

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and thank you for your service to Virginia.

My name is Page Johnson, Commissioner of the Revenue for the City of Fairfax and President of the Commissioner of the Revenue Association.

Commissioners of the Revenue provide valuable service to localities and the Commonwealth. Locally, Commissioners of the Revenue administer Personal Property, Real Estate, & Excise Taxes (meals, lodging, cigarette, etc.). For the Commonwealth, Commissioners assist in State Income Tax, Bank Franchise Tax, DMV Select, particularly in the area of State Income Tax and DMV Select services. In addition to assessment administration, we spend a significant amount of time in the area of “discovery”, in effect, searching for that which taxable according to law.

Oliver Wendell Holmes, the great jurist, once said. *“The power to tax is the power to destroy.”* Your predecessors in this body understood that when they created the position of Commissioner of the Revenue in 1786. They wanted to provide citizens with built in checks and balances that would ensure that no one entity of government would have complete power over its citizens. In our example, the governing body sets the tax rate, the Commissioner assesses, and the Treasurer collects.

We are accountable to the taxpayers, as well. We are good stewards of the funds you grant to us to operate our offices. As elected officials we must face the voters and are judged on how efficiently we operate our offices.

We are a very good value for the taxpayers as well. My own office is typical of localities the cost of operating my office is less than .02 per revenue dollar.

We are also the guardians of confidential taxpayer information.

I am sure that all of you are aware, by now, of the fundamental changes to our form of government proposed by former Governor Kaine. This proposal usurps the Constitutional rights of Virginians to choose their form of government. This action is also unnecessary as the Code of Virginia already provides a clear remedy for those localities who wish to institute a change. Elected Commissioners and Treasurers are the essential because of the checks and balances they provide.

Shortly before his death, Thomas Jefferson said, *“Government is best that is closest to the people.”* As Commissioners of the Revenue, we are the epitome of this statement. Virginians, our constituents, and yours, like this form of government. Over the last thirty five years, when the issue has been put to citizens in the form of a referendum not a single Virginia locality has authorized a change in its form of government.

And we are not alone. The Virginia Constitutional Officer form of government is prevalent in most other states. In 42 of the 50 states, or 84%, have at least one elected official in charge of local assessments and collection. Just 8 states have appointed Assessors and Treasurers.

In summary, we are the revenue generators. It makes little sense to cut the very people who are most capable of assisting the Commonwealth in this time of crisis. Our friends at the Virginia Department of Taxation can not do this job alone. Commissioners of the Revenue have made numerous offers to assist the Commonwealth in recent years. Given the opportunity, we feel that we can continue to expand partnering opportunities and assist the Commonwealth in revenue generation. As an example, we could assist in the generation of Sales Tax by discovering and registering new businesses. We could augment the efforts of the Tax Department in the area of Sales Tax auditing.

I would like to leave you with this one thought. You have in the 128 Commissioners of the Revenue and counting Treasurers, 250 men and women whose sole function is revenue generation. Rather than consider us a liability, perhaps it would be wiser to consider us as a resource to assist the Commonwealth in this crisis.