

Chris Runion Research

Del. Chris Runion consistently votes to hurt and discriminate against his fellow Virginians. His votes in office have repeatedly championed harsh and pointless voting restrictions, irresponsible and dangerous gun ownership and use, crooked employers, greedy landlords, poisoned water, police misconduct, and unwavering anti-immigrant and anti-LGBTQ bigotry. And when presented with a concrete opportunity to create thousands of jobs and expand tax revenue by more than \$150 million a year without raising state income taxes, Chris Runion voted no. **A vote for Chris Runion is a vote to feel better -- and fall behind.**

It's only fair to note that in his time in the General Assembly, Chris Runion has made plenty of practical, unobjectionable votes, and backed numerous admirable and bipartisan measures. I've tried to give him credit for those actions, and the benefit of the doubt, whenever possible. But I believe we should judge him not on the times he supported something that was broadly popular and made common sense, but on the times when he went out of his way to *defy* common sense (and science, and medicine, and basic human decency, and the foundations of democracy, and...) with the power with which he's been entrusted.

ABORTION

Chris Runion has been an unswerving opponent of women's right to choose what happens to their own bodies, and he's pursued this goal without regard for medical accuracy or much concern for who gets harmed or how.

Abortions and abortion rates in Virginia have [fallen sharply and fairly steadily](#) since their peak in 2008 (when the Great Recession might have left more people uncertain about their ability to care for a new child). From 2007 to 2020, the number of annual abortions in Virginia dropped by nearly half, from roughly 27,300 to 15,167. (Compare that to the 94,794 [live births](#) recorded in Virginia in 2020.) The abortion rate per 1,000 women aged 15-44 recorded a slightly greater decline in that same period, from 16.8 to 8.9.

Federal Medicaid funding in Virginia covers abortions only in cases where the mother's life is in danger. The state's Department of Medicaid Assistance Services will also use state funds to pay for abortion care for Medicaid patients when a doctor determines that the pregnancy endangers the mother's health. The Virginia Department of Health additionally reimburses Medicaid recipients for abortions in cases of rape, or if the fetus has abnormalities so severe that it cannot survive.

As of 2021, Medicaid coverage is only available to Virginians making no more than \$17,775 a year, or \$36,570 for a family of four, or 138% of the [federal poverty level](#). (Compare those figures to the Department of Housing and Urban Development's estimated 2021 median Virginia family income of [\\$93,497](#).)

On average from 2015-2019, VDH approved 1 reimbursement a year for rape and 25 for fetal abnormalities, spending [\\$37,354](#) per year, or \$1,514 per patient. I have figures for 2020, but they're dramatically, distortedly lower, because Virginia's General Assembly cut funding for reimbursing abortions in the event of fetal abnormalities from May 2019 through April 2020.

From 2017-2020, Virginia's Department of Medicaid Assistance Services [spent](#) an average of \$1,166.66 per year covering abortions for pregnancies that threatened the mother's health, serving between 1 and 6 patients per year. That's an average of \$262.27 per patient, per year.

From 2017-2019, **total state spending on abortions**, including state funds for Medicaid and VDH reimbursements, averaged \$40,332 per year, for an average of roughly 29 patients per year, or \$1,465.57 per patient, per year. That works out to less than six one-hundred-thousandths of a percent -- 0.00006% -- of the state's annual operating budget in that time, or less than four-tenths of a penny per Virginia citizen.

In 2019, [Runion claimed](#) that one of his main priorities would be a budget amendment that ended state funding for abortion of any kind. Thus far, Runion's promise proves to have been hot air. The only time in his two sessions that he's offered budget amendments, such a measure was [not among them](#). While he's voted against the [relative handful](#) of abortion bills that made it to the floor during his term, Runion hasn't offered or even co-sponsored a single bill related to abortion.

In 2020, [Runion voted](#) against a law that [removed medically unnecessary red tape and invasive requirements](#) for people seeking first-trimester abortions.

He [voted](#) to [consider birth control identical to abortion](#).

In 2021, he [voted against](#) merely *allowing* -- not even *requiring*! -- health insurance plans on the Virginia exchanges to [include abortion care coverage](#).

In 2022, he [voted](#) to impose [additional red tape](#) on doctors, nurses, and patients seeking abortion care, including requiring doctors, under penalty of a \$2,500 fine, to offer patients medically inaccurate information on "[the possible detrimental psychological effects](#) of abortion." The American Psychological Association [debunked this false association](#) between abortion care and psychological harm back in 2008. Indeed, the APA argues, based on "decades of research," that restricting abortion access likely [causes psychological harm](#). Runion supported [a similar bill in 2023](#).

In 2022, [Runion supported](#) a bill that tried to establish fetal personhood by making the [killing of someone else's fetus](#) manslaughter; this time, the bill passed the House with a few Democratic votes joining Republicans, but died in the Senate in committee. [Republicans tried again in 2023](#); same result in the House.

He [voted against](#) repealing a [“conscience clause” exemption for genetic counselors](#) -- the folks who help expectant parents understand the results of prenatal DNA tests that can indicate whether the fetus will be born with certain genetic diseases -- on the basis of “deeply held moral or religious beliefs.”

Note that this counseling does not inevitably or necessarily lead to “Your child has X genetic defect; I strongly recommend you have an abortion.” Counselors can simply help to prepare parents for what they may need to do to ensure their children lead happy, thriving lives. At least in my limited personal experience, the counselors my wife and I saw when she was expecting laid out the facts frankly and impartially and left any decisions strictly to the parents.

Basically, Runion wants people to be able to apply for, accept, and get paid for a job that they fully intend to either do incompletely or not at all? Seems like it would be easier for people who didn't like the duties of the job or didn't believe it was right to simply not go into that line of work. Isn't Runion's stance like saying that gun stores should be required to hire and pay pacifists who actively discourage customers from purchasing a firearm?

AGRICULTURE

Dairy farms in Virginia are hurting. Between 2007 and 2017, the number of dairy farms in Virginia shrank 9%, [according to USDA statistics](#). Though milk prices spiked in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the long term they appear to remain on a [steady downward trajectory](#), falling nearly 18% from 2007 to 2018. Butter, cheese, and ice cream command higher prices and fatter margins, but as of the end of 2018, [Virginia had no large-scale facility to process these products in-state](#), and a study into the feasibility of luring one here -- which would likely involve costly tax incentives -- remained incomplete.

A loan program to help dairy producers and cooperatives like [Homestead Creamery](#) or [MooThru](#) set up their own local processing facilities might help reverse these trends. But Chris Runion (and, to be fair, bipartisan majorities of the Senate and House of Delegates) had a much simpler, dumber, and less effective solution.

In the 2020 session, Runion was a chief co-patron on [HB119](#), which would ban the sale of any product labeled “milk” in Virginia that didn't come from hooved mammals. (Gov. Northam [vetoed the bill](#).) Oat milk, almond milk, soy milk, and other alternatives would have to relabel or be pulled from shelves. In short, rather than providing real solutions that would address the actual reasons why dairy farmers are hurting -- and create jobs and opportunity for Virginians -- supposed free-market proponent Chris Runion would rather impose additional nanny-state regulations on businesses meeting a demand in the free market. He'd rather punish innovation and expand government red tape to protect an incumbent industry in a way that might feel good, but doesn't address any of the *actual reasons* why dairy farmers are hurting.

The people drinking milk alternatives may be lactose intolerant. They may simply seek a healthier or less environmentally impactful drink. Consumers aren't being misled when they see

oat or soy or almond milk on the shelves; they know these things don't come from cows. *Labeling isn't the problem.* Imposing these restrictions might also discourage soy or oat farmers (not a lot of almonds growing here in Virginia, I acknowledge) from selling their crops to make milk alternatives, or keep entrepreneurs from starting milk alternative businesses in Virginia.

In classic Chris Runion fashion, the Delegate would rather back the simple, ineffective, feel-good solution than engage with the underlying facts.

At least [he and literally every other member of the General Assembly](#) voted to help dairy farmers by [refunding](#) the [federal premiums](#) they pay for insurance that covers their costs if the price of milk drops below the price of feeding cows. (The refunds are available on a first-come, first-served basis for as long as Virginia's pool of funds lasts.)

In 2021, Runion [voted no](#) on a [budget bill](#) that included \$14.6 million in federal funds to expand food aid for struggling Virginians, including buying food from local farmers. You'd think a guy who apparently loves to be photographed making donations to his local food bank would approve of such a program, especially to help local farmers. But apparently not?

ANIMALS

Chris Runion is OK with animals suffering if someone's making money, apparently. He [voted against](#) civil penalties for [cosmetics makers who test their products on animals](#), or knowingly use components tested on animals.

He also [opposed](#) a bill that would bar anyone [convicted of animal cruelty](#) from working at a pet shop, and forbade pet shops from letting anyone adopt a dog without a sworn statement that they've never been convicted of animal cruelty. Chris Runion proudly supports Virginia's underground dogfighting entrepreneurs?

Runion also seems to [think it's okay](#) to [rent and repossess dogs and cats](#) for use as pets, and he [opposed](#) a successful effort to [create a state inspector who'd make sure pet shops were treating animals well](#).

Apparently a big *Tiger King* fan, Runion [opposed](#) a ban on letting people who keep captive dangerous animals from [letting members of the public get up close and personal with said dangerous animals](#) for free or for money. (The penalty? A Class 3 misdemeanor and a \$500 or less fine.) More maulings for Virginia, says Chris Runion?

Runion [voted](#) in 2022 to make it [harder to rescue mistreated animals](#) from zoos or petting zoos, by reclassifying those animals as "agricultural."

He did, at least, [join a unanimous vote](#) requiring [animal testing labs to offer animals for adoption](#) rather than immediately euthanizing them.

BROADBAND

Chris Runion's done next to nothing on the issue of rural broadband. As best as I can tell, he hasn't proposed any bills on the issue during his time in the legislature. He voted, along with nearly every other member of the general assembly, [in favor](#) of a 2021 bill [expanding a pilot program for providing broadband internet via power lines](#) and power providers (specifically, Dominion and Appalachian Power). The bill, proposed by Democratic delegate Hala Ayala, opened up those pilot programs to governmental *and* nongovernmental internet service providers. (Previously, only nongovernmental companies could participate.) Power companies can recoup their costs for these pilot programs by [hiking ratepayers' fees](#), a practice that Dominion in particular often [quietly uses to rake in billions at ratepayers' expense](#).

In 2021, Runion repeatedly [voted no](#) on a [budget bill](#) that used federal funding to earmark nearly \$500 million for expanded broadband access throughout Virginia, including \$8 million to help broadband reach low- and moderate-income citizens.

Chris Runion's lack of urgency on expanding rural broadband may possibly have something to do with the [\\$1,000 Comcast donated to his 2019 campaign](#), or the other [\\$1,000 he got from the VA Cable Telecom Association](#).

BUSINESS & JOBS

In 2021, Runion repeatedly [voted no](#) on a [budget bill](#) that spent \$250 million in federal funds to help small businesses -- including, but not limited to, hotels and struggling restaurants -- recover from the damage inflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Businesses that haven't already received federal aid get first dibs on the funding.

In the same bill, Runion also voted down \$4 million in federal assistance to the [Virginia Main Street program](#) to help 28 small towns, many in rural areas, revive their downtown commercial districts. [Towns in the Virginia Main Street program](#) include Staunton and Harrisonburg, which aren't in the 25th District, but are where many district residents -- including Runion himself! -- work.

CANNABIS

See MARIJUANA.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Before you read any of this, remember: Chris Runion is not a lawyer. But he sure seems to dislike people convicted of, or even accused of, crimes.

Let's get some quick background out of the way. As of 2017, one study suggested that Virginia spent roughly [\\$21,000 per inmate per year](#); at the lower end of the national scale, and well below the national average of nearly \$34,000, but still not pocket change.

According to a [2018 report](#) that cited varying data from 2010-2015, Virginia locked up 69,000 of its citizens, or 779 people per 100,000 -- a higher incarceration rate than the U.S. as a whole (at 698 per 100,000), and far exceeding rates in other developed European countries. Black people are wildly overrepresented among the incarcerated, at 2,418 per 100,000 people; white people are underrepresented, at 446 per 100,000. And bear in mind that thousands of those incarcerated inmates haven't been convicted of a crime; they're simply awaiting trial.

These figures may have changed since then, but let's do some rough back-of-the-envelope math. If Virginia merely lowered its incarceration rate to match the U.S.'s, its number of jailed citizens would drop from 69,000 to 61,825. That 7,175-person difference, at \$21,000 per year, could save Virginia \$150 million annually. That's not *huge* -- it's less than 2% of [what Virginia spent just on its public schools in 2019](#), and about \$17.60 per Virginian at [2018 population levels](#) -- but it's not nothing!

So let's see how Chris Runion, supposed champion of lower taxes and less spending, voted in light of those facts he may or may not have bothered to look up.

Runion [voted against repealing the death penalty](#). Since 1973, Virginia has carried out the [second-highest number of executions nationwide](#), surpassed only by Texas. At least [53 people have been wrongfully convicted](#) of serious crimes in Virginia since 1989, only to be exonerated. One was cleared in time to escape the death penalty.

Runion [voted against establishing rules for discovery in lawsuits](#). The new rules prevent prosecutors from withholding evidence that could exonerate a defendant, which Chris Runion apparently thought was completely OK, and ensure that lawyers from both sides can get the material they request from the other with plenty of time to review before a trial.

He [voted against](#) shrinking the list of offenses for which someone could [lose their driver's license](#). The changes removed offenses that might most frequently affect poor or minority drivers.

In 2020, Runion did vote *against* [taking away people's drivers' licenses](#) solely because they couldn't pay any necessary fees. But in 2021, he voted [in favor of taking away licenses](#) if [people owed court fees and fines in other jurisdictions](#) -- exact same issue, opposite votes.

He [voted against](#) creating a [gradation of offenses for robbery](#), with more or less severe punishments attached to whether the robber harmed or killed anyone, used a weapon, etc., rather than a single standard punishment range of five years to life for any and all robberies. (The statutory *maximums* under the new bill include five, 10, or 20 years in prison.)

He [voted against removing mandatory sentence enhancements](#) for second or subsequent [misdemeanor larceny](#) offenses. Basically, Runion thinks that if you steal something worth \$5 or less from a person, or \$1,000 or less from a business, more than once, you should spend 30 days to a year in jail; three times or more, and you've committed a class 6 felony, and you go away for [one to five years](#). That's a lot of (expensive, taxpayer-funded!) jail time for very small, nonviolent crimes -- especially since small- and large-scale evidence shows that [refusing to prosecute minor, nonviolent crimes reduces overall crime rates](#), including violent crime.

Runion [voted](#) -- with mostly Republican support, but also a handful of Democratic votes -- to make it a class 6 felony, punishable as second-degree murder with a mandatory sentence of five to 40 years, if you [sell someone drugs, and that person dies from taking them](#). (It's a class 5 felony if you give the drugs as a gift.) Now seems like a good time to mention the [nationwide sentencing disparities](#) between white people and minorities convicted of the exact same crimes.

In 2022, he [co-patroned](#) an ultimately unsuccessful bill that would [deny any and all bail for undocumented immigrants](#) charged with a crime. It also added [a long list of crimes](#) -- many reasonable, but some involving DUIs or arrests for immigration violations -- for which bail could be automatically denied. The bill [passed the House along party lines](#) but died in committee in the Senate.

Chris Runion apparently likes keeping innocent people in prison on the state's dime. He [voted against](#) allowing more people convicted of felonies to [assert their innocence on the basis of new evidence](#), even if they'd previously pled guilty. The law also eases the standard by which such people can be declared innocent based on that new evidence.

He [voted against waiving criminal drug or alcohol charges for people who save others' lives](#) by reporting overdoses, administering first aid, summoning medical help, and staying with the patient until police and medics arrive. Chris Runion apparently wants more people to die of overdoses.

He [voted against](#) raising the threshold for grand larceny [from \\$500 to \\$1,000](#) -- a measure that would [save the state money](#) by reducing prison costs.

Runion [did not vote](#) on a bill that would encourage and allow judges to [go easier on juvenile offenders tried as adults](#), including letting judges ignore mandatory minimum sentences.

He [voted against](#) a bill that would allow the Department of Juvenile Justice to petition the convicting court to [let juvenile offenders out of prison sooner](#) when good cause exists under current law. The proposed law applies to [serious juvenile offenders](#); the DJJ must petition the court to review whether the child in question still deserves to be locked up starting 60 days before the end of their second year behind bars, and every year thereafter. It also supersedes any plea deal the child cut prior to conviction. Chris Runion wants more children in prison, apparently?

He also seems to believe those imprisoned children should be a revenue stream, however modest, for the state. Runion [voted against](#) a law that waived the need for parents to [pay child support to the Department of Juvenile Justice](#) for their own incarcerated children. Basically, if your child commits a crime and gets imprisoned, you're no longer on the hook to pay the state for the privilege of keeping your own kid locked up. The state estimated that passing this law would cost it less than [\\$436,000 a year in lost revenue](#).

Runion apparently wants to throw the book at elementary school students. In 2020, he [voted no](#) on a bill that [protects elementary, middle, or high school students](#) from being charged with disorderly conduct in a public place if that conduct happened at school, on a school bus, or at a school-sponsored event. (In fairness, Runion [supported](#) a bill that same session that would [excuse principals from reporting at least some such incidents to law enforcement](#).)

In 2022, Bell followed up by [voting in favor](#) of [removing protections against disorderly conduct arrests for high school students](#). Such arrests would likely inflict the most harm on minority students. A 2014 study by the Government Accountability Office found that Black students were [disproportionately punished](#) in schools compared to white students: *"These disparities were widespread and persisted regardless of the type of disciplinary action, level of school poverty, or type of public school attended."*

Runion also wants to deter undocumented immigrants from helping police catch criminals. In 2020, he [voted against barring police officers from asking people about their immigration status](#) if those people were reporting a crime against or witnessed by themselves or their kids. (If the person in question is accused of a crime against their own children, that protection goes out the window.) Abundant evidence shows that cities and counties where police don't ask about immigration status or hand people over to ICE have [significantly lower crime rates](#) -- especially in [smaller counties and rural areas](#).

Runion [voted against](#) reducing felons' sentences when they provide law enforcement with substantial help in [investigating or prosecuting gun thieves](#). The law passed with wide bipartisan support. Protect gun thieves, says Chris Runion?

He [voted against](#) a bill [giving prosecutors greater leeway and discretion to drop cases](#) against defendants. (Again, hard evidence shows that when prosecutors don't prosecute minor, nonviolent offenses, [crime goes down and cities and states save money](#).)

He [voted against](#) a bill letting [judges, not juries, determine punishment](#) in the event of a conviction (unless the defendant requests otherwise).

Runion [opposed](#) loosening the laws that previously barred any convicted felons from working for a Virginia school board. The new law still bars violent felons or anyone convicted of a crime against children from such employment, but [allows all other nonviolent felons](#) to apply for jobs with a school district. The bill passed into law with significant bipartisan support.

Runion [voted against](#) forbidding colleges and universities (except VMI and certain law schools) from [asking questions about criminal history on their applications](#), and discriminating against people on the basis of their criminal history. Schools can still investigate the criminal records of *admitted* students, and can revoke that admission if the individual seems like a threat to campus safety. Apparently Chris Runion doesn't want former inmates pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and achieving advanced degrees and skills through higher education?

In 2021, Runion [voted no](#) on a [budget bill](#) that included more than \$12 million in federal funds to help victims of crime, including victims of sexual assault and domestic violence. He also voted no on tens of millions of dollars in pandemic hazard bonuses and salary increases for police officers, corrections officers, and sheriff's deputies; half a million dollars to help state law enforcement officials buy new equipment to better analyze evidence from guns used in crimes; and tens of millions more to fight COVID-19 and improve employee, visitor, and inmate safety in correctional facilities.

To his credit, [Runion broke with many of his fellow Republicans](#) in voting to allow justice-related General Assembly committee chairs to ask [JLARC](#) -- the General Assembly's nonpartisan research group -- for impact statements about [how any new criminal justice law might affect racial or ethnic disparities](#) in Virginia. He also [voted in favor](#) of allowing juries to consider a defendant's [neurodivergence, mental illness, or intellectual disabilities](#) when determining whether they were capable of intending to commit a crime.

CONFEDERATES

We all know [Chris Runion loves his Confederate statues](#), so it's no surprise that he [voted against](#) the bill that led to the removal of the statue of traitorous [enslaver](#) (and [noted critic and opponent of Confederate war monuments](#)) Robert E. Lee from the Virginia State Capitol.

(Runion also [opposed removing a statue](#) of [Robert F. Byrd](#), the architect of "massive resistance," and a man so ardently racist and pro-segregation that he helped establish Shenandoah National Park -- and then kept it segregated a full year after federal law mandated its integration.)

He also [voted against allowing localities to make decisions about their own war monuments](#) after a due period of public comment and consideration. This bill allowed Charlottesville to finally remove the Confederate statues that provoked violent, deadly white supremacist rioting in 2017.

EDUCATION

Runion [supported](#) a 2022 bill to [let more school security officers carry guns](#). A [2021 study](#) published in the Journal of the American Medical Association found that armed officers don't make schools safer during mass shootings. The study reviewed all U.S. school shootings from 1980 to 2019, finding that schools with armed security had an average fatality rate 2.8 times

greater than schools without them, and that armed officers were more likely to provoke violence than deter it.

Runion [voted in favor](#) of a failed 2022 bill that would have [made it easier for schools to fire teachers](#). It would have lengthened the probationary period during which teachers can be most easily fired from three years to five, allowed school districts to fire teachers for a single unsatisfactory performance review, and removed or weakened protections that let teachers appeal their dismissal. Coming from the same guy who opposed similar accountability for police officers, and – by trying to make it more difficult to vote – himself, this is pretty rich.

He [supported](#) a [2022 bill](#) that attacked efforts to make Governor's School admissions [more diverse](#) by forbidding ["proxy discrimination"](#) against white students. The bill eventually passed into law in a [much broader and more benign form](#), with bipartisan support.

Runion [supported](#) and was [co-patron](#) on a 2022 bill requiring ["parental notification" for any schools teaching "sexually explicit" material](#). To define "sexually explicit" material, the bill cited [a Virginia statute](#) (about things state employees aren't allowed to look at online while at work) that itself cites [another statute](#) (about things that you can't sell to young people) with vague, leftover language from the 1950s that includes "acts of homosexuality" among its no-nos.

The bill includes a clear statement that "the provisions of this act shall not be construed as requiring or providing for the censoring of books in public elementary and secondary schools," but that, of course, wouldn't *prevent* the bill from enabling or encouraging such censorship. Many school boards, if not all, already have policies in place to let parents review material they may find objectionable. The bill died in committee in the Senate.

In 2023, Runion and his fellow Republicans tried to further their book-banning, library-purging dreams. On strict party lines, he [voted in favor](#) of a bill to [create model policies for removing any material from public school libraries](#). He [voted](#) to [force school libraries to make lists of all "graphic sexual material" they might contain](#), for public parental review and complaint. (He [was also a co-patron](#).) And he [voted](#) to give parents the power to [selectively censor their own child's curriculum](#) of any content "inconsistent with their beliefs, values, goals and standards." So, neo-Nazi parents could demand that their kids not learn about the Holocaust?

That same year, Runion – while still technically representing a portion of Albemarle County, which at the time and for years prior had been [struggling with school overcrowding](#) – [voted in subcommittee to kill a bill](#) that would have let the county and the City of Charlottesville's school districts levy a modest local sales tax of 1% or less to fund [new construction or renovation of schools](#).

Runion [voted against](#) studying ways to make public schools hubs where [parents and kids could also get help with social services](#) -- also known as [community schools](#). Data gathered thus far in other states shows that community schools lead to better-prepared and better-performing students, returning [roughly \\$7 in long-term value for every dollar spent](#) on them.

Runion co-sponsored an unsuccessful bill that took advantage of the pandemic and associated school closures to try to [funnel public school funding toward private or home schooling](#).

Remember this if Runion starts inveighing against mask mandates for public school students: He [voted no](#) on a [budget bill](#) that included \$250 million in federal funding to help Virginia's public schools improve and upgrade their ventilation systems.

That budget bill also included \$100 million in federal funds to offer need-based financial aid for low- and moderate-income college students at Virginia's public universities and colleges.

He [voted against](#) a bill allowing public school students one excused absence per school year, with leeway for more at the school's discretion, for [civic events](#) (presumably including protests).

He [voted against](#) creating a [scholarship fund](#) at certain universities to benefit the direct descendants of enslaved people who were forced to work at or for those universities. (As we'll see later on, Chris Runion is not the biggest fan of fairly compensating people for the work they do.)

He [voted](#) to [allow school boards to sue kids and parents for unpaid school lunch fees](#).

He [voted against](#) giving all Virginia localities [the ability to regulate child care facilities](#). Previously, only certain Northern Virginia cities had this ability. As we'll see further down, Chris Runion does not seem to care much for local government unless it's loosening gun laws.

ELECTIONS

Chris Runion does not seem to believe that the candidate who wins the most votes should win the election. He [voted against](#) a [2020 House bill](#) to add Virginia to the [National Popular Vote Compact](#), awarding its electoral votes and those of an aligned group of fellow states to the winner of the popular vote in each Presidential election, once those states' combined electoral votes exceed 270. The bill passed the House but died in committee in the Senate. Perhaps, should Del. Runion win his next election, he will happily cede his seat to the candidate with fewer votes to remain morally consistent.

Runion also seems to like it when election winners get chosen at random out of a hat. He [voted against](#) a 2020 bill establishing [a special election to decide the winner of any state election that ends in a tie](#) (other than for Governor, Lt. Governor, and Attorney General, for which there are already constitutional provisions). Why let the voters decide when you can leave it to random chance? Surely, the fact that the previous such instance of this practice [ended in Republicans' favor](#) had no influence on Del. Runion's decision.

Runion [voted against](#) a law allowing local governments to experiment with [ranked choice voting](#) in local elections, if they wanted to. Election experts [praise ranked choice voting](#) for ensuring

that the most popular candidate with the broadest public support is more likely to win an election. One cannot imagine why Chris Runion would oppose such measures. (After opposing such a measure for the rest of Virginia in the General Assembly, Virginia Republicans [employed ranked choice voting](#) in their dubious 2021 convention.)

Runion [voted against](#) a bill banning [partisan or racial gerrymandering](#) during the redistricting process. Things Chris Runion apparently approves of: drawing districts to benefit or hurt a given political party; drawing districts to dilute a racial or ethnic group's voting power; and drawing district lines through the middle of neighborhoods. (The bill also offers some new ways to keep districts from using prison inmates within their borders to artificially inflate their populations.)

Runion [voted against](#) requiring political parties to [choose ways of nominating candidates](#) that don't exclude students, service members serving abroad, people temporarily living outside the country, disabled people, or people isolated for health reasons from participating. He also [voted against shifting all municipal elections from May to November](#), starting in 2022, which would presumably increase turnout for those elections. As you'll see in the voting section below, Chris Runion apparently likes it when fewer eligible citizens have an opportunity to vote.

EMPLOYMENT & WAGES

Chris Runion likes it when workers get paid less -- a lot less -- for an honest day's work. He likes it when employers can punish them for asking for more. He likes it when employers don't have to pay more money if employees get hurt on the job. And he's at least OK with companies getting off lightly when they cheat employees out of their pay and benefits. What does it say about Chris Runion's own business ownership that he consistently votes to let businesses off the hook when they cheat, swindle, or discriminate against their employees?

In 2020, Chris Runion [voted against raising Virginia's minimum wage](#), in phases, from \$7.25 to \$15 an hour by 2026, thereafter indexed to changes in the cost of living. Virginia hasn't raised its minimum wage since 2009. If minimum wage had consistently risen to match how hard workers were working, and how much value they were creating for the overall economy, the federal minimum wage would now be [more than \\$24 an hour](#). Strong evidence suggests that even small increases to the minimum wage could [significantly reduce suicide deaths](#) by lifting people out of desperation and despair.

He also [voted for](#) a bill that appeared to sneakily attempt to [cap Virginia's minimum wage at \\$11](#) per hour, by allowing employers to count the cost of health care benefits above that cash payment as part of their workers' wages.

At \$7.25 an hour, it would take someone working 40 hours a week, every single week, without having to pay any taxes, more than two years and 10 months to earn the same \$43,450 Runion earned just by being a board member at F&M Bank in 2019. (Runion also sits on the board of privately held Rockingham Mutual Insurance, for which he has [reported receiving some](#)

[unspecified amount of compensation](#), and Lantz Construction, for which he had not as of 2019. F&M is publicly traded, so we have information on how it compensates directors.)

As a board member and a member of F&M's audit committee, Runion gets paid as follows:

- **\$5,000 per quarter, or \$20,000 per year, for work outside regular meetings.** That alone exceeds the annual pre-tax amount someone could earn working 40 hours a week at minimum wage. Runion's quarterly stipend equals \$9.60 an hour for 40 hours of work, 52 weeks a year. As a member of the House of Delegates and the owner of his own separate business, Chris Runion obviously did not spend this much time on his F&M duties.
- **\$1,200 per full board meeting.** Even if we generously assume that each board meeting consumes a full eight hours, that's \$150 an hour.
- **\$500 per audit committee meeting.** If each of these meetings takes eight hours, that's \$62.50 an hour.
- **\$400 per other committee meeting, including the building, operational risk, and ALCO committees.** Assuming they took eight hours each, that's \$50 an hour.
- **A \$1,040 bonus.** Representing 6.8% of the total pre-tax annual wages of a minimum wage employee working 40 hours a week with no time off. It'd take a minimum wage employee nearly 18 full workdays to earn this much.
- **\$310 for ???** When you add up all of Runion's other compensation, assuming he attended all 12 regular board meetings, all five of the year's audit committee meetings, and a number of other committee meetings, you're left with a \$310 mystery amount -- perhaps compensation for travel or other expenses? It would take more than 42 hours at Virginia's old minimum wage to earn this much.

Runion seems to favor lax or nonexistent penalties for employers who refuse to pay their employees for work they've done. He [voted against](#) imposing harsher (but still fair) civil-court punishments on [employers who try to cheat their employees out of wages owed](#). He [voted against](#) empowering Virginia's Commissioner of Labor & Industry to launch justified, evidence-founded [investigations into wage theft](#) even without a written complaint. (Runion does, at least, [believe](#) that employers [shouldn't be allowed to fire employees](#) for complaining about wage theft.)

Chris Runion likes it when employers illegally classify employees as contractors, the better to pay them less and deny them benefits. He [voted against](#) banning companies from deliberately misclassifying employees as contractors, and giving the Virginia Department of Taxation [the power to investigate employers who misclassify employees](#) to deny them their due wages and benefits. He [voted](#) that employees whose employers knowingly [misclassify them](#) shouldn't be able to sue those employers. He also [voted against](#) prohibiting businesses from [firing or retaliating against employees](#) who make such claims in good faith, or any employees who aid in such an investigation.

He [voted](#) for a bill that bars local governments from requiring contractors to provide their employees with [pay and benefits that exceed state or federal standards](#). Pay workers less, says Chris Runion!

Runion was one of only 14 Republicans who [voted in favor](#) of allowing businesses to continue [paying mentally or physically disabled people less than the minimum wage](#). He's willing to [study virtual ways of offering government support to such folks](#) -- but not to ensure they get paid the same wage as anyone else for their work. Note that this vote also contradicts his (sincerely laudable!) [support](#) for [banning discrimination on the basis of disability](#) in the Virginia Human Rights Acts -- perhaps because that law only covered employment of and accommodations for workers, not their actual pay.

He [voted against](#) a bill [barring employers from asking employees about their salary history](#) -- a practice that helps companies get away with paying employees less than other similarly qualified and experienced candidates might earn.

He [voted against](#) a law barring employers from retaliating against employees who tried to [compare notes on how much they got paid](#).

He [voted against](#) requiring companies to inform employees whether they [planned to deny the employees' requests for workers' compensation](#), and explain why.

He [voted against](#) taking the first steps toward requiring [equal pay for Virginians in "similarly situated positions" regardless of gender](#).

He [voted in favor](#) of allowing employers to discriminate against, deny promotions to, or [fire women because they got pregnant or had a child](#). The law also requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for pregnant women or new mothers, as long as those accommodations don't represent an undue hardship. So if, say, a single working woman gets pregnant and doesn't want the baby, she shouldn't be allowed to get an abortion -- but if she does want the baby, her employer should be able to fire her? That's quite the Catch-22, Del. Runion!

He [voted against](#) allowing local government employees to [form unions and bargain collectively](#).

He [voted against](#) including [domestic workers as employees](#) under the Virginia Human Rights Act.

He [voted against](#) allowing Virginia to study whether [repetitive motion injuries should be eligible for worker's compensation](#). Runion previously spent more than a decade [working for Rocco, Inc.](#), a Timberville, Va. [poultry processing company](#) now owned by Cargill. Meatpacking is one of the industries whose workers suffer most from [repetitive motion injuries](#) (see "cumulative trauma" on page 4).

He [voted against](#) requiring contractors who do business with the state to [conduct annual sexual harrassment training](#).

ENERGY & INFRASTRUCTURE

In 2020, Runion [voted against](#) a tiny increase -- six one-hundredths of a percentage point -- on the [maximum allowable taxes on utilities and other public service companies](#), which was designed to help fund the regulatory efforts of the State Corporation Commission. The rate had not been increased in 70 years. (The bill passed and was signed into law.)

He also [voted against](#) allowing the Department of Mines, Minerals, and Energy to partner with a private lender for a statewide [clean energy financing program](#) -- a bill that sailed through the Senate unanimously.

He [voted against](#) allowing localities to [establish their own "green banks"](#) to fund local clean energy projects. Say, remind me: Who sits on the board of a [private bank](#) that offers its own [commercial lending](#), and got paid \$43,450 in fiscal 2019 alone just for sitting on that bank's board? Why, it's [Chris Runion](#), voting against new competition for the business that pays him nearly 70% of [Augusta County's median income](#) (and 143% of its per-capita income)! What an odd coincidence.

Honestly, Runion's energy votes seem all over the map. He was perfectly OK breaking with many of his fellow Republicans and [voting in favor](#) of a bipartisan plan to loosen restrictions on net metering and allow [more distributed generation of solar power](#). He voted to allow communities to make [special exceptions to their zoning laws](#) to incorporate more solar power, but against allowing localities to [waive review](#) of whether solar power fit into their comprehensive plans. And he and the entire House voted unanimously to establish [more offshore wind projects in Virginia](#). It seems like he's mostly OK with alternative energy as long as he doesn't have to acknowledge that climate change is real?

As far as infrastructure goes, Runion [doesn't want](#) the Department of Transportation to even perform a study to identify [roads and bridges in Northern Virginia at risk of washing out](#) because of flooding. After all, if you ignore problems, you don't have to spend money to fix them. Guess he doesn't care if ["nutty Northern Virginians"](#) die in road or bridge collapses.

ENVIRONMENT

In 2020, Runion [voted against](#) the [Virginia Energy Plan](#), which acknowledges climate change as a serious threat and creates a plan to transition Virginia to a low-carbon economy. Considering that oil company owner William Holtzman remains Runion's [second biggest individual donor](#) (after himself) across all his campaigns, this hardly seems surprising.

He [voted against ending leases for offshore oil and gas drilling](#) in Virginia.

He [voted against](#) even studying the possibility of a [state electric vehicle rebate program](#).

In 2022, Runion [voted](#) to [withdraw Virginia](#) from the [Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative](#). This program sets a market price per ton of CO2 emitted, then makes polluting power plants purchase credits for their emissions at auction. As of June 2023, Virginia had received [more than \\$650 million in proceeds](#) from these auctions, nearly half of which are earmarked for [funding efforts to prepare Virginia communities for climate-change-caused flooding](#). Won't someone think of the large, regulated monopolies?

That same year, he [voted in favor](#) of multiple bills to [weaken various renewable energy and energy efficiency efforts](#) statewide, [scrap and rewrite efficiency standards for new vehicles](#), [end efforts to curb carbon emissions](#), and make it easier to build fossil fuel power plants. The bills he supported, which passed the House but died in committee in the Senate, included among other provisions permission for fossil fuel plants to count the waste heat they generated as "renewable energy." He also [voted](#) for a [regulatory loophole](#) that would exempt certain companies and facilities from financial penalties for their carbon emissions.

In 2023, Runion and all his fellow House Republicans [voted](#) to [eliminate planned emissions standards for new vehicles](#), previously set to take effect in 2025. More air pollution, says Chris Runion, his campaign coffers stuffed with oil company money!

Runion [voted against banning unpermitted solid waste dumps](#) -- people piling up garbage on their property -- and requiring owners to clean up the mess.

Runion [repeatedly voted against banning polystyrene takeout food containers](#) by 2023 for large chain restaurants and 2025 for all restaurants (though localities could grant waivers to local businesses for "undue economic hardship.") Polystyrene, a likely human carcinogen, [never fully degrades](#), and it leaches toxic chemicals into the soil and water.

Indeed, Chris Runion seems like a big fan of poisoned water. He [voted against](#) requiring DEQ to [let people know when harmful substances get dumped illegally into the state's water](#), endangering public health. He [voted against](#) requiring utilities to pay for [public and private water testing and, if necessary, cleanup](#), for any water source in the Chesapeake Bay watershed within 1.5 miles of that utility's coal ash ponds. (Rich people and companies who make messes that endanger others apparently shouldn't be responsible for cleaning them up.)

He also initially [voted against](#) creating and regulating [maximum contaminant levels](#) of given dangerous chemicals -- including perfluorooctanoic acid, convincingly linked to [kidney and testicular cancer](#); [chromium-6](#), the real carcinogenic poison spotlighted in the film *Erin Brockovich*, found at higher-than-safe levels in two-thirds of the nation's drinking water; and [dioxane, a probable human carcinogen](#) -- in Virginia's water, and specifically doing so with an eye toward protecting public health and vulnerable populations. Runion [switched his vote to](#)

[support the final bill](#) after it slightly narrowed the list of prohibited substances and [removed a provision](#) allowing Virginia to consider regulating any other substances that two or more other states regulated. Let's ban these carcinogens, sure, but whoa, whoa, let's not be too hasty about some of the others!

As part of his apparent "Dirty Water for As Many People as Possible" policy, in 2021 Runion [voted no](#) on a [budget bill](#) that included \$50 million in federal funding to expand access to clean drinking water; \$5.7 million to help people below 200% of the federal poverty line improve their well and septic systems; \$75 million to help Virginia communities upgrade to safer, cleaner water pipes; and \$100 million to improve efforts to remove harmful nitrogen, ammonia, and other [nutrients found in residential and industrial runoff](#) from Virginia's water supply. In groundwater, these substances can hurt people and the environment, including contributing to [algae blooms that kill fish in rivers and lakes](#). That same bill also included \$3.75 million to fight childhood lead poisoning and remove lead from Virginians' homes.

Runion [voted against a cap-and-trade system of low-and-zero-emissions credits](#) for auto manufacturers starting with the 2025 model year.

He [voted against ending state tax credits for coal mines](#) as of the 2022 fiscal year, even though the bill also includes efforts to support coal companies and their employees as they transition away from coal. Weirdly, he [voted](#) (along with every other legislator) in favor of federal grants to [set up renewable energy projects on former coal land](#).

Runion initially [voted in favor](#) of allowing Virginia to [protect poor and minority communities from becoming dumping grounds for pollution](#), breaking with his fellow Republicans -- but changed his mind and [voted against](#) the final bill. The initial bill Runion voted for had [specific language](#) about individual agencies crafting environmental justice policies and an intra-agency working group; the final law contains a much [broader and vaguer pronouncement](#) in its place: "*It is the policy of the Commonwealth to promote environmental justice and ensure that it is carried out throughout the Commonwealth, with a focus on environmental justice communities and fenceline communities.*" It's entirely possible that Runion felt this bill didn't do enough to take specific actions; however, given his frequent pro-pollution votes on other bills, he may have instead believed that it gave Virginia the ability to do *too much* to stop this kind of pollution.

Runion [voted against](#) letting Virginia gather and use data to help [find potential conservation areas](#) across the state whose preservation would benefit the citizens of Virginia.

He [voted against](#) requiring anyone who gets [a permit to use large amounts of surface or groundwater](#) to show that they've got [plans to keep track of the water they're taking, and find and fix leaks](#). Chris Runion likes wasting water?

He [voted against](#) measures that would [encourage planting and preserving more trees](#) during real estate development.

FREE SPEECH

File this away if Chris Runion ever starts talking up that conservative *bete noir*, “campus free speech.” In 2020, Runion and 13 other Republicans [voted against a bill that extended free speech protections to student journalists](#) at public colleges and universities, establishing that officials or administrators could not censor or interfere with student-run media’s contents or coverage. (To his credit, Runion did vote to [strengthen shield laws for non-student journalists](#) that same year.)

Runion also [voted against decriminalizing public swearing](#).

FORNICATION

Chris Runion (like a vast majority of the House and the entirety of the Senate) is [in favor of](#) decriminalized [fornication](#).

GUNS

Chris Runion opposes responsible gun ownership, and consistently votes for *irresponsible* gun ownership.

In 2020, he [voted against mandating background checks](#) before the completion of every purchase or transfer of a firearm, including at gun shows. Runion’s not opposed to background checks elsewhere; that same session, he [voted for](#) an ultimately unsuccessful bill that would require circuit courts to [run background checks on prospective adoptive step-parents](#). If background checks are important for adoptive parents, why aren’t they also important for gun owners? “Let me sell you this deadly weapon without checking to see whether you are legally allowed to carry it” is not responsible gun ownership.

He [voted against imposing handgun purchase limits](#) of one gun every 30 days, even when the final bill included an extensive number of loopholes (like exempting private sales or holders of a concealed carry permit). “Let me sell unlimited numbers of deadly weapons to people as often as they want, even though this practice has been [abundantly connected](#) to [straw purchases by criminal gun traffickers](#),” is not responsible gun ownership.

He [voted against red flag laws](#) to temporarily take guns from people who’ve been ruled a danger to themselves and others by a Virginia court. (The emergency period lasts 14 days; within that time, a court has to hold a hearing on whether to extend it longer. The people in question get their guns back when the order expires.) In 2022, [he voted](#) to [repeal those laws](#). “Oh, you’re suicidal or threatening to harm others, and your loved ones fear for your life or their own? Please, keep all of the deadly weapons with which you may instantaneously kill yourself or others,” is not responsible gun ownership.

Runion later [voted against](#) allowing higher education institutions and other academics access to [anonymized data about these substantial risk orders](#), in order to study whether or how well they were working. Evidence elsewhere shows that red flag laws [significantly reduce gun suicides](#), which as of 2018 represented [55% of all Virginia suicides](#) (and just less than 1 in every 100 annual deaths in Virginia).

He [voted](#) to allow [convicted domestic abusers to own and carry guns](#). (The final law prohibits gun ownership for three years after each conviction for assault and battery of a family member.) He [voted](#) to let people under [protective orders](#) -- people found by a court of law to be at risk of hurting or killing someone else -- [own, keep, and carry guns](#). According to the Virginia Department of Health, [over half of Virginia's intimate partner homicides involve a firearm](#). Runion and the entire rest of the General Assembly supported a successful, bipartisan 2020 bill to create a [Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Prevention Fund](#), but he bowed to the gun lobby on this far more consequential way to address the problem. Letting people convicted of beating and terrorizing their spouses and kids own and carry deadly weapons is not responsible gun ownership.

In 2019, Runion [made concerned noises about domestic violence](#) while running for office, when he could exploit the issue to his political advantage. (He was criticizing [Ralph Northam's veto](#) of a [bipartisan bill](#) imposing mandatory minimum sentences for repeat domestic violence convictions. While Northam's stated reasons for the veto seemed well-intentioned but [misinformed](#), advocates for domestic abuse survivors have made an [excellent case](#) for why such laws might inadvertently hurt people who merely [try to defend themselves from an abuser](#).) But when Runion had the chance to actually do something to protect domestic abuse survivors, he chose to side with the gun lobby instead.

Runion [voted in favor](#) of a failed 2022 bill [weakening penalties for carrying a concealed weapon without a permit](#). If someone gets caught carrying a gun without a permit, then quickly rushes to get one before their day in court, they get a get-out-of-jail-free card. "I should get off with a slap on the wrist if I break the law and secretly carry around a deadly weapon without proper training," is not responsible gun ownership.

Runion was [co-patron](#) on a failed 2021 bill trying to apply the power of state law to protect so-called ["second amendment sanctuary" counties](#), a protest stunt in which Virginia counties declare that they will [refuse to abide by any gun control laws passed by the state](#), even if those laws are Constitutional. The Supreme Court's 2008 decision in *Heller v. DC*, though striking down a prohibition on handgun ownership in Washington D.C. and affirming the individual right to bear arms under the Second Amendment, also explicitly states that Second Amendment rights can and should be subject to reasonable government regulation, including but not limited to "longstanding prohibitions on the possession of firearms by felons and the mentally ill, or laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings, or laws imposing conditions and qualifications on the commercial sale of arms." ([See p. 54-55.](#))

In 2022, Senate Democrats proposed [creating a state center to study gun violence](#) and fund community-based violence prevention programs. The center would [gather data about gun violence](#) from across the state, analyze it, and develop effective ways to fight it, focusing on community-based solutions. But House Republicans replaced the entire bill with a [substitute](#), which would instead give the Attorney General a way to give law enforcement funding for gun violence intervention efforts based on two existing programs: [Operation Ceasefire](#) and the [Richmond Gang Reduction Programs](#). While the former has shown significant success and been adopted in many communities across the country, an analysis of the latter showed few if any statistically significant changes, for better or worse, resulting from the program.

Republicans' bill gives the Attorney General a lot of leeway on spending that fund:

*... implementing violent crime reduction strategies, **providing training for law-enforcement officers and prosecutors, providing equipment for law-enforcement agencies, and awarding grants to organizations such as state and local law-enforcement agencies, local attorneys for the Commonwealth, localities, social services providers, and nonprofit organizations that are engaged in group violence intervention efforts.***

Note that nonprofit community-based groups come in at the very end of that list. Shutting down the data-gathering aspect of the bill, and diverting its funding to (effectively) a slush fund for the Attorney General to dole out goodies to law enforcement, seems like a less effective approach to curbing gun violence. Runion [voted in favor](#) of the replacement bill.

Runion [voted against](#) banning "[ghost guns](#)" -- including firearms specially made to be smuggled through metal detectors or X-ray machines, and unassembled components that can be ordered off the Internet and assembled into untraceable, serial-number-free, off-the-books guns with [a few basic tools from your garage](#). Ghost guns make a handy legal loophole for getting around background checks and federally mandated purchase and sale records. (The party of law & order, everyone!) The bill died when the Senate and House couldn't hash out their differences in committee.

Runion apparently likes the idea of having loaded guns and small children in close proximity. He [voted against](#) a law [prohibiting firearms on the premises of preschools and day care centers](#) (except for those operated out of people's private homes). And he [voted against](#) requiring family day homes that provide child care to [properly, separately lock up and secure any guns and ammo](#) on the premises during their hours of operation. He also [voted against](#) stronger criminal penalties -- a class 1 misdemeanor, up from a class 3 -- for [people who leave unlocked, loaded guns](#) where they could endanger kids 13 and under. Leaving loaded guns where kids can find them is not responsible gun ownership.

He [voted against](#) a civil penalty of \$250 or less for people who [fail to report lost or stolen guns to law enforcement](#) within 48 hours. In 2022, he [voted in favor](#) of an unsuccessful effort to [repeal that law](#). "Gosh, I lost track of my deadly weapon! Better not tell anyone," is not responsible gun ownership.

He [voted against](#) giving police [two additional days to run a background check](#) before allowing a gun purchase. “I cannot wait five days to let law enforcement officers obey the law because I just want to buy a deadly weapon *now*” is not responsible gun ownership. After the measure passed into law, he [voted](#) to [repeal it](#) in 2022; that effort passed the House to die in the Senate.

He [voted in favor](#) of [letting people get concealed handgun permits simply by completing a single online or video course](#) (as opposed to an in-person class). “I watched a few videos online, which means I’m fully qualified to conceal a deadly weapon everywhere I go” is not responsible gun ownership.

He [voted against](#) [banning guns from polling places](#) (except for law enforcement and licensed security officers) and electoral board meetings. We all, of course, remember the many violent, life-threatening shootouts that have taken place at polling places on Election Days past. Oh, wait. “Let me carry a deadly weapon to a place where large numbers of people are gathering to peacefully exercise democracy” is not responsible gun ownership.

Runion [voted against](#) allowing local governments to [establish their own laws about the possession of guns and ammo](#), and to sue gun manufacturers. However, he [voted in favor](#) of letting local school boards add their own exceptions to state laws regarding [who’s allowed to carry guns on school property](#).

He [voted against](#) creating an *entirely voluntary* [“do not sell” list](#), which people could place themselves on (and remove themselves from at any time) to bar themselves from ever being sold a firearm. “I realize I may be a danger to myself or others if I purchase a firearm, and I am exercising my own judgment to prevent this” *is* responsible gun ownership. Chris Runion opposes it.

HEALTH / HEALTH CARE

Before you read any of this, remember: Chris Runion is not a doctor.

Chris Runion initially and repeatedly [voted against](#) a reinsurance plan that would use largely federal funding (at least through 2025) to [lower health care premiums for Virginians by as much as 20%](#). The state would set up a fund -- initially funded mostly through federal dollars -- that would pay back insurers if they set premiums too low and end up losing money when they reimburse customers’ health care costs. By covering those losses, Virginia can help insurers keep premiums low while they figure out the right level of premiums to charge. Virginia would end up spending [roughly \\$50 million to \\$80 million a year](#) in the long run for such a program, but that’s a drop in the bucket for the state’s budget -- approximately 0.08% to 0.14% of Virginia’s total operating expenditures in 2019.

Runion changed his mind and [voted in favor of the final bill](#), perhaps because the [final version](#) removes language that would have imposed an [annual state assessment](#) of 1% on health insurers' net written premiums -- basically, asking insurers to pay back a sliver of their earnings in exchange for getting generous government subsidies. So perhaps Chris Runion is okay, grudgingly, with lowering premiums for Virginians -- who, at least as of 2019, [paid some of the highest health care premiums in the country](#) -- as long as it only involves giving large amounts of money to health insurers, and not requiring those insurers to pay anything back?

In 2021, Runion [voted against](#) a [budget bill](#) that included more than \$110 million in federal funding to improve community mental health services; pay bonuses and purchase protective equipment for essential workers in the state's mental health hospitals; improve the safety and efficiency of those hospitals; make it easier for patients to get beds at those facilities by building new supportive housing, and train police officers and dispatchers in safer, more effective ways to respond to people in a mental health crisis.

In the 2019 campaign, Runion repeatedly railed -- either because he didn't know what he was talking about and didn't care to find out, or because he was happy to just lie about it -- against Medicaid expansion. This life-saving program doesn't cost Virginians a dime in state taxes, helps struggling people stay healthy enough to find or keep jobs, and has freed up hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes for Virginia to spend on schools and teachers instead.

If Chris Runion had gotten his way, Virginia would not only be in an ever-deepening financial hole, but roughly 4,700 of his own constituents -- 5.8% of the district's population -- would also lack health care today. (As of January 2022, 18% of the former 25th district's population received some form of Medicaid.) [Get more information about Medicaid expansion in Virginia here.](#)

Chris Runion doesn't seem too keen on vaccinations. He [voted against](#) giving the state board of health the power to [revise its own regulations on necessary vaccinations](#) for schoolchildren (with a 60-day public comment period). In 2022, he [voted in favor](#) of [making religion an all-purpose excuse for not getting vital vaccinations during an epidemic](#). Strangely enough, [he voted](#) to support [COVID-19 vaccinations](#) when his own life was on the line.

Chris Runion wants more Virginians to get skin cancer. In 2020, Runion [voted against prohibiting Virginians under 18 from using UV tanning beds](#), even though the bill [made exceptions](#) for medical treatments conducted by a licensed physician.

[According to the FDA](#), in 2009 the International Agency for Research on Cancer listed indoor tanning beds as one of the most dangerous ways human beings could increase their risk for cancer. The IARC reached this decision after reviewing 19 studies conducted over 25 years that found strong connections between indoor tanning equipment and multiple forms of life-threatening skin and eye cancer. (Ironically, Runion was one of many bipartisan [co-patrons](#) on a bill to declare 2020 the [Year of the Eye Exam](#).) It further recommended that children 18 and younger be banned from using tanning beds, since its studies found that people who started

using tanning beds before age 35 had a 75% higher risk of melanoma. The FDA concurs with IARC's findings, especially regarding the risk tanning beds pose to teenagers and young people.

Chris Runion also wants students to bring their own tampons and pads to school. He [voted against](#) a 2020 bill [obliging school districts to provide menstruation hygiene products](#) to students in middle and high school bathrooms, and in appropriate locations at elementary schools.

Runion apparently thinks kids should breathe more secondhand smoke. He [voted against](#) a 2020 law that [raised the age at which it was illegal to smoke around a child](#) in an enclosed vehicle from 8 to 15. Breathe real deep, kids! Get all those carcinogens into your lungs.

Runion also [voted against](#) public schools providing the parents of their students with [information about the dangers of smoking](#). The measure would cost the state [less than \\$20,000](#) all told.

Runion's love of smoking continued in 2021, when he was one of just 27 GOP delegates to [vote against](#) a law allowing the board of directors of a property owners' association to create [rules restricting smoking](#) in their development, both within private and common areas. "More cancer for everyone" seems to be Chris Runion's guiding principle? Note that, as you'll read below, this appears to be one of the very few times Chris Runion will ever, *ever* side with a tenant over a landlord.

In 2022, he [supported](#) a seemingly innocuous bill to [allow doctors to prescribe FDA-approved drugs](#) for purposes for which those drugs weren't designed or tested. [Off-label use](#), as it's called, is not uncommon and generally benign. But the bill included language barring hospitals from in any way *preventing* individual doctors from prescribing medicine for off-label use. And it arrived amid nationwide news stories about hospitals fighting to keep doctors from treating COVID-19 patients with [ineffective and untested drugs](#) as encouraged by Internet rumors and misinformation. Ivermectin, only the most recent of these supposed miracle cures, is an otherwise safe and effective anti-parasitic drug; in a March 2022 trial of nearly 1,500 patients, [ivermectin did not improve or alter COVID-19 health outcomes](#) in any way. In short, Chris Runion voted to kill his own voters – to allow quack doctors to prescribe them phony cures and false hope based on Internet hype. (The bill died in the Senate.)

That same year, he [voted](#) to allow providers of ["innovative health care products or services"](#) to use Virginia citizens as their guinea pigs by applying for a two-year waiver from the Commissioner of the Department of Health to ignore any provisions of state law they found inconvenient. This isn't "getting to ignore state laws to try out untested ideas on the public," mind you; it's a "regulatory sandbox"!

While the bill does include consumer protections and proper labeling requirements for these services, note that [the bill text](#) makes specific provisions for blockchain-related businesses, an industry that has thus far proved [less than trustworthy](#). The bill passed the House with Republican support and a handful of Democratic votes – including progressive Sam Rasoul – but was narrowly defeated in the Senate.

To his credit, in 2021 Runion proposed and passed a bill [encouraging DMAS to look into virtual supports](#) for the intellectually and developmentally disabled. At least some of the science around this idea [looks promising](#), so we'll set aside the idea of Chris Runion railing against Virginia's Medicaid spending in 2019 and then asking Virginia for new Medicaid spending in 2021. In 2022, Runion also [co-patroned](#) a failed bipartisan bill to [create mandatory screening for developmental disabilities among jail inmates](#), and transfer any inmates found to have those disabilities to facilities that could better help them within 72 hours.

HOUSING

Chris Runion apparently rarely met a landlord he wouldn't side with -- no matter how they cheat, steal from, or discriminate against their tenants. He seems to think it's OK to keep otherwise qualified and able-to-pay people from renting or buying a home simply because they're poor.

In 2020, he [voted against expanding Virginia's housing discrimination ban](#) to include the prospective buyer or renter's source of funds. Had he succeeded, landlords could have continued to refuse to rent or sell to otherwise qualified people who would have paid in full for their housing with funds subsidized by the government or a private charity.

He also voted to let landlords rip off victims of abuse. [2020's HB99](#) said that if a landlord refused to rent or sell to an otherwise qualified tenant who was the victim of family abuse, solely because of that applicant's low credit score, the prospective tenant could get back any fees, deposits, or out-of-pocket costs they'd already paid to the landlord. The bill became law; [Runion voted against it](#).

In the middle of a pandemic, Runion [voted against](#) a bill that would give renters [more time and more ways to pay off overdue rent](#) before they get kicked out of their homes. (He later [voted against an extension of that bill](#).) He [voted](#) to allow landlords to [refuse to rent to people who could afford to pay, just because their credit record reflected that they'd lost their jobs and their homes](#) during the pandemic. He [voted against 60-day and 30-day grace periods for nonpayment of rent or foreclosure](#) for people affected by the pandemic (valid only during the pandemic, and only if those folks provided written proof that the pandemic had hurt their finances). Note that none of these bills apply to small-scale individuals renting out one or two properties; they apply only to people owning all or a 10% or greater stake in four or more properties.

Runion [voted](#) to allow landlords to collect, in full, all the rent and other fees a tenant owes them -- and then [still evict that tenant](#) for not paying rent. (Under the new law, tenants can still be evicted for other causes, or for only paying part of the rent and other fees owed.) In 2021, he [voted against](#) a [budget bill](#) that included \$2.5 million in legal aid to help tenants fight eviction cases, and \$120 million in federal funding for utility assistance to help struggling Virginians keep their lights and water on.

Chris Runion likes (some) derelict houses and the people who own them. In 2020, he [voted against](#) a bill that would impose a civil penalty of no more than \$500 a month on [owners of derelict property who fail to submit a required plan to renovate or demolish those homes](#). (The total penalty can't exceed the cost of demolishing the house.) In fairness, he did [vote for](#) a 2021 bill making it a little easier for localities to [seize and sell blighted, derelict, or tax-deficient properties](#).

Runion's odd love of derelict houses continued in the special session of 2021, where he [voted against](#) a [budget bill](#) that included a \$22.5 million federal grant to demolish or renovate derelict housing.

He also does not appear to like public housing or the people who live there. Runion [voted no](#) on a bill that would require housing authorities to let tenants know at least 12 months before they plan to [close, demolish, or sell their public housing](#), and protect tenants from unjustified evictions or rent hikes during that period.

The one place where Runion [appears willing](#) to stick up for homeowner and tenant rights? [Manufactured housing and trailer parks](#).

IMMIGRATION

Chris Runion does not like the idea of immigrants learning. (He doesn't seem to like the idea of *immigrants*, period.) He [voted against](#) extending in-state tuition at Virginia universities to otherwise qualified students [regardless of their citizenship status](#). He [voted against](#) granting in-state tuition to people legally admitted to the U.S. as [refugees or under special immigrant visas](#) within the past two years. He [voted in favor](#) of barring even the *children* of undocumented immigrants -- kids who may be citizens themselves -- from [getting in-state tuition at Virginia schools](#).

He [voted against](#) a bill creating an [Office of New Americans](#) within the Department of Social Services to welcome new immigrants and help them assimilate in Virginia. Encouraging immigration expands tax bases, tends to create new businesses, and has numerous other [economic benefits](#). Yet again, when Chris Runion is handed an opportunity to create jobs and ease tax burdens on a silver platter, he votes against it.

He [voted against](#) giving legal immigrants temporary driver's licenses, or issuing [driver permit cards](#) to non-citizen Virginia residents who pay taxes, have insurance, and have passed a driving test. (The bill contains safeguards to ensure that no noncitizens can use these cards to vote.) Why allow safe, qualified, insured, tax-paying drivers to legally operate motor vehicles when you could just have potentially untrained, uninsured drivers constantly living in fear? (Reminder: Chris Runion's home county, Augusta, is [90% white and 3.1% Hispanic or Latino](#).)

Runion further [voted against](#) issuing noncitizens -- even if they live in Virginia and pay Virginia taxes -- [special privilege ID cards](#), which would need to be renewed every four years, would

look different from citizen or driver ID cards, and would not allow the holder to vote. Government-issued IDs help people [obtain housing, get jobs, receive health care, travel](#), and so much more.

LGBTQ+

Chris Runion consistently votes against treating all Virginians equally, and in favor of singling out LGBTQ Virginians for discrimination. He'll vote to oppose [discrimination based on hairstyles](#) -- and seriously, good for him on that! -- but not on gender identity or sexual orientation.

In the 2020 session, Runion [voted more than once](#) to [allow continued discrimination against gay and transgender people](#). With his vote, Runion proclaimed his belief that the [257,000 LGBT adults in Virginia](#) could and should be fired or denied accommodation, public housing, or other benefits because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. That puts him out of touch with even the [63 percent of Virginia Republicans](#) who favored such protections in a 2019 survey. Runion even [voted against](#) allowing [local governments to create anti-discrimination laws](#) on this basis.

Runion [voted in favor](#) of allowing [health carriers to deny or restrict coverage](#), or jack up prices beyond the actual cost of care, on the basis of a patient's sexual orientation or gender identity.

In 2022, he [voted](#) that no one employed by or contracted with the Dept. of Health can [contact or treat a minor without the consent of that minor's parents](#). That could [hurt LGBTQ+ kids](#) seeking health care that their parents don't or wouldn't understand or might otherwise forbid. The bill passed the House but died in the Senate.

In 2021, Runion voted that [murderers could defend themselves in court](#), and possibly escape some convictions or harsher sentencing, by saying they were confused or surprised about [the victim's gender identity or sexual orientation](#) (also known as the [gay/trans panic defense](#)).

Runion [doesn't think](#) that crimes against people on the basis of their disability, sexual orientation, or gender identity should [count as hate crimes or be reported to the State Police](#). He voted against this [twice](#), including as part of a [larger law](#) that beefed up hate crimes laws protecting LGBTQ and disabled people, allowed victims of hate crimes to sue the perpetrators, eliminated mandatory minimum sentencing for hate crimes, and protected any web site that makes voluntary, good-faith efforts to police hate speech from getting sued.

He also [voted against](#) a law allowing [multi-jurisdiction grand juries to investigate such crimes](#). It's worth noting that there's not much data on how effective such laws are at deterring hate crimes, and [reasonable arguments for and against them](#). But Runion's vote still fits into a larger pattern of pro-discrimination stances.

In 2020, Runion [voted against removing prohibitions on gay marriage from Virginia's criminal code](#), consistent with the Supreme Court's ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, and applying

gender-neutral terms to other laws in ways that extend protection beyond the bounds of a single gender. In 2021, he [voted against](#) offering voters an amendment that would remove prohibitions on gay marriage from Virginia's constitution. A 2019 poll found that even [45% of Virginia Republicans support marriage equality](#), a figure that has steadily risen over time.

Runion [voted no](#) on a [2020 fair housing law](#) that bars discrimination against tenants on the basis of race, religion, national orientation, sexual orientation or gender identity (among other measures). It passed the House with significant support but died in committee in the Senate. He also [voted against](#) allowing localities to set up such laws; [that bill passed into law](#).

Runion apparently doesn't want transgender kids in public schools. He [voted against](#) a 2020 law that required Virginia's Department of Education to set up evidence-based minimum standards for [making sure trans students are safe and welcome in public schools](#). By the 2021-2022 school year, the law requires every school district in Virginia to set up policies that at least meet the state standard.

In 2023, Runion and his fellow Republicans continued their attacks on transgender kids. He supported a bill to [force schools to out trans kids to their parents](#) (and make it impossible for the law to ever consider forcing kids to live as the gender they were assigned at birth as a form of abuse or neglect). And he backed a bill [banning trans kids from playing school sports](#) unless they're competing with the gender they were assigned at birth.

He [voted no](#) on allowing the state to issue [new birth certificates showing a change of sex](#). To get one, petitioners would need a written affidavit from a health care professional confirming that they were undergoing or had undergone gender transition. [The measure wouldn't cost the state anything](#).

He [voted no](#) on a bill requiring state agencies to establish and maintain "[a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion strategic plan](#)." Not a priority for Chris Runion! He further [voted against](#) the establishment of a citizen [LGBTQ+ Advisory Board](#) for the governor and executive-branch policymakers.

Runion [did not vote](#) on a 2020 bill [banning conversion therapy in Virginia](#) for people under 18.

Runion also [voted no](#) on a measure that would designate [a day of remembrance for transgender victims of violence](#). Good data is hard to come by, but the [best available](#) data suggests that transgender people experience disproportionately high levels of assault and violence during their lives. He could, at any point, cross the aisle and simply ask his colleague, Del. Danica Roem, about her experiences. But Chris Runion apparently doesn't care.

MARIJUANA

Chris Runion likes punishing people for smoking weed. He [voted against](#) decriminalizing [simple possession of one ounce or less of marijuana](#). The law also protected people with such offenses on their records from having to disclose them to potential employers, and established a study into full legalization of marijuana in Virginia.

In 2021, he voted against [full legalization of marijuana](#). According to [the state's own research](#), legalizing marijuana would cost the state \$10 million-\$16 million a year in ongoing expenses, but bring in \$177 million-\$300 million in annual tax revenue -- at minimum, a more than tenfold return on investment -- while creating 11,000-18,000 jobs. Chris Runion says he wants lower taxes and more jobs, but he's apparently not willing to vote to actually make it happen.

[Long-term data from states that have legalized marijuana](#) shows that, yes, more people use marijuana when it's legal. But those studies also found no effect whatsoever on crime rates, no increase in traffic accidents or fatalities, hundreds of millions of dollars annually in additional tax revenue for state budgets, tens of thousands of newly created jobs -- legal weed now employs more people nationwide than mining -- and lower workers comp claims as employees turned to marijuana for pain management. (States that legalized marijuana also reported significant drops in opioid abuse.)

Runion and every other legislator did [vote in favor](#) of making it easier to [distribute cannabis oil for medical purposes](#).

MISCELLANEOUS

Chris Runion -- still not a lawyer! -- [voted against](#) removing a requirement in Virginia law that all no-fault divorces involve an affidavit from a ["corroborating witness."](#) Not sure why Runion would want to make mutually agreed-upon divorces more difficult and expensive, but I *did* discover that actual Virginia law contains the word ["buggery."](#)

PANDEMIC

In 2021, Runion was co-patron on a [go-nowhere Constitutional amendment](#), proposed entirely by Republicans, that would limit the governor's ability to "issue an executive order declaring a state of emergency that restricts, limits, or prohibits otherwise lawful action by a private business, nonprofit entity, or individual" for more than 45 days, without the General Assembly's approval. This effort to politicize public health died a quiet death in committee.

According to [Johns Hopkins University data](#), there were 3,242 new cases of COVID-19 reported in Virginia on Nov. 23, 2020, the day the bill was introduced; that figure subsequently climbed sharply, peaking at 4,526 new daily cases on Jan. 19, 2021 -- a period of more than 45 days -- before beginning to recede.

But Runion was also chief patron on a 2021 bill to make sure that [people who applied for a handgun permit](#), after having passed *one whole online safety course* to demonstrate that they could use the gun safely, would get a three-month extension on their application if the pandemic prevented them from visiting a circuit court clerk's office in person. It justified this by citing ... you guessed it ... a state of emergency. The bill passed the House by [a large bipartisan margin](#) and was signed into law in the following special session. Fair enough, but it definitely shows where Runion's priorities lie.

Runion [voted in favor](#) of allowing [price gouging during a state of emergency](#) following a disaster. In fairness, [most economists would agree with him](#).

He [voted against](#) barring landlords from [forcing tenants to submit to in-person showings or apartment inspections](#) if they feared for their health or safety during a state of emergency. The law Runion opposed doesn't only benefit tenants; it also frees landlords from the obligation to make non-emergency repairs if tenants specifically request that they not do so for health reasons. There's a lot more to the bill, but it's all pretty sensible and reasonable.

He [voted against](#) making it easier and less time-consuming to punish people for [violating executive orders issued by the governor during a state of emergency](#) -- like, say, refusing to wear a mask during a pandemic, perhaps? Instead of a class 1 misdemeanor, which would require court hearings, violations could be punished with a fine of up to \$500, issued on the spot by a police officer. As you'll see below, Chris Runion's votes suggest that he appears to prefer finding ways to let police officers more easily *break* the law, rather than uphold it.

POLICE

Runion was co-patron on a raft of what initially appeared to be [sensible police reform bills](#), all proposed by Republicans, in the 2020 special session. None seem to have gone anywhere, in large part because upon closer scrutiny, they're subtly or overtly less effective and more toothless than competing proposals that did pass. Indeed, when actual bills come up for actual votes, Runion largely (though not entirely) seems to prefer that police officers face *no* accountability, rather than what he might consider *too much* accountability.

Quick background info: Police nationwide don't keep reliable data on how many people they kill. But groups and organizations that attempt to piece together that data (including [The Washington Post](#)) suggest that police killed anywhere from [1,096](#) to [1,183](#) Americans in 2022. Both of those sources indicate that 2022's number of police killings was the highest in their records, and that the figure has risen slowly but steadily each year since 2016. According to [Mapping Police Violence](#), black people represented 25% of people killed by police, but just 13% of the U.S. population. They're three times as likely to be killed by police than white people – but 30% more likely to be killed while unarmed.

As U.K. newspaper [The Guardian reported in early 2023](#):

In 2022, 132 killings (11%) were cases in which no offense was alleged; 104 cases (9%) were mental health or welfare checks; 98 (8%) involved traffic violations; and 207 (18%) involved other allegations of nonviolent offenses. There were also 93 cases (8%) involving claims of a domestic disturbance and 128 (11%) where the person was allegedly seen with a weapon. **Only 370 (31%) involved a potentially more serious situation, with an alleged violent crime.**

Chris Runion tried to [increase penalties for assaulting a law enforcement officer](#), especially during a state of emergency. That seems reasonable on its face, until you realize he and his co-patrons put forth this bill during the civil unrest of summer 2020, in a way that smacks of attempting to chill public protest.

Curiously enough, Runion repeatedly [voted against](#) a bill that would require officers to intervene if they saw [fellow officers using excessive force](#). Runion had previously backed [his own version](#) of such a bill; the only differences I could find between the bill he supported and the one he consistently voted against are:

- **The final law actually clarifies what “excessive force” means:** any force that is [“objectively unreasonable given the totality of the circumstances.”](#) The bill Runion backed had no such definition, which might have made it easier for officers to claim that a particular use of force was not, in fact, excessive.
- **The final law includes *decertification*** -- no longer being able to get any law enforcement job elsewhere in Virginia -- among the list of potential punishments for officers who violate it. Runion was apparently OK with letting bad cops who'd been fired for excessive force in one place get hired in the next town over.

Runion [voted against prohibiting cops from acquiring and using military hardware](#), including weaponized drones, combat aircraft, heavy weapons, bayonets, and oh yes, *grenades and grenade launchers*. The bill also barred police from using less-lethal “impact rounds” unless they had to do so to protect a fellow officer’s life. Years of evidence suggest that impact rounds and less-lethal munitions can cause [serious injuries](#).

Runion initially [voted against](#) letting the Department of Criminal Justice create [clear standards for law enforcement officer misconduct](#); requiring agencies to notify the DCJ within 48 hours when an officer resigns or is fired for violating those standards; and empowering the DCJ to yank that officer’s certification -- ending their ability to be employed in Virginia law enforcement -- for violating those standards. Runion [changed his vote to yes](#) for the final bill -- perhaps because he’d earlier [backed a similar bill](#) (with fewer teeth) that included notification and decertification, but not establishing misconduct standards.

He [voted](#) to [help bad cops conceal their history of arrests](#), lawsuits, misconduct, and/or disciplinary action when applying for another law-enforcement job. The law also requires prospective cops to pass a psych evaluation. Runion had previously backed a [similar bill](#) which,

again, wasn't as strong or comprehensive and had more loopholes (including fewer required types of misconduct to report, and no psych eval).

He [voted against strengthening civilian oversight of police departments](#) by allowing localities to create police oversight boards. These aren't one-stop solutions to police misconduct, but [they generally don't hurt](#).

He [voted against expanding the state committee that governs how we train police](#) to include representatives from advocacy groups for mental health, the homeless, and minority populations. Even though these groups of people most often encounter and suffer from police action, Chris Runion doesn't believe they deserve a voice in how we teach cops to do their job.

Runion initially [voted in favor](#) of establishing [a standard curriculum for police training statewide](#), including implicit bias and de-escalation training. (While there's [mixed evidence](#) about the [latter measures' effectiveness](#), experts do seem to agree that [standardizing police training](#) would be [a step in the right direction](#).) But Runion [voted against the final bill](#) after it went through committee and the governor's recommendations. Changes between the bill he supported and the bill he opposed included:

- **Substituting the words “racially biased” instead of “biased”** to curriculum training standards.
- **Toughening the circumstances under which training academies could get waivers** from meeting the standard curriculum.
 - In the original bill, alternate curriculums just had to “*meet the minimum standards*” set forth; in the final bill, they also have to “*substantially comply with the content*” in the state's training curriculum.
 - In the original bill, waivers could be issued indefinitely. In the final bill, the waivers get reviewed and renewed every three years, and the state can yank them at any time if it finds that the curriculum isn't up to snuff.
- Slight, apparently trivial differences in the requirement for psych evaluations when hiring officers.

In short, it looks like Runion and many of his fellow Republicans wanted to give the appearance of creating standards for training, but allow training academies more leeway to wiggle out of or drift away from actually following those standards.

Chris Runion doesn't seem to care if Virginians struggling with mental illness needlessly face arrest, [assault](#), [injury](#), or death at the hands of law enforcement -- even if doing so racks up massive bills for taxpayers that we could otherwise easily avoid. In 2020, Runion [consistently opposed](#) efforts to establish a [Marcus alert system](#) for Virginia law enforcement -- in short, ensuring that [911 calls involving mental health issues get handled by trained professionals](#), rather than untrained, overworked police officers with a limited and often deadly set of ways to deal with such cases.

Abundant evidence suggests that sending mental health professionals, not police, to deal with the mentally ill leads to [better outcomes](#) -- less taxpayer expense, less danger to officers and the people they interact with, and more time for officers to focus their attention on preventing serious crime. In just a single city -- Eugene, Oregon -- a similar program costs \$2.1 million annually, but is estimated to save the city more than four times that much each year.

Runion [voted against barring police from using common but flimsy excuses for traffic stops](#) like “I smelled weed when I approached the car.” Evidence found during an improper traffic stop won’t be admissible in court under the law Runion opposed. Later, he [supported](#) efforts to [expand excuses for traffic stops](#), including the absence of a light illuminating the license plate, window tinting, or “certain objects suspended in the car.” In 2023, he again [supported a similar bill](#).

Per the Mapping Police Violence data cited above, eight out of every 100 police killings occur at traffic stops. Extensive studies show that [traffic stops are often racially biased](#), with minority drivers stopped more often -- but less likely to be actually committing a crime -- than white drivers.

After the murder of George Floyd, Runion [voted against banning police from using chokeholds](#) (unless their own life or another officer’s life is in immediate danger), and punishing police who do with demotion, dismissal, transfer, or decertification. Research does indicate that such bans [may not be effective at reducing police killings](#); some police trainers say chokeholds can be effective and safe *if* officers are properly trained, but most officers don’t receive the extensive training they need to ensure this. Experts say more effective versions of chokehold bans include the kind of real consequences this bill incorporates.

In 2022, Runion and his fellow Republicans [pushed](#) to [weaken civilian police oversight boards](#) by extending the generous protections of the [Law Enforcement Officers Procedural Guarantee Act](#) to officers under those boards’ oversight.

Runion [voted against](#) increasing the penalty for [calling the cops on someone under false pretenses](#) because of their race, religion, ethnicity, orientation, or gender identity. Formerly a Class 1 misdemeanor, falsely calling the cops on someone for [existing] while black/minority/queer/etc. is now a Class 6 felony. Chris Runion will proudly stand up to protect the Karens of the world.

Runion [voted against banning no-knock warrants](#) -- in short, he supported allowing police to [barge into your home, guns drawn](#), without announcing themselves. You know, the kind that led to [the police murder of Breonna Taylor](#). Chris Runion is a champion of liberty.

Runion [opposed](#) empowering the Attorney General’s office to open [pattern-and-practice investigations](#) against police departments with a record of misconduct.

To his credit, Runion did [join a unanimous vote](#) to ban law enforcement in Virginia from using [facial recognition](#). He voted yes, along with every other member of the General Assembly, on a GOP-proposed bill that made it a crime for [cops to have sex, voluntarily or otherwise, with arrestees or inmates](#). And he voted with the rest of the General Assembly [in favor](#) of requiring [warrants to be served only during daylight hours](#) unless absolutely necessary.

PRISON REFORM

In 1995, Virginia abolished parole for convicted felons, a law that remains in effect today. In 2000, the Virginia Supreme Court ruled in [Fishback v. Commonwealth](#) that juries trying cases of non-capital felonies -- in other words, crimes didn't involve the taking of human life -- had to be informed that if they convicted the accused, he or she would be ineligible for parole. Presumably, this knowledge might alter the jury's willingness to convict.

In 2020, Runion [voted against a bill](#) that would extend the right to apply for parole to defendants who committed crimes before the law changed in 1995, were convicted of those crimes before the *Fishback* ruling in 2000, and remained incarcerated in 2020. Felons convicted of murders and other class 1 felonies, or crimes against children including statutory rape, were *specifically not eligible* for this expansion of parole under the bill.

That same year, Runion [voted against parole for people who committed crimes as a juvenile](#) and had served at least 20 years of their sentence, apparently believing that 20 years in prison was not sufficient punishment for a crime committed when the offender was a literal child.

Runion [voted against releasing terminally ill inmates](#) with less than a year to live who have not committed serious or violent crimes. Very Christian!

Runion also [voted against](#) allowing people convicted of drug-related felonies who are obeying all their court-obligated requirements to [obtain food stamps](#) and other nutritional assistance.

He [voted against](#) longer grace periods before people who owe fines for criminal offenses are [charged interest on those fees](#). The law also makes it easier for people to pay those fees on an installment plan.

VOTING RIGHTS

Chris Runion does not appear to like it when Virginians have an easier time voting.

Runion may cry "voter fraud," but the right-wing [Heritage Foundation's database of documented, prosecuted cases of election fraud](#) ending in convictions shows only 13 cases of ineligible voting, false registrations, or misuse of absentee ballots in Virginia since 2007. One of those cases only involved a local mayoral election. All five of the documented cases of ineligible voting involved individual convicted felons attempting to vote. The single documented case of

fraudulent use of absentee ballots in a state election, from 2018, involved a man attempting to vote using his own ballot and his deceased wife's. (In 2021, Gov. Glenn Youngkin's then 17-year-old son [twice attempted to cast an illegal ballot](#); because he did not lie about his identity, age, or intentions, he was turned away both times and was not charged with a crime. Voter fraud begins at home!)

Per [Virginia Department of Elections turnout statistics](#), there have been more than 37.3 million Virginia ballots cast in state and federal elections since 2007. That's a documented fraud rate of less than 0.000035%, or roughly one attempt at a phony ballot for every 3.1 million authentic votes cast. And that figure assumes each of these efforts to illegally vote were even successful. Most weren't.

While Runion has recorded "yes" votes on a relative handful of measures to make voting easier and/or more secure -- like [curbside voting](#) -- he far more often voted against them. Provisions that would have zero conceivable impact on the likelihood of fraudulent voting are **highlighted**:

- Runion [voted no](#) on the [2021 Virginia Voting Rights Act](#), which prohibits measures designed to disenfranchise any racial or ethnic minority or language group.
- He [voted no](#) on a bill that implements [same-day voter registration](#) as of October 2022. He later [voted in favor](#) of [repealing that bill](#); the measure passed the House but died in committee in the Senate.
- He [voted no](#) on [establishing automatic voter registration at the DMV](#) when eligible voters obtain or renew a driver's license, and don't opt out of being registered.
- He [voted against no-excuse absentee voting at every step](#) of its progress through the House.
- He [voted against absentee voting reforms](#), including letting voters correct minor errors on their ballots before election day; allowing drop boxes to collect ballots; and counting (but not transmitting) absentee votes before polls close to ensure prompt election returns.
- He [voted](#) to [impose stricter witness and voter identification requirements](#) for mail-in ballots. Under the bill, ballots without a witness signature and other key information would be thrown out. This bill, which passed the House but became snarled in conference with the Senate, mirrors another, unsuccessful bill he proposed to radically increase [the amount of required information voters must provide on absentee ballots](#).
- He [supported](#) efforts to [ban secure drop-off boxes for mail-in ballots](#).
- He [voted](#) to [shrink the early voting window to just 14 days before an election](#).
- He [voted against allowing absentee voting on Sundays](#), at registrars' or electoral boards' discretion.
- He [voted against](#) allowing eligible citizens 16 and older to [preregister to vote](#), and to be automatically enrolled when they turn 18.
- He [voted against](#) establishing a [permanent absentee voter list](#), which would automatically send mail-in ballots for every election to voters who opted in once.
- He [voted against repealing Virginia's photo ID requirement for voting](#), even though the bill still included [ample provisions to prevent fraud](#). (That said, he did [break ranks with](#)

[most of his fellow Republicans](#) and vote to allow Virginia students to use [out-of-state college IDs](#) as a form of photo ID.)

- In 2022, he [voted](#) to implement a host of [attacks of voting rights](#): restoring photo ID requirements, [shrinking early voting windows to 21 days before an election, throwing out valid ballots that are postmarked by Election Day but received within three days of the election](#), and repealing the permanent absentee voter list.
- He [voted to throw out any mailed absentee ballots received after Election Day](#).
- He [voted](#) (again) to [repeal the permanent absentee voter list](#) and to throw out any mail-in votes not postmarked by the Saturday *before* election day.
- He [voted against prepaid postage for mail-in ballots \(on multiple occasions\)](#).
- He [voted against](#) distributing [mail-in voter registration forms to Virginia college students](#).
- He [voted against](#) letting people who weren't sure what precinct they lived in [cast provisional ballots in both](#) (election officials would later figure out which precinct was correct, and throw out the sealed ballot for the other).
- He [voted against](#) providing [voting information in languages other than English](#).
- He [voted against](#) letting first-time voters [vote absentee](#) if they were in jail awaiting trial or serving time for a misdemeanor.
- He followed in Steve Landes's footsteps by [opposing](#) a bill to [extend voting hours on Election Day](#).
- He [voted against](#) replacing Lee-Jackson Day, which celebrates racist, treasonous enslavers Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, with [Election Day as a state holiday](#).

In 2021, Runion was chief patron on a bill that would have mandated not only that all absentee ballots be filled out in the presence of a witness, but that [the witness must also include their name and address alongside their signature](#) -- another needless complication that makes voting more difficult, especially during a pandemic. It died in committee.

Runion was co-patron on a bill to declare each November ["Voting Rights for Women"](#) month. Perhaps he likes the *idea* of voting more than people *actually* voting.