



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA
Office of the Governor

R. Brian Ball
Secretary of Commerce and Trade

December 21, 2020

The Honorable Ralph S. Northam
Governor of Virginia
Patrick Henry Building, 3rd Floor
1111 East Broad Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Members of the General Assembly
General Assembly Building
900 East Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23219

Dear Governor Northam and Members of the General Assembly,

Pursuant to §2.2-205.1 of the Code of Virginia, I am pleased to submit the annual report of the Economic Crisis Strike Force. I serve as chairman of the strike force, and several cabinet members and agency directors are members. The statute requires the Economic Crisis Strike Force to report on its activities each year.

Chapters 79 and 80 of the 2006 Acts of Assembly codified the Economic Crisis Strike Force to “respond as needed to economic disasters in Virginia communities by (i) immediately providing a single point of contact for citizens in affected communities to assist with accessing available government and private sector services and resources; (ii) assisting localities in developing short-term and long-term strategies for addressing the economic crisis; and (iii) identifying opportunities for workforce retaining, job creation, and new investment.” Subsection E of the Act defines “economic disaster” as an employment loss of at least 5% during the immediately preceding six-month period, the closure or downsizing of a major regional employer in an economically distressed area, a natural disaster or act of terrorism for which the Governor has declared a state of emergency, or other economic crisis situations, which in the opinion of the Governor adversely affect the welfare of the citizens of the Commonwealth.

During 2020, the Economic Crisis Strike Force (“ECSF”) met 21 times from March 12 through October 28 regarding the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and its impacts on Virginia’s citizens and businesses.

The membership of the ECSF included the Secretaries and Agency representatives as required by §2.2-205.1 of the Code, but due to the magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis, additional Secretaries and Agencies were invited to attend and participate in the work of the ECSF. On a regular basis, the ECSF received reports from numerous agencies, including the Department of Housing and Community Development, the Department of Education, the Department of Small Business and Supplier Diversity, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the Virginia Economic Development Partnership, the Virginia Employment Commission and the Virginia Tourism Corporation.

Additionally, several workgroups were formed to analyze the various aspects of the crisis and eventual relief and recovery. These workgroups included (i) data compilation and analysis; (ii) workforce programming; (iii) two relief workgroups, small business programming and large/tradeable sector programming; and (iv) business stimulus. These workgroups met separately on numerous occasions and reported the findings of each workgroup to the ECSF.

Before Virginia was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, our economic development activity was stronger than ever. Virginia had seen strong job growth, with 78,000 new jobs relocating to Virginia. In addition, Virginia had brought in \$35.5 billion in new capital investments, with 30% of those projects coming to economically distressed communities. Despite these strong numbers, the COVID-19 pandemic required swift action to stem the economic bleeding, and deliver support to those who need it most—families, small businesses and Virginia’s low-income communities. Through the Rent and Mortgage Relief Program, we have delivered \$40 million to more than 13,000 households, though tremendous need still remains. Rebuild VA has deployed \$100 million to more than 2,500 small businesses, and 65% of awardees are minority, women or veteran owned businesses. Importantly, \$40 million of Rebuild VA grants have been delivered to businesses in low-income communities.

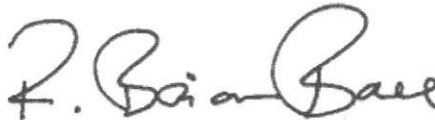
Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the glaring inequities between those who have access to broadband internet, and those who do not. In response to this pandemic, we have fast tracked \$30 million to high-speed internet projects in 49 localities.

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Though much work remains to be done, these funds will help to close the gap between those who can participate in the 21st century economy, and those who are currently left out.

The ECSF stands ready to respond to economic disasters and assist citizens with access to state resources. Please feel free to contact me if you require additional information about this important program.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Brian Ball". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "R" at the beginning and a long, sweeping underline that extends across the name.

R. Brian Ball

RBB/cls