

January 29, 2024

Dear Northern Virginia Senators and Delegates:

As the community and government relations arm for over 100 Jewish organizations in our region, we thank you for your ongoing support of our legislative and budget priorities, as well as your efforts to ensure that Virginia remains safe and a place where all communities can grow and thrive.

This year, we approach the legislative session carrying the burden of our people in a new way – we are worried about the safety and security of Jews here in Virginia and across the world. Our priorities necessarily reflect our need to process and understand October 7, the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust, and we also recognize that a proper and complete local response to October 7 is not wholly – or even primarily – legislative. We thank you for your understanding and for standing with us in the many ways that we have worked and will continue to work to bring information and understanding about the Jewish community, including Israel, into the public discourse.

With this in mind, we nevertheless write now to share our legislative priorities and the specific legislation we support and those we oppose. In general, we support (1) budget items that allow our network of Northern Virginia agencies to continue to provide excellent cost-effective social services to the community at large on a non-sectarian basis, and (2) legislation that aims to better our Commonwealth for all of her citizens and residents.

Legislative Priorities and Corresponding Legislation

Countering antisemitism and supporting Israel. The tidal wave of antisemitic incidents in our region and around the world following Hamas' massacre of Israelis on October 7 have rendered antisemitism and its antizionist manifestation JCRC's most pressing concern. We support legislation, policies and initiatives that fight hatred targeting Jews and the Jewish community as well as all other forms of hatred and bigotry. We further support and encourage efforts to correct misinformation, disinformation and distortion of facts, much of which is designed to foster antisemitism and propagate or repackage age-old antisemitic tropes.

- **WE SUPPORT: HB 18 by Delegate Helmer and SB 7 by Senator Reeves/ SB 120 Senators Subramanyam and Bagby.** The legislation adds the word ethnic to the list of protected classes, which also includes race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and national origin. Ethnicity is a collective identity which often includes the belief in a common history and origin and may include shared traditions, language, and religion. An ethnic group consists of a shared common culture based on cultural, historical, linguistic, and unique historical and social experiences. Examples include Han Chinese, Zulu, Kurds, Basques, and the Jewish community. It's essential to note that the perception and definition of ethnicity can vary widely among different societies and individuals.

Security for Faith-Based Institutions. The JCRC supports increasing funding for security measures and programs to support nonprofits, including faith-based organizations, at risk of hate crimes.

- **WE SUPPORT Item 394 O in the proposed budget and amendments offered by Senator Aird and Delegates Carr, McQuinn and Reid.** Item provides funding for the Department of Criminal Justice Services to make competitive grants to combat hate crimes, including but not limited to target hardening activities, contractual security services, critical technology infrastructure, cybersecurity resilience activities, monitoring, inspection, and screening systems; security-related training for employed or volunteer security staff; and terrorism awareness training for employees. Governor Youngkin increased funding for FY 25 by \$2 million dollars to \$3.5 million.

WE ALSO SUPPORT budget amendments by Senator Aird, Delegate Carr and Delegate McQuinn to adjust language to restore allowing localities to participate in the program as well as providing funding to allow DCJS to promote the current program.

In addition, WE SUPPORT amendment 394 #8h introduced by Delegate Reid, which increases funding for security grants to \$7.5 million per year.

Supports for Social Services. Our Jewish agencies provide a range of support for aging adults, individuals with disabilities, victims of domestic violence, Holocaust survivors, and individuals seeking counseling and mental health services, regardless of faith, background, or ability to pay. We support expanding the social safety net to support our agencies in their work to serve all Virginians in need.

- **WE SUPPORT**
 - **Item 296 K in proposed budget**, which provides for an appropriation from the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services to contract with the Jewish Foundation for Group Homes to expand the Transitioning Youth program the Department for individuals with developmental disability who are aging out and exiting the school system in Loudoun County.
 - **Item 315 H in the proposed budget**, which provides that out of this appropriation, \$200,000 the first year and \$200,000 the second year from the general fund shall be used to contract with the Jewish Social Services Agency to provide assistance to low-income seniors who have experienced trauma.

Democracy protection / voter access. The JCRC recognizes that protecting democracy is essential to a thriving America and a thriving Jewish community. We support laws, policies and initiatives that strengthen the infrastructure of the democratic process such as civics education; poll worker recruitment, training and protection; voter access and that combat misinformation.

- **WE SUPPORT:**

- **HB 43 (Delegate Thomas)** Polling place; assistance for certain voters, expands definition of disability.
- **HB 441 (Delegate Bennett-Parker)** Polling place; assistance for certain voters, clarifies definition of "person with a disability."
- **HB 1408 (Delegate Srinivasan)** Department of Elections; standards for determining number and location of voter satellite offices.
- **SB 364 (Senator Ebbin)** Elections; protection of election officials, penalty.
- **SJ 2 (Senator Locke)** Constitutional amendment; qualifications of voters, right to vote, persons not entitled to vote

Reproductive Health. The JCRC supports legislation that ensures that Virginians have access to comprehensive health care and that Virginians do not face discrimination or government overreach into their relationships with their health care providers, their family or their faith.

- **WE SUPPORT:**

- **HJ 1 (Leader Herring)** Constitutional amendment; fundamental right to reproductive freedom (first reference).
- **HB 78 (Delegate Watts)** Search warrants; menstrual health data prohibited, definition.
- **HB 819 (Delegate Mundon King)** Health insurance; coverage for contraceptive drugs and devices.
- **SB 15 (Senator Favola)** Reproductive health care services; prohibitions on extradition for certain crimes.
- **SB 140 (Senator Carroll Foy)** Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team; created, penalty, report.

Gun Violence Protection. The JCRC supports bipartisan efforts to prevent gun violence and keep firearms out of the wrong hands.

- **WE SUPPORT:**

- **HB 158 (Delegate McClure)** Firearm locking device; required for sale or transfer of firearm.
- **HB 183 (Delegate Simon)** Firearms; storage in residence where minor or person prohibited from possessing is present, penalty.
- **HB 270 (Delegate Reid)** Commonwealth Comprehensive Gun Safety Program; established, etc.
- **HB 798 (Delegate Hope)** Firearms; purchase, possession, etc., following an assault and battery or stalking violation.

- **SB 55 (Senator Salim)** Firearms; waiting period for purchase; penalty.
- **SB 225 (Senator Pekarsky)** School bd. policy; parental notification of responsibility of safe storage of firearms in household.
- **SB 447 (Senator Marsden)** Firearm in unattended motor vehicle; civil penalty.
- **SB 642 (Senator Perry)** Purchase, possession, or transportation of firearm following an assault and battery against.

Justice for Individuals and Communities. The JCRC supports legislation, programs and initiatives that protect the most vulnerable in our community, ensure a system that works toward justice for all and the well-being of our communities by providing access to affordable housing, fighting food insecurity, ensuring quality education, ensuring accountability of the criminal justice system, ensuring access and resources that allow people of all abilities to live with dignity and participate in society.

- **WE SUPPORT:**

- **HB 159 (Delegate Seibold)** Correctional and juvenile correctional facilities; use of canines, prohibited acts.
- **HB 167 (Delegate Keys-Gamarra)** Special grand juries; circuit court to impanel when an unarmed person is killed by law enforcement.
- **HB 174 (Delegate Henson)** Marriage lawful regardless of sex, gender, or race of parties; issuance of marriage license.
- **HB 509 (Delegate Cohen)** Public institutions of higher education; policies; individuals with disabilities.
- **HB 719 (Delegate Reaser)** Public high schools; research-based hazing prevention instruction.
- **HB 962 (Delegate Lopez)** Noncitizens of the United States; removes term aliens throughout Code.
- **HB 984 (Delegate Tran)** Early childhood care & education; expansion of Head Start prog. availability at community colleges.
- **HJ 9 (Delegate Sickles)** Constitutional amendment; marriage between two individuals.
- **SB 283 (Senator Roem)** School meals; availability at no cost to students.
- **SB 311 (Senator Boysko)** State plan for medical assistance services; violence prevention services benefit.
- **SB 504 (Leader Surovell)** Expungement of police and court records.

Environment and Climate Change. The JCRC supports policies to protect our environment through adaptation, mitigation and resilience.

- **WE SUPPORT:**

- **HB 71 (Delegate Bulova)** Combined sewer overflow outfalls; compliance with regulations, Chesapeake Bay Watershed.
- **HB 197 (Krizek)** Solar energy equipment; establishes a nonrefundable income-tax credit.
- **HB 638 (Delegate Sullivan)** Electric utilities; energy efficiency programs, duty to implement the Energy Policy, etc.
- **HJ 36 (Delegate Sewell)** Study; Department of Energy; local governments; purchases of clean energy; report.

Thank you, again, for all that you do. If you have any questions about our positions on these or other bills, do not hesitate to reach out to Vicki Fishman, JCRC Director of Virginia Government and Community Relations, at vfishman@jcouncil.org or (703) 307-3467 or our lobbyist in Richmond, Missy Wesolowski at (703) 975-5411.

Sincerely,

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