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## **VRLTA Seeks to Strengthen Tourism & Hospitality Industry Recovery: Over 800 Businesses and Associations Call on General Assembly to Fully Fund Relief Request during Special Session**

RICHMOND, VA – The Virginia Restaurant Lodging and Travel Association (VRLTA) today announced that more than 800 statewide businesses and associations support allocating \$291 million of Virginia’s American Rescue Plan funding to the tourism and hospitality industry. The groups are calling on the General Assembly to adopt this budget item during the August special session which convenes on Monday, August 2. VRLTA will lead a robust outreach effort directed at the General Assembly to encourage adoption of its relief request.

The global pandemic devastated the Virginia tourism and hospitality industry, causing record loss in revenues and shuttering roughly 1 in every 5 Virginia restaurants. As the industry tries to recover, it is facing 200-300% increase in costs and many in the industry cannot fully staff or maintain pre-pandemic service hours and capacity, even as many other industries are open at full capacity. The industry accounted for nearly half of the jobs lost due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and still half of those jobs remain unfilled, leaving businesses to attempt a recovery while struggling to handle full occupancy.

The Federal Restaurant Relief Fund was shuttered in July, leaving nearly half of Virginia’s applicants unanswered, and even as peak travel season is upon us, travel expenditures are down 30% from healthy years. This industry contributes so much to our culture as a Commonwealth, and it desperately needs our help.

VRLTA President Eric Terry said, “The crisis for Virginia’s tourism and hospitality industry is still very much ongoing, even as other industries resume a sense of normal. As a voice for the industry, we must do our part to ensure our elected officials understand the urgency of our request. Our members have suffered monumental losses over the course of the pandemic and are doing their best with limited resources to make up for the \$14 billion deficit suffered last year. Governor Northam recognizes the urgency and has announced his intent to fund the tourism and hospitality recovery, and we have more than 800 organizations across the state who agree. We are calling on our state legislators to adopt this budget item and bring back our hotels, restaurants, and the tourism and hospitality industry that contributes so much to our communities and Commonwealth. We will be ensuring that our legislators hear from their constituents on this issue.”

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Virginia Chamber of Commerce President and CEO Barry DuVal said, “For the last 16 months, the tourism, travel and hospitality industries saw a stark plunge in visitors and travelers. This multi-billion industry in Virginia was the hardest hit sector of Virginia’s economy. With Virginia’s mild climate, historical areas, diverse geography and location to the nation’s Capital, the Commonwealth is an ideal location for vacationers, conferences, and outdoor enthusiasts. To help this important part of Virginia’s economy rebound, the Chamber supports additional investments in this industry to help it recover from the pandemic induced downturn in the economy.”

While restrictions have been lifted, the pandemic-induced crisis is far from over for one of the hardest hit industries – tourism and hospitality. The Virginia legislature will convene in a special session this upcoming Monday, August 2 to determine federal relief allocations.

The industry will be mounting a campaign to support the relief request, and leaders in the tourism and hospitality industry are encouraged to sign the support form at [vrlta.org/arp-sign-on-form](http://vrlta.org/arp-sign-on-form) and contact their legislators directly.

The full proposal and list of signatories can be reviewed via the form web page at [vrlta.org/arp-sign-on-form](http://vrlta.org/arp-sign-on-form).

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