



March 23, 2020
The Honorable Ralph Northam
Governor of Virginia
P.O. Box 1475
Richmond, VA 23218

RE: Title Insurance Companies and COVID-19 Response

Dear Governor Northam,

The Virginia Land Title Association is a statewide trade association that represents the Virginia title insurance industry and the more than 3,687 licensed professionals and support staff who work for the safe and efficient transfer of real estate. We want to thank you for the leadership and guidance you provided today in Executive Order 53. We are grateful that you have classified “banks and other financial institutions with retail functions” as an essential retail business that can remain open. As title and settlement companies have been classified in other state and federal laws as financial institutions, we understand that phrase to include our industry.

Please consider making clear in any upcoming announcements regarding mandatory business closures that the title insurance industry will continue to remain open in the same manner as other financial institutions. Our industry’s work, including conducting title searches, closings and issuing title insurance to protect property owners and mortgage lenders, is crucial to financial sector operations. Such action would be consistent with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security memorandum dated March 19, 2020, which has identified workers who are needed to process and maintain systems for processing financial transactions and services (e.g., payment, clearing, and settlement; wholesale funding; insurance services; and capital markets activities) as essential service workers.

It is important to note that much of what we do can be accomplished without face-to-face contact. Title searches for many jurisdictions can be performed online. Virginia’s Remote Online Notarization (RON) creates a safe and consistent approach whereby an online notary can electronically notarize deeds and other documents for closing. These documents can be e-recorded in many jurisdictions throughout Virginia. To the extent that such features are unavailable for a particular transaction, our industry members are implementing several protocols at their business locations to maximize the safety of the community, such as social distancing and sound personal hygiene.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Megan Meloon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Megan Meloon, VLTA President