup>5</sup> Entries for New York State United Teachers in the NYS BOE Campaign Finance database include “VOTE COPE”, “VOTE/COPE”, “VOTE-COPE”, “NYSUT VOTE COPE”, “VOTE/COPE OF NYS TEACHERS”, “NYS UNITED TEACHERS VOTE/COPE” “VOICE OF TEACHERS FOR EDUCATION,” “VOICE OF TEACHERS FOR EDUCATION COPE, “VOICE OF TEACHERS FOR ED PAC” among many others.

<sup>6</sup> Connecticut eCRIS Website. <http://seec.ct.gov/eCris/DocumentSearch/DocumentSearchHome.aspx>

# Appendix: Virginia Performs Screenshots – Full Dashboard

07.2011

## SCORECARD AT A GLANCE

Virginia Performs | VISION FOCUS RESULTS  
*"Measuring what matters to Virginians."*

### Economy

**Goal:** Be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy.

Business Climate	↑
Business Startups	→
Employment Growth	→
Personal Income	↓
Poverty	↓
Unemployment	↓
Workforce Quality	↑

### Education

**Goal:** Elevate the levels of educational preparedness and attainment of our citizens.

School Readiness	↑
3rd Grade Reading	→
4th Grade Reading/Math	→
High School Graduation	↑
High School Dropout	→
College Graduation	↑
Educational Attainment	↑
Lifelong Learning	→

### Health and Family

**Goal:** Inspire and support Virginians toward healthy lives and strong and resilient families.

Adoption	→
Cancer	↑
Cardiovascular Disease	↑
Child Abuse and Neglect	↑
Foster Care	↑
Health Insurance	↓
Immunization	↓
Infant Mortality	↑
Life Expectancy	↑
Obesity	↓
Smoking	↓
Suicide	↓
Teen Pregnancy	↑



### Public Safety

**Goal:** Protect the public's safety and security, ensure a fair and effective system of justice, and provide a prepared response to emergencies and disasters of all kinds.

Crime	↑
Emergency Preparedness	↑
Juvenile Intakes	↑
Recidivism	↑
Traffic Fatalities	↑

### Natural Resources

**Goal:** Protect, conserve and wisely develop our natural, cultural and historic resources.

Air Quality	↑
Energy	→
Historic Resources	→
Land Preservation	↑
Solid Waste and Recycling	↑
Water Quality	↑

### Transportation

**Goal:** Ensure Virginia has a transportation system that is safe, enables the easy movement of people and goods, enhances the economy, and improves our quality of life.

Infrastructure Condition	→
Land Use	→
Traffic Congestion	↓

### Government & Citizens

**Goal:** Be recognized as the best-managed state in the nation.

Bond Rating	↑
Civic Engagement	→
Consumer Protection	↓
Government Operations	↑
Internet Access	↑
Taxation	→
Voter Registration & Turnout	↑

**Performance Trend**

Improving	↑
Maintaining	→
Worsening	↓



# Virginia Performs Screenshots – “Economy” Dashboard

Virginia Performs

VISION  
FOCUS  
RESULTS

Regions | Trends | Demographics | Map  
Agency Planning and Performance | Scorecard at a Glance

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Economy
Education
Health & Family
Public Safety
Natural Resources
Transportation

Government & Citizens

Search the Site

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Agency Planning & Performance

Key objectives in Economy

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Related Secretariats

- Commerce & Trade
- Agriculture & Forestry

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Related Agency Strategic Plans

- Dep't of Business Assistance
- Dep't of Housing and Community Development
- Dep't of Labor and Industry
- Dep't of Mines, Minerals and Energy
- Virginia Economic Development Partnership
- Virginia Employment Commission
- Virginia Tourism Authority



## Economy

Virginia's goal is to be a national leader in the preservation and enhancement of our economy. The quality of Virginia's economy directly affects businesses, citizens, and institutions. Highlights of Virginia's economy include:

- Virginia is widely recognized as a top state for business, winning regular accolades from Forbes.com, CNBC, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and *US News and World Report*, among many others.
- Despite the recession, Virginia's unemployment rate remains lower than the national average.
- Worker productivity has been rising in the U.S., and Virginia's productivity rate continues to exceed the national average.
- Although Virginia ranked 7th among the states in per capita personal income for 2011, more than one in 10 residents still lives below the federal poverty level.
- Regions of the state differ -- sometimes significantly -- in their prosperity and levels of educational attainment.

The economic indicators help to assess the progress we are making, understand the key elements that influence performance, and clarify the role the Commonwealth is taking to improve the economic quality of life.

Indicators

- [Business Climate](#)
- [Business Startups](#)
- [Employment Growth](#)
- [Personal Income](#)
- [Poverty](#)
- [Unemployment](#)
- [Workforce Quality](#)

### Economy Indicators AT A GLANCE

**Business Climate**

↑ Performance: Improving  
▤ State Influence: Significant

**Business Startups**

→ Performance: Maintaining  
▤ State Influence: Limited

**Employment Growth**

→ Performance: Maintaining  
▤ State Influence: Limited

**Personal Income**

↓ Performance: Worsening  
▤ State Influence: Limited

**Poverty**

↓ Performance: Worsening  
▤ State Influence: Limited

**Unemployment**

↓ Performance: Worsening  
▤ State Influence: Limited

**Workforce Quality**

↑ Performance: Improving  
▤ State Influence: Significant

**Check out the Scorecard at a Glance to see how Virginia is doing in all categories.**

Information Tools

- ✉ [E-mail](#)
- 🖨 [Print](#)
- 📄 [Save to PDF](#)
- 🔗 [Share](#)
- 👤 [Follow Us](#)
- 🗉 [Send us feedback](#)

# Virginia Performs Screenshots – “Economy” Dashboard – “Poverty” Section

**Economy**

**Poverty**

Graphs at a Glance

Data Definitions

Economy Summary

All Economy Indicators:

- Business Climate
- Business Startups
- Employment Growth
- Personal Income
- Poverty
- Unemployment
- Workforce Quality

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**Information Tools**

- E-mail
- Print
- Save to PDF
- Share
- Follow Us
- Send us feedback



## Poverty

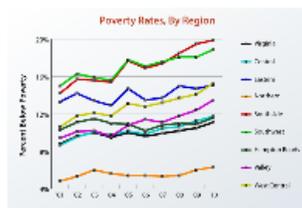
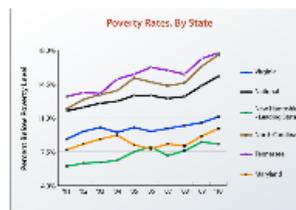
Poverty imposes far-reaching hardships, not only on the poor but also on all who share their communities. Virginia has a relatively low poverty rate -- it was ranked 7th in the nation in 2010 -- but it, too, has been affected by the recent recession, with over 1 in 10 residents now living below federal poverty thresholds. Virginia continues to work to make education and opportunity available to its at-risk populations.

### Why is This Important?

Poverty has a significant impact on individuals and society at large. Children who live in poverty are likely to suffer from poor nutrition during infancy, experience emotional distress, and have an increased risk for academic failure and teenage pregnancy. Adult men and women who live in poverty are at high risk of poor health and violence. Poverty can also affect seniors' ability to care for themselves or to obtain prescription medication.

### How is Virginia Doing?

Virginia had the 7th lowest poverty rate in the nation in 2010 at 11.1 percent. However, due to the 2007-2009 recession and its prolonged high joblessness, poverty rates in Virginia have been rising since 2006; in fact, although many states have seen minor reductions across certain years, poverty rates on the whole have been increasing nationwide since the start of the decade. Among Virginia's peers, Maryland had the lowest poverty rate in 2010 at 9.9 percent, while North Carolina and Tennessee both had considerably higher rates -- 17.5 and 17.7 percent, respectively. New Hampshire ranked top in the nation with a poverty rate of 8.3 percent. The national average was 15.3 percent in 2010.



In 2010 the Southside region had the highest percentage (19.9%) of individuals living below the poverty level of any region in the state, followed by the Southwest (18.9%) and West Central (15.3%) regions. At the other end of the scale, the Northern region (6.3%) had the lowest percentage of individuals living below the poverty level, followed by the Hampton

**At a Glance:**  
Poverty in Virginia

Performance Trend:   
State Influence: limited

**National Ranking:** Despite an increase in its average poverty rate, in 2010 Virginia improved its ranking to 7th lowest in the nation for rate of poverty (11.1%); the national average was 15.3 percent.

**Virginia by Region:** In 2010 the Northern region again had the lowest poverty rate, while the Southside region again had the highest.

### Related Agency Measures

- o **TANF participants employed six months after leaving program**

### State Programs & Initiatives

**Tax Credit Programs for Employers:** The Welfare-to-Work Tax Credit (WtW) is for employers who hire long-term welfare recipients. Employers may also earn a Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC); the number of new hires who can qualify employers for this credit is unlimited. **Learn more...**

**Child Support Enforcement:** There are currently 363,000 child support cases in Virginia. Collectively, 484,000 of Virginia's children are owed more than \$2.2 billion. The Department of Social Services has won numerous awards for its **child support enforcement efforts**.



**Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) -- formerly Food Stamps:** SNAP is an electronic benefits program that can be used like cash to buy food at any store that has a sign displaying the

# Virginia Performs Screenshots – Agency Profiles -- DMV

Virginia.gov
Online Services | Help | Governor | General Assembly

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Home | Agency Performance | List All Agencies

Measuring what matters to Virginians

## Virginia Performs



[View Agency](#)

VISION  
FOCUS  
RESULTS

[Overview by secretariat](#) | [Select an agency](#)

[Agency Login](#) (password required)

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**Department of Motor Vehicles (154)**

**Mission**

DMV promotes Security, Safety, and Service through the administration of motor vehicle and tax related laws.

**Strategic Plan**

Last modified: 12/14/2011

[View Full Agency Plan](#)
 [Custom Report](#)

Select a service area plan

Customer Service Centers Operations

**Budget Summary**

Biennium	Dollars		Positions	
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 1	Year 2
2010-2012	\$217,244,208	\$217,541,260	2,038.0	2,038.0
2008-2010	\$214,479,009	\$217,244,208	2,038.0	2,038.0
2006-2008	\$261,287,528	\$285,901,438	1,943.0	2,095.0

There are [2 capital projects](#) for this agency in Chapter 890, 2011 Acts of Assembly.

Source: DPB's VABUD database - [More Budget Info](#)

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**Performance Measures**

Agency Key Measures
Productivity Measures
Other Agency Measures
Administrative Measures

[Browse Measures](#)
 [Measure Reports](#)

Measure
Average wait time for customers conducting business in Customer Service Centers
Average number of times a citizen is required to interact with the Department of Motor Vehicles to complete a single transaction.
Number of traffic fatalities

