**Virginia Needs Real Solutions to Address Housing Affordability**

More and more Virginians have become housing cost burdened because their monthly rent or mortgage payments are more than their income can sustain. According to the 2021 Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission study on Affordable Housing, 29 percent of households across the Commonwealth of Virginia are housing cost burdened. Most of these fellow Virginians who are struggling with high housing costs are those professions most vital to our communities. They include nurses, firefighters, paramedics, teaching assistants, home health aides, waiters, bus drivers, and others.

One sensible and realistic solution to our more immediate needs is to provide rental assistance to families with school-age children and younger who are most impacted by the housing affordability crisis. Parental income is one of the strongest factors in how children perform in school, and the achievement gap by family income is substantial.

The General Assembly and Governor can make a bold investment in the future of the state and school-aged children by funding a statewide rent relief program. The 5000 Families pilot program would target families with school-aged children and younger who meet specific qualifications. The program would provide monthly rent relief to families to keep their rent affordable for the long term.

With a state investment over a three-year period, this program could make housing stability a reality for 5,000 families! As such, this initiative is something Virginia can afford and must prioritize, especially when we consider that spending on all housing programs accounted for only 0.76% of the state’s general funds in fiscal year 2025. It’s not just what we say that matters, but what we’re willing to fund. Fewer priorities are more important than ensuring the next generation of all Virginians are given the strongest foundation for success. That starts at home.