



2017 VIRGINIA LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

*The Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington (JCRC) is the public affairs and community relations arm of the local Jewish community and the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington, serving over 225,000 Jewish residents and 100 Jewish agencies and synagogues throughout Washington, DC, Maryland, and Virginia, with more than 67,000 Jews in Northern Virginia along..The JCRC achieves its work through four pillars: **government relations, Israel advocacy, inter-group relations, and social justice.***

- ⇒ **Separation of Religion and State:** The statewide Jewish community is a leading advocate for the separation of religion and state. We support religious freedom and oppose bills that run afoul of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. We support the constitutional right to individual religious expression, but affirm our opposition to efforts to legislate coercive religious practice into Virginia government institutions and schools, such as school-supported prayer. We also oppose bills that on the basis of religious beliefs allow discrimination against the LGBT community; such legislation gives preference to certain religious beliefs in violation of the Establishment Clause and also violates the protected rights of LGBT persons.
- ⇒ **Voter Access:** As voting is a constitutional right and civic duty, laws limiting voter access – regardless of intent – may disenfranchise eligible voters and disproportionately affect minorities, the elderly, voters with disabilities, and those who live in poverty. We support legislation to expand access to the polls such as broader permissible forms of identification and expanded absentee voting and oppose legislation unduly or excessively restricting ballot access and legislation to permanently bar the formerly incarcerated from the polls.
- ⇒ **Combating Bias:** The JCRC believes in fair treatment for all under the law and unequivocally opposes discrimination based on race, religion, national origin, age, disability, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. In order to foster a Commonwealth that is safe and welcoming to all residents, we support legislation that fights bias and strengthens state anti-discrimination protections while at the same time opposing legislation that would result in discrimination against any individual or class of individuals.
- ⇒ **Israel Advocacy:** The JCRC is dedicated to the preservation and prosperity of the State of Israel. We support bipartisan legislation that would enhance the currently existing strong relationship between Israel and the Commonwealth of Virginia as well as bipartisan legislation to combat efforts to boycott or delegitimize the country.
- ⇒ **Workforce Training & Poverty Reduction:** JCRC seeks to ensure a strong economy and 21st century workforce, as well as revitalization of in-need areas of the Commonwealth. Furthermore, the Jewish mandate to “champion the poor and the needy” requires that we ensure the basic necessities of life for all. Accordingly, we strive to provide all people with the ability to maintain their economic well-being and support efforts to reduce poverty including, but not limited to, legislation to develop a strong workforce, curb predatory lending and employment practices, and increase the minimum wage.
- ⇒ **Virginia-Israel Advisory Board:** The Virginia-Israel Advisory Board (VIAB) is dedicated to increasing jobs in Virginia by encouraging Israeli companies to locate their businesses here. Key areas for Virginia-Israel cooperation include agrotechnology, life sciences, manufacturing, and cybersecurity. Since 2000, VIAB has helped add approximately 2,051 new jobs to Virginia’s workforce and generated roughly \$67.7 million in state tax revenues. We support robust state funding for VIAB to continue its critical contribution to Virginia’s economic growth.

- ⇒ **Support for Social Services:** Our Jewish agencies provide a range of support for aging adults, individuals with special needs, victims of domestic violence, Holocaust survivors, and individuals seeking counseling and mental health services. These services are provided to all, regardless of faith, background, or ability to pay. We advocate on behalf of these agencies on the federal, state, and local level, as a strong partnership between government and non-profits is essential to effectively serve the community, particularly during these weak economic times. We support expanding the social safety net to adequately provide for all Virginians in need.
- ⇒ **Healthcare for All:** For more than a decade, JCRC has advocated for healthcare reform that strives for universal coverage and addresses the special needs of low-income populations while implementing consumer protections and education. We support bipartisan legislation to close the Medicaid coverage gap and ensure that all Virginians can obtain healthcare, including mental health services and substance abuse treatment.
- ⇒ **Individuals with Special Needs:** The JCRC seeks to ensure that individuals with special needs have the resources they need to live with dignity and fully participate in society and Jewish life. We are committed to creating opportunities for self-sufficiency and inclusion.
- ⇒ **Immigration:** In light of the modern Jewish immigration experience, the JCRC supports a generous immigration policy that enables a path to legal status and citizenship. We support humane efforts to reduce the flow of illegal immigrants into the United States but oppose legislation that would deny healthcare, education, and other services to undocumented immigrants and their children or discourage their access to law enforcement assistance.
- ⇒ **Our Environment:** Like many faiths, our Jewish traditions teach responsibility to care for creation. We support conservation and policies to protect our environment, including incentivizing energy efficiency and utilization of renewable energy sources.
- ⇒ **Reproductive Choice:** The JCRC supports an individual's right to reproductive choice. We oppose any governmental action which would limit this right, such as the creation of undue regulatory barriers for women and abortion providers or cuts in public funding to any health provider that provides family planning and women's health services because that provider also performs abortions.
- ⇒ **Gun Violence Prevention:** The sanctity of life and the abhorrence of senseless violence are so fundamental to Judaism that the JCRC has supported smart firearm policies on the federal and state levels since 1975. Accordingly, we support background checks on all firearm purchases and transfers of ownership in the Commonwealth of Virginia, as well as bipartisan efforts ensure that only those who are properly trained and in good mental health have access to firearms.
- ⇒ **Human Trafficking:** Each year, more than two million women and children are victimized by sexual trafficking. Judaism prioritizes our responsibility to free the captive, and therefore the JCRC strongly supports efforts to secure comprehensive anti-trafficking legislation in Virginia. We have joined with other communities of faith in order to support efforts to provide victim assistance and to criminalize all aspects of human trafficking.