

The Virginia Clean Economy Act: Putting Virginia on the Path to 100% Clean Energy

Supporting Clean Energy Jobs and a Just Transition for Everyone

The climate crisis is here, and it's hurting every community in Virginia. Flooding from sea level rise has become one of the most challenging public policy issues ever to face coastal Virginia. Intense storms are devastating agriculture across the state. Dangerous heat waves are causing asthma hospitalizations, heart attacks, and more.

It's time to take serious steps to address global warming. From the mountains to the coast, there is a movement to shift away from fossil fuels and towards a future powered by 100% clean, renewable energy.

We need solutions now. The world's top scientists at the United Nations said we must immediately take substantial action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in order to avert climate catastrophe. That means we have to radically change our energy economy to be powered by renewable sources like wind and solar.



What's at stake if we don't act? As heat waves increase, the risk of heat-related illnesses and deaths in Virginia will grow. Coastal flooding, which already threatens Norfolk and the Hampton Roads area, is likely to worsen as sea levels rise, potentially impeding emergency medical services. Allergy season is starting earlier and lasting longer, and asthma attacks are increasing in the southeastern United States.¹

Virginia should begin to dramatically expand renewable energy by enacting a Clean Energy Standard of 60% by 2036 and 100% soon after.

A Clean Energy Standard (CES) is a state law that requires utilities to deliver a specified amount of renewable energy such as wind and solar to their customers. By design, a CES does not hand pick a technology; rather all renewables are able to compete, incentivizing cost reductions and energy efficiency gains. These state-based policies help drive the nation's \$64-billion market for clean energy.²

Virginia's clean energy goal is badly broken. Neighboring states of North Carolina and Maryland have renewable mandates in place that require state utilities to invest in a minimum amount of solar and wind energy in order to help spur development in the clean-energy industry and reduce the state's carbon pollution. Virginia's law is merely a voluntary standard, and utility monopolies like Dominion and Appalachian Power are able to meet its minimal, loophole-ridden goals primarily with dirty energy sources like coal and biomass. As a result, Virginia lags far behind our neighbors in North Carolina and Maryland on solar power, and wind power is almost nonexistent in the Commonwealth.^{3,4}

What's holding Virginia back? Our monopoly utility companies – Dominion Energy and Appalachian Power – have routinely blocked policies that would bring more solar and wind to Virginia, and even pushed for policies that would stifle the renewable energy markets in the state.⁵

Our proposal: The Virginia Clean Economy Act

The Virginia Clean Economy Act (VCEA) would require 60% of electricity to come from renewable sources by 2036 and to determine the best way to get to 100% shortly after. This would keep us in line with what the IPCC calls for by cutting carbon emissions approximately in half by 2030 for the electricity sector. Other states across the country have put in place similar policies with great success, including Maryland, Washington, DC, California, and more.⁴ Clean energy mandates have proven to be politically popular and very effective in boosting clean energy across the country. Roughly half of the growth in U.S. renewable energy generation since 2000 can be attributed to state renewable energy requirements.⁴

A focus on equity: Energy efficiency and workforce development.

Electricity bills in Virginia vary widely. A low-income household spends on average \$1.23 per square foot on electricity, while higher-income households spend \$0.98 per square foot. And, overall, Virginians have the 10th highest electric bills in the country.⁷ We need to invest in energy efficiency, so we can keep electricity bills low as we transition to a clean energy economy.

Additionally, as we expand clean energy, we must not leave behind families and businesses in our most vulnerable communities. Virginians residing in low-income and environmental justice communities need state policies that smartly invest in education, infrastructure projects, and new workforce development programs to assist families now and into the future. Further, a plan to transition to 100% clean energy must not unfairly burden communities by allowing the price of energy to raise rates significantly. Investing in energy efficiency is one way to offset any increases in a household's electric bills.

If we don't act: More dangerous, dirty fracked-gas pipelines threaten our communities.



We know that Virginia's most powerful monopoly utility, Dominion Energy wants to build more fracked-gas infrastructure. The company claims it is a "clean" form of energy. This is far from the truth. Fracking infrastructure releases methane into the atmosphere, a powerful heat-trapping gas. According to growing scientific data, fracked gas could be as disruptive to the climate as coal, when factoring in the full life-cycle of emissions from extraction to piping to burning. The currently proposed Atlantic Coast Pipeline and Mountain Valley

Pipeline for fracked gas have the estimated climate impact equivalent of adding 45 new coal-fired power plants to the state.⁸

For a strong, resilient Commonwealth

We have a vision for a state that is resilient in the face of climate change and powered by clean, renewable energy, and where no one is left behind on the path to 100% clean energy.

Support Virginia's pathway to 100% clean electricity!

Sign our online petition: bit.ly/100-va

For references, please visit: <https://ccanactionfund.org/virginia/100-clean-energy/>

To get involved, contact CCAN Action Fund's Virginia Director Harrison Wallace, harrison@chesapeakeclimate.org



Works Cited:

1. Constible, Juanita. "Climate Change and Health in Virginia." *Natural Resources Defense Council*, Apr. 2018, assets.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/climate-change-health-impacts-virginia-ib.pdf.
2. Hering, Garrett. "Report: US Clean Energy Investment Hits Record \$64B in 2018 amid Global Decline." *Spglobal.com, S&P Global*, 16 Jan. 2019, www.spglobal.com/marketintelligence/en/news-insights/trending/PvGOKVVSyC6WFG7OLLhKkA2.
3. "Solar Jobs By State 2018." *The Solar Foundation*, 2018, www.thesolarfoundation.org/solar-jobs-by-state-2018/.
4. *State Facts Sheets: AWEA State Wind Energy Facts*. American Wind Energy Association, July 2019, www.awea.org/resources/fact-sheets/state-facts-sheets.
5. Vogelsong, Sarah. "Dominion's Green Energy Package Comes with a Catch: Coal Businesses Aren't Happy." *Virginia Mercury*, 31 Oct. 2019, www.virginiamercury.com/2019/10/30/dominions-green-energy-package-comes-with-a-catch-coal-businesses-arent-happy/.
6. *State Renewable Portfolio Standards and Goals*. National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017, www.ncsl.org/research/energy/renewable-portfolio-standards.aspx.
7. "Electricity Burden and the Myth of Virginia's Rate Utopia." *Affordable Clean Energy Project*, Virginia Poverty Law Center, 15 Aug. 2018, vplc.org/electricity-burden-and-the-myth-of-virginias-rate-utopia/.
8. Stockman, Lorne, and David Turnbull. "New Analysis: Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast Pipelines Are Climate Disasters." *Oil Change International*, Oil Change International, 14 Feb. 2017, priceofoil.org/2017/02/15/new-analysis-mountain-valley-and-atlantic-coast-pipelines-are-climate-disasters/.