

[https://www.fauquier.com/news/new-laws-on-guns-marijuana-voting-take-effect-july-1/article\\_658adae4-bb08-11ea-8148-2b5fdf25925c.html](https://www.fauquier.com/news/new-laws-on-guns-marijuana-voting-take-effect-july-1/article_658adae4-bb08-11ea-8148-2b5fdf25925c.html)

## New laws on guns, marijuana, voting take effect July 1

By Anna Hovey Special to the Times  
Jul 1, 2020



The Virginia General Assembly meets in the state capitol building in Richmond.  
courtesy photo

A newly empowered Democratic trifecta -- the Virginia House, Senate and Gov. Ralph Northam -- passed 2,218 bills this session, most of which will come into effect Wednesday, July 1.

Many are progressive measures, including making it easier to vote and easier for local governments to restrict guns in public places within their jurisdictions. Other measures gradually raise the minimum wage and allow local governments to decide whether to remove Confederate statues.

"It is as important that we pass good bills as it is that we kill the bad ones," she said. Also, the process is not as partisan as it may look. "Most of the time, we are working with a common goal," she said.

*Anna Hovey is a summer intern from the University of Maryland's journalism school. Her internship was made possible by the Piedmont Journalism Foundation and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation*

## **Closing Time: Here's All The Restaurant Chains Closing in 2020**

Collider | Sponsored

## **Yearbooks That Were Printed And Handed To The Whole School Before Teachers Saw The Photo Error**

SoGoodly | Sponsored

## **Clint Eastwood Is Nearing 100 & This Is The House He Lives In Today**

Invest Goddess | Sponsored

## **Is Your Dog Suffering From Bacteria-Filled Gums? If So, Try This...**

Petlab Co. | Sponsored

## **Richard Gere's Son Is Probably The Most Handsome Man To Ever Exist**

Healthy George | Sponsored

## **The Truth Is Finally Out About The William And Kate Affair Rumors**

Serendipity Times | Sponsored

## **New Senior Apartments Near Sandy Are A Dream Come True**

Senior Living | Sponsored

## **Farewell! Netflix Just Canceled These Shows**

bonvoyaged.com | Sponsored

## **Marijuana is now decriminalized in Virginia. Here's what that means.**

Fauquier Times

## **Fauquier teachers' union supports blended instruction model for upcoming school year**

Fauquier Times

## **Reversing course on disclosure, Virginia officials reveal which nursing homes face outbreaks**

Fauquier Times

“Virginia really isn’t the purple state it used to be,” said J. Miles Coleman, associate editor of Sabato’s Crystal Ball, the University of Virginia Center for Politics’ nonpartisan newsletter on American campaigns. Democrats “taking the legislature is something of a natural extension of that.”

---

Here are some of the most consequential new laws taking effect this week:

**Minimum wage:** House Bill 395/Senate Bill 7 will raise the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$9.50 as of May 1, 2021. It will then jump to \$11 in 2022; \$12 in 2023 and \$13.50 in 2025 before finally reaching \$15 in 2026.

Fauquier’s Sen. Jill Holtzman Vogel, R-27th, said that jumping from \$7.25 to \$15 all at once could have meant wiping out some entry-level positions that smaller businesses couldn’t afford to pay.

“I think this was a critical compromise for the business community that felt like that would be a crushing blow if you were going to go from \$7.25 right away to \$15 an hour,” Vogel said in a phone interview this week.

**LGBTQ protections:** House Bill 696 bans discrimination on the basis of sexuality or gender identity in housing, employment, public accommodations, credit and education, a bill which Vogel called controversial yet a long time coming. House Bill 618/Senate Bill 179 will also leverage high penalties against hate crimes on the basis of gender, gender identity or sexuality.

Another new law prohibits health care providers and counselors from engaging in so-called “conversion therapy” with anyone under 18 or face disciplinary action. Also, the state registrar must now provide individuals who identify as transgender with new identification reflecting their new name and the gender with which they identify.

**Confederate statues:** House Bill 1406/Senate Bill 612 creates the Commission for Historical Statues in the U.S. Capitol, which will decide if the statue of Confederate Civil War Gen. Robert E. Lee at the U.S. Capitol building should be taken down.

---

Other bills removed Lee-Jackson Day as a state holiday, replacing it with an Election Day holiday, and allow local governments to remove, relocate or recontextualize Confederate monuments in their jurisdictions.

In 2010, Republican former Gov. Bob McDonnell attempted to declare April Confederate History Month. Coleman said the contrast between this and today’s desire to consider removing certain Confederate statues reflects a shift among Virginia’s leaders.

“We’ve come a long way since [then],” Coleman said.

In June, Northam declared his intent to have “Juneteenth,” observed on June 19, the day enslaved people in Texas were notified of their freedom back in 1865, a state holiday.

**Marijuana decriminalization:** House Bill 972/Senate Bill 2 decriminalizes simple possession of marijuana, making it a civil offense. The penalty for possessing up to one ounce is now a \$25 civil fee. Previously, possession of a half-ounce or less was punishable by up to 30 days in jail and a maximum \$500 fine.

**Driver's license suspensions:** Senate Bill 513/House Bill 909 removes the driver's license suspension penalty for individuals convicted of non-driving-related drug offenses or for failure to pay certain fees to local correctional facilities and jails. Vogel said the penalty negatively impacts communities, especially when a family's breadwinner loses their right to drive or must drive to work on a suspended license.

"It's a terrible, vicious cycle," she said.

**Firearms possession:** House Bill 421/Senate Bill 35, gives localities the right to ban firearms and ammunition in any local public building, park, recreation or community center or public street or sidewalk. Other new gun laws require background checks on all firearm sales, limit handgun purchases to one per month and ban the possession of firearms by a person subject to a restraining order. Also, lost or stolen guns must be reported to police within 48 hours.

---

**Cellphone curbs:** House Bill 874/Senate Bill 160 makes holding a cellphone while driving illegal in what Vogel calls a significant change for drivers. The current law mandates that drivers may not hold or operate a cellphone while driving through a work zone. All uses of the phone while driving as of Jan. 1, 2021, must be via Bluetooth.

**Voting:** Thanks to House Bill 1/Senate Bill 111, voters no longer have to provide a reason to obtain an absentee ballot. Absentee voters previously had to select from a long list of excuses to gain approval.

Meanwhile, House Bill 19 further amends state voting laws by doing away with the photo ID requirement and replacing it with other forms of official identification, such as a passport or voter confirmation documents.

“These are all changes in a long-standing tradition and custom in terms of how we administer our voting process,” said Vogel, who called the bill controversial.

**U.S. 17:** Vogel sponsored House Bill 941/Senate Bill 557, which requires the highway commissioner to place a minimum of six electronic speed indicator signs along U.S. Route 17 between 66 and Warrenton at certain intersections. The bill was supported by the sheriff, the board of supervisors and a coalition of community leaders. The law will also allow Fauquier to post signs reflecting an increase in the price of speeding fines.

“That part of 17 is often treated much like an interstate, but it’s not an interstate, it is a rural... highway,” Vogel said.

**Tobacco:** The tax rate for cigarettes and other tobacco products will double starting July 1. Tax on a pack of cigarettes will increase from 30 cents to 60 cents, according to the Department of Taxation. There is also a new 6.6% per milliliter tax on liquid nicotine products.

---

**Health insurance:** Cost-sharing payments for prescription insulin drugs is capped at \$50 a month.

Vogel said she believes the General Assembly can accomplish as much in six to eight weeks, often while working triple time, as the U.S. Congress typically would in two years.

“That’s a very personally satisfying accomplishment,” Vogel said.