



VIRGINIA
AFRICAN
AMERICAN
ADVISORY
BOARD

ANNUAL REPORT
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Prepared by Members of the African American Advisory Board

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VIRGINIA AFRICAN AMERICAN ADVISORY BOARD

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Suzanne Holland	Special Assistant for Advisory Board Administration and Director of Women's Outreach
Janice Underwood, PhD	Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer

LETTER FROM THE CHAIR

Governor Northam,

The Virginia African American Advisory Board (VAAAB) is pleased to present its 2021 annual report and recommendations. These recommendations reflect challenges and opportunities impacting African American residents, organizations, and communities throughout the Commonwealth.

This past year has continued to be challenging. The COVID19 virus continues to be a concern with the Delta Variant and now breakthrough variants. We anticipated a decrease in the number of cases but find ourselves seeking ways to continue to educate the community on the necessity of taking the vaccine. Racial divisions and inequities in education, health care, business ownership and unfair police practices are still at the forefront of the issues we find impacting the African American community. Our report outlines the concerns we believe are most pressing. It is our hope that through policy changes, legislation, studies, and additional resources, that the work this board began on last year might continue. We want to continue to serve as partners as well as advocates for fair treatment and practices as we enter this third year. We recognize this is the final year of your administration and want to recognize the value in the creation of VAAAB. Much has been accomplished over the past 12 months. We are preparing for the transition and look forward to modeling a plan of action that transitions this great legacy you leave the finally places at the forefront the needs of the African American Community. We will continue to serve as a voice for community and as a partner with the Governor's Office, other boards and those seeking to make a difference in equitable practices for the African American community.

Over the past year we continue to strengthen our relationships with other boards, joining the Virginia Latino Advisory Board, Virginia Asian American Advisory Board, and the Council on Women through cross-board meetings where we shared information on similar concern and needs for our respective demographics. We also joined your office in welcoming the new boards and participated in events for The Office of New Americans and the LGBTQ Advisory Board. We thank you and your staff for continuing to think outside the box as you explore ways to serve African American communities. We look forward to continued opportunities to collaborate with the other boards. We were also pleased to launch a survey to capture data on the needs in the African American Community. We introduced to the community "Black Table Talks" where we provided an opportunity for the community to talk to us about the four concerns we have chosen as our current focus: Public Safety & Criminal Justice; Education; Health Care and the Environment; and Small Black Owned Business. We continue to move forward to build stronger relationships and allow community members and partners to know we are present and working to address their issues of concern on behalf of the Governor of the Commonwealth.

While the VAAAB was challenged by the Pandemic less than six months after its inaugural meeting, we believe, that we have been able to strengthen our processes and move our agenda forward. Our successes are noted in this report. While we have much work to do, we are well on our way, to becoming a valued and recognized voice for the African American community in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

We have organized with four committees:

1. Small Black-Owned Business
2. Health and the Environment
3. Public Safety and Criminal Justice
4. Education

We believe each of these committees are the proper arenas to explore the critical issues impacting our citizens. Via the skills and experiences of our committee members combined with collaboration with key community leadership groups across the Commonwealth and our direct outreach to our citizens, we have a broad understanding of how to advocate for and advise on the most appropriate opportunities to build healthier communities. As we move forward, we will be instituting a formal survey process to ensure we fully convey the needs of our communities.

Our report addresses the impact of COVID and the need for continued testing, vaccines, education, and resources. The African American community continues to have the lowest rate of vaccinations and we join the rest of the community in addressing the need to get young adults who because of misinformation are fearful of taking the vaccine. We also await the availability of the vaccine for youth under 12. COVID continues to serve as a reminder to of the many long-standing inequities for our African American. Our areas of focus will continue address these inequities. citizens in each of our focus areas.

We are pleased to present our recommendations and purpose to continue the work and the dialogue as we address the issues and concerns facing the African American community. Our hope is that we become one of the resources used to improve qualities of life, address systemic inequities, and strengthens the valued people of our community. As you close out your administration, we want you to know our desire is to build a strong foundation to continue the work of this advisory board and make it one of your top accomplishments during this administration.

Finally, on behalf of the VAAAB, we want to thank you for the opportunity to serve. Your support and the many investments you have made in the African American community can be seen and will become part of the legacy of your administration. We wish you the very best as you transition to what we know will be a continuation of the work you have begun. Thank you to your Administration as they have partnered with us to serve the African American community in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Your administration will be recorded in history, as making the largest investment in addressing the inequities that have plagued our community for hundreds of years.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Ivey Green,
Chairman



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Virginia African American Advisory Board (VAAAB) was established by **Governor Ralph Northam and signed into law on March 22, 2019**. The Board serves at the pleasure of Governor Ralph S. Northam. It advises the Governor on issues of African American interest so that the Administration can best serve Virginia's African Americans. The VAAAB is completing its second year and is pleased to have been able to move forward its agenda during this period of social distancing and virtual meetings due to Covid19.

The VAAAB exists to advise the Governor on the development of economic, professional, cultural, educational, and governmental links between the Commonwealth of Virginia and the African American community in Virginia. The Board has chosen to organize around four key areas which continue to highlight the key areas impacting the African American Community:

- Small Black-Owned Business
- Education
- Health and the Environment
- Public Safety and Criminal Justice

While there are a host of other concerns, the Board believes that these four areas remain critical to strengthening the African American community. These focus areas provide a mechanism by which African Americans can receive greater access and equitable treatment while helping to increase economic opportunities with fair access, strengthen the educational pipeline, shed light on the injustices African Americans face in the policing and justice system and create healthier and livable communities while providing equal access to medical services and resources.

These recommendations set forth by the Board will enhance the quality of life for the Black community and benefit all Virginians as we seek to eliminate the many disparities that exist among not only the Black community, but communities of color.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Small Black-Owned Business

Urgent attention is needed to address Black income and wealth. Black income is most often generated through the ingenuity of Black businesses. These recommendations are intended to provide assistance to small Black and African American owned businesses so each business can move from the pandemic crisis to thriving. We must ensure every Black and African American business has the opportunity for a future of economic prosperity and wealth transfer to the benefit of all Virginians but especially for the Black and African American community in Virginia:

- **Provide direct support and funding to localities connected to Black businesses.** State and federal resources should flow through localities to current Black owned business with associated accountability measures to evaluate effectiveness
- **Provide continuing education opportunities in entrepreneurship.** Provide business courses as electives in middle school, high school, and community colleges; create partnerships with civic and nonprofit organizations to augment the public education initiative.
- **Assessing the Commonwealth contracting procedures** to ensure no barriers exist for small Black owned businesses.
- **Conduct a Census of Black Businesses** to create a database useful to state procurement executives and large businesses.

Education

The Education Committee of the Virginia African American Advisory Board's continued purpose examines educational disparities and inequities that create barriers to African Americans receiving equitable access to educational opportunities, resources, and funding for education. With this in mind, the Education Committee of the African American Advisory Board makes the following recommendations to the Governor:

- **Increase African American Educators**
- **Reduce Suspension Rates for Marginalized Groups**
- **Provide social and emotional Mental/Behavioral Health resources in the classroom**
- **Create Career Pathways for African American students**

Health and the Environment

The longevity and quality of life for African Americans will depend on health access and care as well as the environment. Health disparities in the African American community continue to rise. Access to health care, health facilities and doctors and healthy environments continue to be at the forefront of health needs in the African American community. The following recommendations are critical to improving health care access and outcomes in the African American community:

- **Continue to address the Maternal Health disparities that exist for African American women and reduce the incidence of maternal and infant mortality, and the racial disparities therein, by actualizing fully all doula-related investments in the Governor's budget proposals**
- **Invest in local African American communities to address Food Insecurities**
- **Incentivize local health departments to adopt comprehensive community asthma programs.**
- **Directly finance or support reimbursement models for programs that align asthma clinical interventions with home assessments, indoor environment improvements and remediations to reduce asthma triggers**

Public Safety and Criminal Justice

With the continual examples of unarmed Black women and men dying at the hands of police, or dying through gun violence in their community, public safety and criminal justice reform must be addressed holistically and realistically in order to facilitate meaningful and lasting changes. We recommend the following:

- **Conduct a comprehensive study on the impact of gun violence, including injuries requiring hospitalization and police interventions.**
- **Establish state-wide standards and certification for K-9 trainers and K-9 units.**
- **Develop a minimum, state-wide 'anti-racism' code of conduct for law enforcement.**
- **Revise Virginia's pretrial system to ensure that its citizens are not subject to unnecessary cost during pretrial detention, including supporting and funding policies that implement counsel at first appearance.**

COMMITTEE REPORTS



SMALL BLACK-OWNED BUSINESS

Black and African American small business owners endured a lot in 2021. Like many Virginians, small Black owned businesses endured payroll challenges, lost revenue and employee and client retention challenges all while combating COVID-19. At every turn Black and African American business owners found a way to survive. Further, exacerbating an already traumatic and difficult year was the addition of paying respect, pausing, and remembering the Tulsa Massacre. In 1921 the Greenwood District of Tulsa Oklahoma was a thriving business mecca for Black and African American business owners. There were Black shopkeepers, doctors, restaurants, hotels, grocery stores and more. Their success was not just about their business acumen, professionalism, and exceptionalism, but it was also a visual demonstration of what Black and African Americans can accomplish even in the face of Jim Crow laws and segregation. The Greenwood District was coined the Black Wall Street because Black/ African American business owners dared to thrive and dared to survive notwithstanding the acute discrimination of the time.

The audacity of Black Wall Street was not a welcomed inclusion in Tulsa Oklahoma. Perhaps it was their wealth, success and independence that angered some their white counterparts in Tulsa that resulted in a white mob burning the prosperous community of Black and African American small business owners completely to ashes on May 31, 1921. The burning of Black Wall Street in the Greenwood district of Tulsa Oklahoma had a chilling effect in 1921 but also caused an economic destitution that continues to reverberate today. The economic loss resulting from the Tulsa Massacre is just one example of the devastating economic challenges that Black and African Americans have faced since the first Africans arrived on Virginia shores at Point Comfort.

There are few events more illustrative of the obstacles Black Americans have historically faced to accessing economic prosperity than the Tulsa Race Massacre of 1921. In roughly 24 hours starting on May 31, 1921, a white mob destroyed an estimated at least \$1.47

million — or more than \$20 million in today’s dollars — of Black-owned homes and businesses, according to a state report on the event released in 2001. ¹

The Tulsa massacre was not the only assault on Black/African American business communities. CNN reports that, “Between the end of the Civil War and the 1940s, the destruction seen in Tulsa happened in various ways to communities of color across the country.”²

There is a strong correlation between Black owned businesses and Black wealth. According to a 2019 survey of Consumer Finance “the median net worth of Black households was \$24,000 as opposed to \$189,000 for white households. This shortfall in financial wealth creates a cascade of inequalities in education, homeownership, and simply saving for emergencies. And while it will take multiple solutions to solve these enormous problems, entrepreneurship can provide the best opportunity to build sustainable, long-term wealth”.³

Black and African American businesses are often birthed from necessity. These businesses tend to be pillars in Black and African American communities bringing resources, but also adding culture considerations. Yet Black and African American small business owners continue to face dire consequences from historical systematic inequities compounded by COVID-19. While many might be hearing the history of the Tulsa Massacre for the first time in 2021, Black and African Americans businesses have been subject to economic and social attacks in the past and in the present.

Given this history it has become even more imperative that in 2021 supporting Black business owners and their contributions to the American economy should not be limited to sympathetic words but

¹ <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/what-the-1921-tulsa-race-massacre-can-teach-us-about-the-racial-wealth-gap-in-2020-2020-06-19>

² <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/05/us/whitewashing-of-america-racism/>

² [https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianthompson1/2021/06/17/the-key-to-closing-the-racial-wealth-gap-](https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianthompson1/2021/06/17/the-key-to-closing-the-racial-wealth-gap-black-entrepreneurship/?sh=eb627be5bec4)

[black-entrepreneurship/?sh=eb627be5bec4](https://www.forbes.com/sites/brianthompson1/2021/06/17/the-key-to-closing-the-racial-wealth-gap-black-entrepreneurship/?sh=eb627be5bec4)

must extend to essential change in policy and economic resource abutment so those words can turn into measurable action.

It is with this backdrop as context that the small Black owned business committee of the Virginia African American Advisory Board offers recommendations. Over the last year VAAAB met with local Black Chambers of Commerce in each region in the Commonwealth. Additionally, the committee took time to meet with individual Black businesses to assess resources, information, and present-day challenges. The recommendations presented here stem from those conversations.

Recommendations:

- **Provide direct support to localities connected to Black businesses AND set up accountability measures as a condition to the financial resources**
 - Black and African American businesses reported that they mostly accessed information and resources through their local connections. This includes the local county and city government, as well as local banks and civic organizations. During COVID-19, businesses relied on the local county and city government for financial resources and supports. It's important that as local government is receiving funding from the State, that they demonstrate how those funds were used and by who. Data collection can help mitigate inequities. There should be clear documentation of how many and what kind of businesses were supported during COVID-19 including demographic information.
 - When funds are dispersed to county and cities government the Governor's office should inform each of the regional Black Chambers of commerce. Many times, by the time Black and African Americans businesses learn about new funding, the funding has already been depleted.

- **Provide continuing education opportunities in entrepreneurship**
 - Provide free business courses in middle and high school and community college
 - Set aside financial resources for civic and nonprofit organizations to conduct business classes in the communities they serve

- **Assessing the Commonwealth contracting procedures**
 - Review the process for awarding state contracts and determine the challenges that small Black owned businesses face in being awarded contracts
 - Provide clear directives, oversight, and enforcement to government agencies to ensure that small Black owned businesses are not being prevented from contract awards

- **Conduct a Census of Black Businesses**
 - The State Government should know how many Black Businesses are operating within Virginia

Too often in Black history we are commemorating and remembering what was lost, what was taken, and what was destroyed. Today we have an opportunity to put in place policies, backed by financial support, that will ensure Black and African American businesses in Virginia survive and thrive so that Virginians 100 years from now are not commemorating a tragic past but instead celebrating and building on our legacy of abundance and abundance.

EDUCATION

Virginia has a long, torrid history as it pertains to educating Black children. Slaves in Virginia were prohibited by law and practice from learning to read or write. Even when Virginia established a free public education system, educating Black children was a complete afterthought. In 1896 the Supreme Court upheld "separate but equal doctrine in the landmark case of Plessy v. Ferguson. However, Plessy v. Ferguson reinforced the separate and ignored the equality pertaining to education in practice. Black schools were widely underfunded by every measure - from the lack of quality buildings to the scarcity and, in many cases, complete lack of books and the lack of a livable compensation for Black teachers. Unfortunately for many African- American children in Virginia, many of these measures remain unequal today.

The struggle for equal and quality education for Black children in Virginia can be conceptualized by understanding one piece of history: white school systems in Virginia opted to shut down rather than integrate entirely. The Farmville students' walkout led by Barbara Johns was part of the Brown v. Board of Education ruling that concluded: "separate education facilities were inherently unequal." Understanding Virginia's history on Black children's education will deepen your understanding of why stark divisions and inequalities remain in Black children's education in the Commonwealth of Virginia today. 16 With this in mind, the Education Committee of the African American Advisory Board makes the following recommendations to the Governor:

- **Increase African American Educators**

As a state, we must increase the percentage of minorities and male educators. Our schools lack teachers with diverse backgrounds to cater to our diverse student population. 40% of public school students are African American, yet less than 15% of educators are Black or Latino. Children from diverse backgrounds benefit from educators who can affirm and share

their identity. All educators must be culturally sensitive to their students to ensure academic, social, and emotional needs are met.

According to the U.S. Department of Education: African American students are 2.9 times likely to be labeled as a student with mental disabilities and 1.9 times as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed. Black males also make up 2% of K-12 public school teachers.

With this information, the Education Committee recommends the following:

- Tuition Assistance ex. Loan repayment program/HBCU
- Increase assistance for teacher PREP for all Colleges
- Student Loan Assistance to include private loans
- Resources (i.e., funding to pay for test and testing materials) to assist teachers in preparing for the Praxis Preparation test
- Quality of Life Resources, i.e., housing, continuing education
- **Reduce Suspension Rates for Marginalized Groups**

Male and female Black students disproportionately acquire discipline referrals and out-of-school suspensions at a 2-3 times higher rate than White students. Recent research has also raised concerns that students belonging to the LGBTQ spectrum are also at heightened risk of receiving discipline consequences. As educators, we must consider issues of race, culture, gender, power, and privilege when addressing inequality in schooling. The following are recommendations to support decreasing suspension rates of marginalized groups:

- Culturally Relevant and Responsive Teaching Curriculum that reflects and is respectful of the diversity of today's classrooms and schools
- Funding for schools to target specific marginalized populations within districts for professional learning and programming
- Research-based resources and professional learning opportunities for school districts

- **Mental/ Behavioral Health**

Mental/Behavioral Health is critical to children's success in school and life. Research demonstrates that students who receive social-emotional and mental health support achieve better academically. The pandemic itself has caused much worry, stress, and grief. As schools return to school, there is an increased need for additional mental health resources in our PK-12 schools and colleges/universities.

- Lack of community resources for low-income students (that are available outside instruction, ex: during a crisis)
- Supporting higher education in administering a code of conduct holding students accountable for their actions

- **Career Pathways**

African Americans disproportionately fill vulnerable jobs and make less. There is a need to invest in job training and education for displaced and vulnerable workers. Also, creating entry-level jobs workforce to take jobs in sectors that can sustain an inevitable economic downturn. According to the Census Bureau, 32.5% of the 25 and older population has a bachelor's degree or more, compared to only 22.5% of African Americans. 55.6% of African Americans in the labor force are underemployed or working jobs that do not require their degree. The following recommendations are needed to improve the quality of life for African Americans in the Commonwealth.

- Career and Technical Education(CTE) - Create high-quality K-12 education with career training that leads to career pathways that build a resilient middle class

- Workforce Development/Credentialing will allow access to educational or credentialing opportunities, on-the-job training, and removing barriers such as transportation and childcare
- Provide grant funding to schools and community organizations for internships, experiential learning opportunities, career counseling, and other activities that have a greater impact on integrating their education and career preparation

We hope that these recommendations will serve as a bridge to close the disparities gap and serve as a propeller to catapult African American children into the 21st century with economic security and the opportunities to create wealth. However, even with all the education opportunities, the efficacy is significantly weakened if the Black community's health gaps are not addressed.

HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Health disparities in the African American community have been linked to longevity and quality of life. In 2020, the lack of access to vaccines and the high rate of deaths due to Covid-19 continued to shine light on inequities in health care. The African American community continues to face high rates of death due to strokes, high blood pressure, cancer, and other health concern. The longevity and quality of life for African Americans will depend on healthcare access and care, as well as environmental needs such as transportation and food insecurities. The Healthcare and Environment committee seeks to continue its work to improve healthcare and provide access to healthcare services in the African American community to address these disparities. The African American community is less likely to receive preventive health services and often receives lower-quality care. African Americans also have the worst health outcomes for various conditions. The committee makes the following recommendations:

1. **Reduce the incidence of maternal and infant mortality, and the racial disparities therein, by actualizing fully all doula-related investments in the Governor's budget proposals.**
2. **Invest in local African American communities to address Food Insecurities,** perhaps hiring trusted consultants/contractors to develop a systematic approaching to growing foods as well as educating the community on healthy lifestyles.
3. **Address asthma disparities in the African American community by advancing some of the recommendations in the 2018 Asthma Burdens report.**

The African American community is less likely to receive preventive health services and often receives lower-quality care. African Americans also have the worse health outcomes for various conditions. The Commonwealth of Virginia and healthcare professionals must acknowledge that race and racism are factors in receiving health care. The VAAAB Health

committee seeks to move forward an agenda to address the disparities that exist in Maternal Health, Food Insecurities, Asthma, and the Environment in the African American community.

Maternal Health

The Health Committee will continue its work to join the Governor in advancing the goals set forth in the April 2021 Maternal Health Strategic published by the Secretary of the Commonwealth. We acknowledge all the accomplishments made in the 2020 legislative session. The report states that Virginia mirrors the national rate of maternal mortality: “College educated Black women in the U.S. are 60% greater risk of maternal death than a white or Hispanic woman with less educate.”⁴ This statistic alone raises concerns about the health and wellbeing of Black women and infants. Governor Northam during the 2020 legislative session was able to move forth the agenda to fully address disparities in maternal health and infant mortality by 2025. The recommendation supports the Governor and seeks to address continued needs in the Commonwealth as it relates to maternal health.

Recommendation and Support:

Reduce the incidence of maternal and infant mortality, and the racial disparities therein, by actualizing fully all doula-related investments in the Governor’s budget proposals. This would be accomplished through full implementation of the doula-related policy recommendation from the statewide strategic planning session. The plan calls for providing a doula reimbursement through Medicaid; and taking concrete steps forward on the doula-related recommendations and solutions under Strategy 1 and Strategy 3 of the statewide 2021 Maternal Health Strategic Plan. The plan calls for eliminating maternity care deserts and ensuring “trauma-informed, humane treatment of pregnant and postpartum women in the criminal justice system.”⁵

⁴<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-health-and-human-resources/pdf/Virginia's-Maternal-Health-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

⁵ Ibid

Reference the following:

- Investment proposed in Governor Northam’s maternal health budget package in December 2019 to mandate the Secretary of Health and Human Resources to conduct a study and make recommendations regarding a community doula benefit for women covered by Medicaid.
- Investment proposition in the 2021-2022 Governor’s Proposed Budget for the 2021 General Assembly Session to allot \$1.2M to establish a community doula benefit through Medicaid reimbursement.
- Policy recommendation from the statewide strategic planning session that called for providing a doula benefit through Medicaid reimbursement.
- Recommendations under Strategy 1 from the statewide Maternal Health Strategic Plan to eliminate maternity care deserts in part by expanding “insurance coverage for doula services to promote access regardless of income or source of insurance”⁶ and by expanding “insurance coverage for a range of birth options that include hospitals, birthing centers, and planned home births that are attended by a physician, midwife, or doula.”⁷
- Recommendations under Strategy 3 from the statewide Maternal Health Strategic Plan to “ensure trauma-informed, humane treatment of pregnant and postpartum women in the criminal justice system”⁸ in part by providing “access to pregnancy supports such as lactation consultants, doulas, and other perinatal birth workers.

⁶ <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-health-and-human-resources/pdf/Virginia's-Maternal-Health-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-health-and-human-resources/pdf/Virginia's-Maternal-Health-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/media/governorvirginiagov/secretary-of-health-and-human-resources/pdf/Virginia's-Maternal-Health-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

Food Insecurity

The onset of the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 has devastatingly impacted food security in Virginia. COVID-19 has exacerbated the fundamental inequities that have long existed in our food system. A report from Feeding America estimates that nearly half a million more Virginians have experienced food insecurity because of the pandemic. This is due to related job losses and the fact that the pandemic has disproportionately impacted minority communities. There have been numerous studies done about food insecurity before the pandemic came to Virginia and the solutions remain the same: maximize federal nutrition program participation and access, invest in a strong regional food system, and empower local communities.

Nearly 1.2 million Virginians live in a food desert, according to the most recent 2017 data provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In an urban setting, a food desert qualifies if someone must travel more than a mile away to find affordable and healthy food. If you live in a rural setting, a food desert qualifies as access to a grocery store that's more than a 30 minutes' drive away. In 2018, there were 842,870 food insecure Virginians, according to Feeding America's interactive data map. That is a rate of 9.9%.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines household food security as "access at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life. Food security includes at a minimum:

- The ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods.
- Assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways (that is, without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies).

In contrast, the USDA defines food insecurity as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways."

Early research from the Northwestern Institute for Policy Research estimated that Virginia's food insecurity rose 12.5 percentage points to 22.5% (or more than one in five people) during the April-May 2020 timeframe. The [Virginia SNAP-Ed Food Security Survey](#)⁹ found that 58% of households reported they did not have money to buy enough food and children in 29% of households were not eating enough as a result.

Food insecurity, and hunger, have far reaching implications. Hunger and poor nutrition lead to poor health outcomes, emotionally, physically, and mentally. Work and academic performance can suffer as well due to food insecurity. Food insecurity is a symptom of poverty. Food is not a fixed cost, so it is often sacrificed, in terms of both quantity and quality, to accommodate other basic needs. Given the fact that poverty is a major factor when it comes to food insecurity it makes it even more important that the African American community have access to affordable and nutritional food resources. African Americans make up 16.44% of the population in Virginia and make up 16.1% of those living in poverty in Virginia. The poverty number is astounding given the disinvestments in these communities. There is a stigma on getting access to food and some will pass on receiving food due to this stigma that society has placed on shaming those in need. Food insecurity is a solvable problem. The resources needed are available, but too many barriers still stand between low-income families and affordable, healthy food choices.

Recommendation

Invest in the local African American Communities to grow their own food. (Virginia Extension Office) using the following methods:

9

[https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/oisi/food_security/resources/Virginia Food Security Survey Report 5.21.pdf](https://www.dss.virginia.gov/files/division/oisi/food_security/resources/Virginia_Food_Security_Survey_Report_5.21.pdf)

- Educate and have listening sessions about how food and nutrition play a role in overall health. This includes mental health, physical health and improved cognitive abilities. (Virginia Department of Health and Virginia Extension Office)
- Hire African American Contractors to do this work. Studies have shown that people respond better to folks that look like them.
- Have public schools send home food on Friday for low wealth students to ensure they have access to food for three days.

ASTHMA

Asthma Disparities

There are major disparities with Asthma in the Black and Brown community due to Structural Social, Biological and Behavioral Determinants. These include systematic racism, segregation, education, housing, socioeconomic healthcare, genes, and tobacco use. The Asthma and Allergy Foundation reported:

Causes of Differences in Asthma:

Racial and ethnic disparities in asthma are caused by complex factors, including:

- **Structural determinants** such as systemic racism, segregation, and discriminatory policies
- **Social determinants** such as socioeconomic status, education, neighborhood and physical environment, employment, social support networks and access to health care
- **Biological determinants** such as genes and ancestry
- **Behavioral determinants** such as tobacco use and adherence to medicines

It was also reported that Richmond is number three in the country on the **Highest Asthma Capitol list (2021 Report)**. In the 2018 Virginia Asthma Burden report disparities were summarized: ¹⁰

- Asthma is, and will continue to be, an important public health issue, considering its vast impact on health, quality of life and economic cost.
- In the U.S., the burden of asthma is huge; however, there are large disparities by sex, race/ethnicity, and age.
- In Virginia, adult females, female children, blacks, and Hispanics are disproportionately affected by asthma. There were an estimated 874,713 people diagnosed with asthma at some point in their lifetime, out of an estimated population of 8,411,808 in 2016 (BRFSS, 2016) in the Commonwealth of Virginia. That is, one out of every ten adult residents in Virginia, has been diagnosed with asthma in their lifetime.
- An estimated 560,419 adults currently have asthma (BRFSS, 2016). This means one in fifteen adults in the Commonwealth of Virginia has asthma. This morbidity continues to greatly impact the cost of care and management of the disease, considering the number of individuals with asthma.
- Deaths due to asthma are rare and are thought to be largely preventable, particularly among children and young adults.
- Asthma related deaths are a testament to a lack of patient education, limited access to preventive medications and/or poor quality of care.

Institutional **racism** and its consequences, including **environmental injustice**, poor housing conditions, and absence of resources (time and finances) have intensified the adverse effect of

¹⁰ [Asthma-Burden-Report_Final_10232018-1.pdf \(virginia.gov\)](#)

diseases such as **asthma** in low income, communities of color. The COVID-19 pandemic impacted nearly every aspect of daily life through most of 2020. Some of the biggest impacts were seen in healthcare, with limited access to doctors, medicines, and protective equipment. For people living with asthma, the pandemic changed the ways they sought and maintained their asthma treatment. In some cases, the pandemic may have contributed to changes in the health outcomes and risk factors outlined in this report.

Key activities for this recommendation:

1. Incentivize local health departments to adopt comprehensive community asthma programs.
2. Directly finance or support reimbursement models for programs that align asthma clinical interventions with home assessments, indoor environment improvements and remediations to reduce asthma triggers.

PUBLIC SAFETY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Public Safety & Criminal Justice Committee strategically addresses safety concerns based on data, that impede quality of life and adversely impact healthy socialization in African American communities. The committee will also examine public safety and criminal justice practices that perpetuate generational poverty, unhealthy neighborhoods, and inevitable incarceration in African American communities. In addition, it will explore and analyze public policies that inadvertently perpetuate violent crime and economic disparity in African American communities.

Police Accountability & Transparency

As the investigation continues surrounding the Capitol Riot (January 6, 2021) a distressing trend as surfaced -several alleged perpetrators previously served their country. At least 52 active or retired military, law enforcement, or government service employees are among the over 400 suspects arrested for their alleged actions at the Capitol to include, over half a dozen ex-police officers.¹¹

Our overarching recommendation is to:

Develop a minimum, state-wide ‘anti-racism’ code of conduct for law enforcement. There are several recommended components for the proposed code of conduct:

- Explicitly prohibit officers from supporting and associating with hate groups and paramilitary groups in accordance with practices and policies that preserve First Amendment rights.
- Prohibit the use of racist and other discriminatory language, jokes, statements, and or gesticulations. Ensure that standards for interaction with colleagues and the public, and rules for conduct unbecoming, explicitly prohibit discrimination and the use of racial epithets.

¹¹ <https://policingequity.org/images/pdfs-doc/CPE-WhiteSupremacy.pdf>

- Prohibit the display of patches, tattoos, symbols, and insignia of hate groups or paramilitary gangs, whether the officer is on or off duty.
- Include instructions to implement departmental social media policies that explicitly prohibit posts, “likes,” jokes, memes, retweets, and other statements that advocate racism, violence, misogyny, homophobia, or other kinds of hate and discrimination

Declaring Gun Violence, a Public Health Emergency

Gun violence is not just about crime suppression or enforcement, it is also about prevention, intervention, and reentry. One of our chief concerns is gun violence and its impact in the African American community. Since 2011, at least 100,000 people have died due to gun violence in our Black and Brown communities which has largely gone unnoticed. In Virginia, 82% of firearm homicide victims are male and African American males are disproportionately impacted. African American males ages 15-34 have a firearm homicide rate nearly 16 times higher than White (non-Latino) males of the same age group.

Strategies likely will involve traditional police enforcement and crime prevention activities through a **multipronged and multi-disciplinary strategy** to include police to address the underlying problems that facilitate gun violence.

To most effectively address the public health emergency that is gun violence, we recommend:

Conduct a comprehensive study on the impact of gun violence, including injuries requiring hospitalization and police interventions. There are a variety of tools available to implement this recommendation:

- Community Violence Intervention (CVI) communities suffering from high levels of gun violence need to know about, understand, and strongly consider the (CVI) strategy. The violence interrupters are a community-based strategy that helps to resolve conflicts, spread the retail deterrence message, and serve as street-level conduits to social services.

- Cure Violence (CV) model promising approach to reducing urban gun violence. CV is rooted in the theory that violence is a behavior pattern that acts like a contagious disease transmitted from person to person via rivalry and social conditions. A key principle of CV is that, by targeting the individuals most at risk for driving or becoming the victims of violence, it is possible to interrupt and slow the spread of violence within the “infected” community. “Under this framework, America’s poor, inner-city neighborhoods are the epicenters of the gun violence epidemic.”¹² Underserved, predominantly urban African American and Hispanic areas are plagued by a massively disproportionate share of violence.

- Hospital - Based Violence Intervention. A strategy that focuses on gun violence and high-risk individuals who have been recently admitted to a hospital for treatment of a serious violent injury due to gun violence. This strategy, referred to as Hospital-based Violence Intervention (HVIP), is built upon the premise that the strongest risk factor for violent injury is a history of previous violent injury. In fact, being the victim of violence also significantly increases the chances of a person becoming a perpetrator of violence.

- Require police agencies to conduct a comprehensive yearly report on all guns recovered.
The Norfolk Model: The Norfolk Police Department (NPD) is in its fifth year of tracking the history of guns that have been recovered by the NPD. These guns have either been found or used in the commission of a crime. This intensive research effort has been put forth to better understand how firearms are found in the hands of criminals despite the state and federal laws in place that are meant to control the flow of weapons into the hands of

¹² Giffords Law Center *Other Laws & Policies Intervention Strategies*
<https://giffords.org/lawcenter/gun-laws/policy-areas/other-laws-policies/intervention-strategies/>

criminals. Almost every gun in this country is legally purchased through a federally licensed firearm dealer. Data reveals that the crime that has occurred with that firearm in most cases was not committed by the lawful purchaser. It is only through analyzing evidence such as this data that we can make informed decisions that will have the greatest impact on violent crime in our neighborhoods.

Police Canine Certification

Most Americans remember the horrid scenes of police dogs deployed on defenseless African Americans in Birmingham, Alabama during the Civil Rights movement. Police dogs' jaws are strong enough to pierce sheet metal, and often can produce severe injuries. "Some police departments deploy them not only in emergencies, but also for low-level, non-violent incidents. The dogs bite thousands of Americans each year, including innocent bystanders, police officers, even their own handlers. And there is little oversight, nationally or in the states, *to include Virginia* of how police departments use them."¹³

- **Recommendation: All police departments that employ Canine Units be “certified”. The Virginia Police Work Dog Association (VPWDA) is the benchmark for Canine certification.**

Currently there is no requirement (nothing in DCJS, no legislative requirements, no court case law) for a law enforcement agency to register, complete a certain amount of training, or obtain a license, or earn a certification to use a dog for patrol work, explosive detection, narcotics detection, accelerant detection, cadaver detection, and search and rescue.¹⁴

¹³ *Like I was being eaten': When police dogs bite, no one is accountable*

<https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/investigations/2020/10/02/police-use-of-force-dog-bite-k-9-investigation-excessive-force-arrests-lawsuits/5879123002/>

¹⁴ The Marshall Project *When Police Violence is a Dog Bite*

https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/10/02/when-police-violence-is-a-dog-bite?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter&utm_source=opening-statement&utm_term=newsletter-20201002-2179

Pretrial Justice

Racial disparities are prevalent in the criminal legal system, including the disproportionate number of persons of color who are detained pretrial. Persons of color disproportionately receive higher bails and more burdensome release conditions compared to their white counterparts.¹⁵ Proactive steps must be taken to address these disparities on the individual case and systemic levels.

Recommendation: Revise Virginia's pretrial system to ensure that its citizens are not subject to unnecessary cost during pretrial detention, including supporting and funding policies that implement counsel at first appearance.¹⁶

Prior to July 1, 2021, Virginia did not collect or report data concerning statewide pretrial outcomes. As a result of legislation adopted during the 2021 General Assembly session, Virginia now mandates the collection of a specific set of data on individuals held pretrial in Virginia and requires the data to be made publicly available. With the passage of this legislation, Virginia will have a continuous, sustained data collection process, allowing for the examination of demographics related to race, ethnicity, gender, and age disparities, pretrial detention and other data related to pretrial outcomes.

With this victory, Virginia will need to remain vigilant and continue to examine its pretrial system to ensure that individuals are not being subjected to unnecessary and costly pretrial detention and correct for any possible disparities that the data may show.

¹⁵ *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 133, Issue 4, November 2018, Pages 1885–1932, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjy012>.

¹⁶ NACDL resolution urging the recognition of the right to counsel at initial appearance, <https://www.nacdl.org/Content/Urging-the-Recognition-of-Right-to-Counsel-at-Init>.

NACDL resolutions and policies on pretrial practice, <https://www.nacdl.org/Content/PoliciesPretrialPractices>.

The legislation adopted, as well as the continued examination of Virginia’s pretrial system is a priority issue of a coalition of state and national organizations under the banner of the Virginia Pretrial Justice Coalition.

Support and encourage policies that implement counsel at first appearance. National studies show that the early appointment of defense counsel,⁵ who have the tools to fight for their clients is crucial to achieving just outcomes for people accused of crimes. This can include supporting legislative proposals, as well as, appropriating needed funding to ensure successful implementation.

As cited in “The Role of Defense Counsel in Ensuring a Fair Justice System,” the author states:

“It is at the first arraignment of the defendant that a vigorous defense counsel is needed for the justice system to be a fair one. Studies have repeatedly demonstrated that the defendant who is released on bail ends up with a better ultimate disposition than one who does not. The freed defendant is at a better bargaining position regarding plea negotiations, is able to enter a rehab program and have counselors report to the court about his progress, is able to locate witnesses, and is available to meet with and assist counsel in preparing the case for a hearing or trial.”¹⁷

HB 820, introduced during the 2020 General Assembly session, would have:

- Guaranteed that everyone in custody has a lawyer at their first court appearance.
- Required that an individual and their lawyer have adequate time to communicate confidentially before appearing in court; and
- Created a committee in each circuit court with stakeholders from prosecution, defense, and pretrial and court services to plan for and implement counsel at first appearance.

¹⁷ The Role of Defense Counsel in Ensuring a Fair Justice System (June 2012), <https://www.nacdl.org/Article/June2012-TheRoleofDefenseCounselinEnsuring>.

At the conclusion of the 2021 session, a budget amendment was approved, directing the Office of the Executive Secretary (OES) to form a working group to provide a cost estimate of statewide implementation of HB 2286, as well as recommending a plan for implementation. Additionally, the Virginia State Crime Commission has requested that the Committee on District Courts to study this issue as well.

The legislation was supported by a coalition of state and national organizations under the banner of the Virginia Pretrial Justice Coalition. Please see the fact sheet (“In Support of Access to Meaningful Counsel at First Appearance”) included in the appendix regarding the impact of providing counsel at first appearance on the criminal legal system.

LOOKING FORWARD

The 2021 Annual Report captures what the VAAAB sees as the most pressing needs facing the African American community. It is not an exhaustive list of these needs and concerns, but those we believe require the most immediate actions and decisions to reverse the inequities we believe plague this community.

To aid in gaining greater clarity regarding the needs and challenges in the Black community, we hosted three “Black Table Talks” on Health and the Environment, Education and Public Safety and Criminal Justice to hear directly from the community. We are scheduled to hold the final Black Table later this year on “Small Black Owned Business” and expect to make this an ongoing part of the VAAAB platform. These table talks coupled with a data survey we conducted this year will further quantify and clarify the needs of the Commonwealth’s African American community. More than 500 community members responded to the request to complete the survey.

The data survey will be used to better ensure the Board’s recommendations to the Governor speak firsthand to the needs of the African American community. Because this data reflects the voice of the community, we will be able to aid further in building a more inclusive and equitable Commonwealth. We have included in the Appendices, two documents that provide a snapshot of survey process. We will report this data to the community before the end of the year as we advance the work of the VAAAB. We especially thank Dr. Monica Motley who chaired this effort and led the board through extensive research, data collection and reporting that included two virtual information sessions on March 25, 2021 and June 31, 2021 to prepare the community to take the survey. We will host sessions later this year to report this data to the community.

It is our hope that the work we have begun, will continue to be advanced as the new administration takes office in January. It is necessary that the work we have already done moves

forward as the transition takes place. We look to support continued funding of the Health Equity Dashboard to ensure the work done to date continues for decades to come.

We applaud the establishment of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion and the work this team has accomplished. The Commonwealth of Virginia is leading the country in establishing a diverse and equitable government and community. We strongly support introducing legislation to elevate this office to Cabinet level thereby assuring permanency in the Commonwealth's journey to become an inclusive state where people can live, learn, work, visit, and thrive. The One Virginia Plan provides an excellent roadmap to achieve and promote a diverse and equitable community, state government and Commonwealth of Virginia, but we must secure the work accomplished to date. We welcome further conversation with your cabinet as we seek to build a more diverse and equitable Commonwealth.

REFERENCES

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[USDA Economic Research Service](#)

[Asthma Disparities - Reducing Burden on Racial and Ethnic Minorities | AAFA.org](#)

[AAFA 2021 Asthma Capitals Report May 2021](#)

[Asthma Capitals: Top 100 Most Challenging Cities to Live in With Asthma \(aafa.org\)](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix A - VA CAFA Factsheet FINAL



VA CAFA Factsheet
FINAL - Appendix A.docx

Appendix B - NLADA CAFA Report

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NLADA CAFA Report
Appendix B.pdf

Appendix C - VAAAB Community Survey Info Sheet



VAAAB Survey_Info Sheet.pdf

Appendix D - VAAAB Survey Invitation



VAAAB Survey_Invitation Letter.pdf