

## MEMORANDUM REPORT

TO: Susan Swecker, Chair, DPVA

FROM: DPVA Ad Hoc Committee on Local Committees

DATE: September 8, 2015

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### I. Introduction

The success of Virginia's 133 city and county Democratic Committees is essential to the growth of the Democratic Party of Virginia (DPVA), the election of Democratic candidates, and the advancement of Democratic ideals.

At the June 2015 DPVA State Central Committee meeting, concerns were raised about the experience and continuity of local committee officers and the challenges they face. At that meeting, the Central Committee revised the Party Plan to provide local committees with more flexibility with regard to the scheduling of their elections. Specifically, they need not notify the DPVA of their election process until November 15 of odd number years and such elections may take place between December 1 of that year and January 15 of the following year.

DPVA Chair Susan Swecker also appointed an ad hoc committee (Committee) consisting of Frank Leone (Chair), Del. Jennifer McClellan, Steve Bunn, Cheryl Zando, Clinton Jenkins, and Steve Cochran to consider ways of strengthening local committee leadership, with instructions to report back by the September 2015 Central Committee meeting. The Committee met several times by telephone, consulted with DPVA Vice Chair for Organization Gaylene Kanoyton and Virginia Association of Democratic Chairs Chair Gene Magruder, and makes the recommendations set forth below.

The proposals focus on actions that DPVA can take, but it is essential for city and county committees to use the resources available and put in the time and effort to achieve our party's goals. Moreover, the first line of support for such local committees is the congressional district committees which are charged under the Party Plan with perfecting the Democratic organizations within their districts.

This report is one step in a continuing process of providing support for local committees, whose strengthening remains a priority of DPVA.

### II. Concerns

Concerns were raised that local committees have too much turn over in officers and a lack of continuity and face a number of challenges, including the National Convention delegate selection process and special elections. Other concerns addressed the need for more guidance and support for new officers, planning in the local officer succession process, current and clear by-laws, training, and consistent support from State Party.

### III. Proposals

- A. **Chair Terms** – Currently city and county committee chairs are elected in December of odd-number years (or the following January) for two year terms. Sometimes new chairs are confronted with the presidential delegate selection process and other immediate challenges. The Committee discussed moving the elections to even years, but then new chairs would be confronted with local and legislative nomination processes, which are also challenging. We noted that Central Committee members serve four years – extended local chair terms might result in more experienced chairs, but currently there is no bar to chairs serving multiple terms. The Committee decided not to recommend any changes in the terms of the local chairs, and focused instead of ways of providing more support to new chairs and local committees.
- B. **New Chair Training, starting in February 2016** – With (new) officers being elected in December 2015-January 2016, it is important for DPVA to provide prompt training for those officers, before they have to hold local caucuses for the presidential race. We therefore recommend that DPVA establish a statewide training session for local committee officers starting in February 2016. New chair training should be held at least every two years, but statewide training, including for new chairs as well as others, should be held in the off years. In short, DPVA should have annual state-wide training sessions.
1. For the February 2016 training, we suggest having a lead in person session in Richmond, which can be webcast to select regional locations (including in Southwest Virginia) which will also have in-person presentations and/or be available to any Democrat who wants to participate. Modules would also be recorded for viewing at a later time.
    - a. Topics covered in the February 2016 training could include the following: Delegate selection; DPVA organizational structure and rules; local committee officers, bylaws, and meetings; precinct operations and field organization; VAN, candidate recruitment/nominations; technology; communications; press; fundraising; and campaign finance compliance.
  2. We recognize that the Vice Chair for Organization, the VADC, and members of Congressional District Committees have been implementing regional training for local committees and encourage continuation of these efforts.
- C. **Clarification of Roles and Responsibilities** – All elements of the DPVA have responsibility for supporting our local committees, including State Party officers (particularly the Vice Chair for Organization), congressional district committee members, the Virginia Association of Democratic Chairs, and the DPVA

caucuses. State party should clarify the roles of these entities and improve communications among them.

- D. **State Party Staff** – The Committee was appreciative of all the work that DPVA has been able to do with relatively limited staff, but as resources permit, we recommend retaining additional staff with a goal of having a political director, a party services director, and regional field staff. There is no substitute for direct communications, preferably personal communications, between staff and local committee officers. The Party should designate one staff person (regardless of the title) who will establish an ongoing relationship with each of the local chairs.
- E. **State Party Officers** –
1. All state party officers, lead by the State Party Chair, have important roles in helping to build and support local Democratic Committees.
  2. **Vice Chair for Organization** – Pursuant to the Party Plan (§4.12), the Vice Chair for Organization (1st Vice Chair) is responsible for strengthening county and city democratic committees, increasing their membership and activities, perfecting their organization, providing necessary training, and acting as a liaison to congressional district and county and city democratic committees regarding statewide coordinated campaign activities.
    - a. The Vice Chair for Organization should continue to take the lead in coordinating training activities, together with a training committee, composed of members of Congressional district committees.
  3. To improve communications, the Vice Chair for Organization holds regular local chair calls (weekly during campaign season) – information from those calls should be shared with Central Committee members. The State Party Secretary now provides city and county committees with Central Committee minutes and materials. It is important for all DPVA entities to know what the others are doing.
  4. The Vice Chair for Rules can and does provide guidance on rules, procedures, and bylaws, and conflict resolution to local committees.
- F. **Congressional District Committees** – The Party Plan charges CD committees with the responsibility of perfecting the local committees within their districts. The CD committee and its members should be the primary resource for local committees.
- G. **Virginia Association of Democratic Chairs** – The VADC, and its officers (including its four regional vice chairs) should work with CD committees and state party staff to support local committees. The VADC may serve leading roles

in many activities including advocating for local committees, mentoring committee chairs, encouraging succession plans, providing draft bylaws and setting out officer responsibilities (including or outreach, treasurer/finance, and secretary/ recordkeeping), providing guidance regarding the role of the local committees in candidate recruitment, screening, and development.

- H. **City and County Democratic Committees** – The local committees, of course, have the primary responsibility for taking advantage of available resources and building their volunteer organization, engaging in voter registration, voter contact and get out the vote efforts, recruiting local candidates, and complying with legal and party requirements regarding nominations and other duties.
  - 1. City and county committee vice chairs should be included in all communication, training, and other efforts involving committee chairs. Such inclusion should improve local committee leadership continuity.
- I. **Calendar** – State Party should provide a standard two year calendar for all new chairs, setting forth legal and party rule deadlines for nominations and other activities.
- J. **Materials** – The Committee recommends that manuals be prepared and available to local committees and their officers. The Vice Chair for Organization should work with the VADC officers and other interested entities in updating these materials.
  - 1. DPVA website-accessible materials currently include a portal<sup>1</sup> and a training page<sup>2</sup>, but these materials must be consolidated, organized, and updated.
  - 2. Most information should be freely available at the website, and not require password protection.
  - 3. The Local Chair manual should be updated.
  - 4. We should have a nominations manual that would cover legislative district and local nominations.
    - a. We should continue to develop guidance on non-partisan elections.
  - 5. DPVA should prepare manuals or other guidance on the other substantive areas that are the subject of training.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.vademocrats.org/dpva>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.vademocrats.org/training-page>

6. The DNC's Association of State Democratic Chairs also provides training materials – these should be available at the DPVA training portal.
  7. A Congressional District Committee manual should be prepared to provide guidelines and resources for those committee members.
- K. **Assistance with legal responsibilities** – Local chairs have various legal responsibilities including making sure candidates get on the ballot, recommending electoral board members, and providing observer credentials for poll watchers/provisional ballot meeting watchers. State Party should provide reminders and assistance in complying with these obligations.
- L. **National Convention Delegate Selection** – The 2016 process starts with the Affirmative Action/Outreach kickoff in September 2015. DPVA will provide materials, brochures, live training, and an on-demand video training to encourage participation in the March 1, 2016 primary and the subsequent city/county caucuses, CD conventions, and State convention. Special assistance to new local committee chairs should be provided for the caucus planning.
- M. **Outreach** – Local committees are required to have an outreach officer – the State Outreach committee, CD committee outreach coordinators, and the DPVA caucuses should encourage local outreach efforts. The Committee recommends consideration of an updated outreach plan and appropriate Party Plan revisions if necessary to implement it.
- N. **Campaign functions** – Precinct organization and GOTV – DPVA should facilitate contacts between local committees and statewide entities, including campaigns.
- O. **Voter Protection** – The new DPVA Voter Protection Council is trying to identify at least one local counsel for each city and county. It will provide training for poll watchers, election day and canvass assistance, as well as support voter registration, voting restoration, voter education and other efforts to make voting easier for all Virginians.
- P. **Technology and Communications** – The DPVA staff, the Vice Chair for Communications and Technology, and the Technology Committee have assisted local committees with VAN and other technology issues, and setting up their own webpages. This effort should be expanded.
1. The new DPVA website should have an enhanced calendar function and local chairs should have input in other changes.
  2. Local committee bylaws and other relevant documents should be accessible on the DPVA website.

- Q. **Fundraising** – DPVA, led by its Vice Chair for Finance, should consider ways of involving local committee in fundraising efforts and sharing resources.
1. DPVA should formalize its process for collecting dues from local committees, including providing committees with fact sheets on services DPVA can provide.
- R. **Recordkeeping and Compliance** – It is essential that local committees receive appropriate guidance regarding campaign finance and other compliance issues. Moreover, they can be provided guidance on good recordkeeping and reporting practices.
- S. **DNC Resources** – The DNC’s Association of Democratic State Chairs provides resources to State Parties, some of which may be useful to local committees. Our ASDC members should pass on those resources to local committees, and, as noted above, such materials should be included in the DPVA website reference materials.
- T. **Conflict Resolution** – At times, there are conflicts among local committee members that distract the committees from achieving its goals. The Party Plan contains a formal appeals process, but DPVA should consider establishing a more informal conflict resolution process to address and resolve these disputes, where possible.