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**Virginia REALTORS® Implore Governor to Sign Legislation Creating Affordable Health Plans**

*General Assembly passes legislation to help uninsured Virginians obtain affordable health coverage*

Richmond, VA – (March 6, 2020) – Today, Virginia REALTORS® respectfully asked Governor Ralph Northam to sign into law House Bill 795 and Senate Bill 235, which allow for the creation of association health plans. Association health plans must cover the Affordable Care Act’s “essential health benefits,” and they must cover pre-existing conditions.

The bills passed the General Assembly this week with nearly unanimous, bipartisan support. Senate Bill 235, sponsored by Senator George Barker, passed the Senate 40-0 and the House 93-3. House Bill 795, carried by Delegate Chris Hurst, passed the House 93-3 and the Senate 39-0.

The legislation will give associations, like the Virginia REALTORS®, the ability to work with insurance providers in Virginia to establish the same type of health plans that large employers offer to their employees. Large employer plans are just as comprehensive as individual market plans but are more affordable for Virginians who are not eligible for government assistance under the Affordable Care Act.

“The passage of SB235 marks a major milestone in increasing affordable quality healthcare to a large group of Virginians who for too long have gone without,” said Senator Barker. I was proud to work with Virginia REALTORS® over the past year to craft this legislation and applaud them for their tireless work on behalf of their members. The unanimous votes in the Senate speaks to the popularity of this idea, and we urge Governor Northam to sign SB235.”

“Expanding Medicaid went a long way to increase access to healthcare, but there still exists a forgotten group of middle-income earners who cannot afford the coverage they need. Constituents in my district need an option for affordable healthcare, and HB 795 will finally deliver that option,” said Delegate Hurst. “I hope that Governor Northam will sign this bill for my constituents and the thousands more across the Commonwealth who have waited for this option.”

 “We applaud Senator Barker, Delegate Hurst, and the members of the General Assembly for passing this important legislation. We ask Governor Northam to join them in supporting this initiative to provide a more affordable, quality health insurance option for our REALTOR® members,” said Kemper Funkhouser, 2020 president of the Virginia REALTORS®.

“The vast majority of REALTORS® are independent contractors and don’t have access to typical employer-based benefits,” said Terrie Suit, CEO of the Virginia REALTORS®. “We find that in any given year, around 20-percent of our nearly 35,000 members, about 7,000 people, go without health insurance because they can’t afford the high out-of-pocket costs on the individual marketplace. Often, those premiums can rival the cost of a home mortgage.”

 “We’ve worked in good faith with legislators and representatives from the Governor’s administration for more than a year to craft legislation that addresses the concerns of policymakers while providing much-needed health insurance options for tens of thousands of hardworking Virginians,” said Martin Johnson, Senior Vice President for Government Relations for the Virginia REALTORS®.

“We support the administration’s broader efforts to lower health care costs for all Virginians and believe association health plans can be an early piece of that puzzle. These bills require fully insured, ACA-compliant plans that, while bringing costs down, will provide much-needed options for members of our organization that go without.”

“We ask the Governor to sign these bills into law and give our members a chance to find affordable health care coverage for themselves and their families,” continued Johnson. “Outside of an association health plan option, where do we tell our members who have already been priced out of the individual market to go to find health insurance coverage for themselves and their families?”

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**About Virginia REALTORS®**

Virginia REALTORS® (previously known as the Virginia Association of REALTORS®) is one of the largest trade associations in Virginia, representing 35,000 REALTORS® engaged in the residential and commercial real estate business. Virginia REALTORS® serves as an advocate for homeownership and homeowners and represents the interests of property owners in the Commonwealth of Virginia. For more information, visit [www.virginiarealtors.org](http://www.virginiarealtors.org) or follow Virginia REALTORS® on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/REALTORSVirginia/), [Twitter](https://twitter.com/REALTORS_VA), and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/31801).

**Virginia REALTORS® is celebrating its 100-year anniversary in 2020. The association’s centennial celebration will occur as part of the annual convention, September 22-24, 2020, held this year at the Richmond Marriott.**

NOTE: The term REALTOR® is a registered collective membership mark that identifies a real estate professional who is a member of the National Association of REALTORS® and subscribes to its strict Code of Ethics. Top of Form