Victories for 2022 Annual Report

We need to re-order these but this is just to get the text and pictures correct.

Non-Christian Holidays Recognized by FCPS



What makes Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Eid Al-Fitr and Diwali different this school year in Fairfax? They are fully recognized holidays in Fairfax Public Schools. Congratulations to VOICE leaders, School Board members and allies!

Many may not know that this campaign was started by Muslim and Jewish high school students in 2017 when they wanted to do something about the hateful remarks and acts directed at them such as peers making jokes about the holocaust, girls being told they couldn't wear their hijabs and students being called "terrorists."

VOICE leaders knew they needed to do something to address the fact that many did not feel welcomed at school. So we did what we do best: we talked to those directly impacted. VOICE leaders listened to hundreds of Jewish and Muslim students and while many ideas were shared, the one that we heard again and again was "honor my most important holidays show that you also respect me as a person."

That year, over 800 VOICE adult and high school age leaders gathered in Fairfax and Prince William Counties with their prospective Superintendents at VOICE Actions to get public commitments about the Muslim and Jewish holidays. Both superintendents stated to VOICE leaders that going forward no tests or major field trips were allowed the day of, the day before and the day after the religious holiday. There were other victories as well, such as allowing students to be able to spend their lunch time in the library during Ramadan since they were fasting.

The next several years were rocky in the actual follow through which led VOICE leaders and others to decide that organizing for having the days off was worth relaunching. Then in the 2021-2022 Fairfax public school calendar, the County School Board decided no religious holidays would be included, even moving Easter from Spring Break.

There were many pivotal moments throughout this campaign when members of different faiths stood for the whole and would not let one faith's holiday be included if not all of the ones they had collectively agreed upon were in the FCPS calendar. We want to celebrate this fact, as well as, the victory that going forward thousands of families can observe their major religious

holidays with their families. A special shout out to the VOICE leaders, young and older, at Dar al-Hijrah, Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation and Temple Rodef Shalom!

Hundreds of Seniors Stay In Their Homes



Seven years ago, what began as a tragedy for hundreds of seniors ended up as a victory for those seniors and the VOICE leaders who organized with them. In 2015, residents of Fellowship Square Senior Housing at Lake Anne learned that there was a plan to replace their aging building, a place that those seniors called home.

The residents, some of whom had family and friends attending VOICE congregations (Trinity Presbyterian, Unitarian Universalist of Reston, Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation), were angry and scared with the initial proposal. Junita Clark, mother-in-law to a NVHC member, led a petition drive. Residents united in solidarity saying, “No we will not accept being separated from one another.”



Renee Brereton, VOICE organizer, met with residents and found strong established relationships, especially within the Chinese, Korean and Iranian ethnic communities. One key ingredient in the success of this campaign was finding a new developer that had experience with senior housing and a commitment to not displace tenants.

The team found that developer in CPDC who later merged with Enterprise Community Development. They worked with County and Federal agencies to raise $83 million for Lake Anne House with 240 units. In August, residents moved into an award-winning beautiful building. All residents have HUD vouchers. In addition, HUD designated Reston as an expensive zip code and raised the HUD voucher to $1,600/month.

Missing Middle Housing



VOICE Arlington leaders and allies turned out 266 strong from 16 member and allied institutions on Nov. 17th to show support for a proposed Missing Middle Housing plan to remove long standing exclusionary zoning restrictions limiting more than ¾ of residential land to single-family homes only. Missing Middle Housing are homes that fall in between detached single family homes and large apartment complexes, such as duplexes, triplexes, townhomes, etc.

The VOICE assembly, which filled the sanctuary of the Universalist Unitarian Church of Arlington, capped months of intensive listening by VOICE leaders in group workshops and one-on-one conversations on the streets of Arlington. Support for this “gentle” housing density to allow more people, including historically excluded people of color, to access homes is a logical next step in VOICE’s 14-year campaign to ensure housing opportunities for families across the income spectrum.

With singing, a powerful homily about the prophetic mandate to “welcome the stranger,” a Missing Middle Housing 101 tutorial with props, and stories illustrating the need for more housing, participants on stage moved County Board members Christian Dorsey and Libby Garvey to declare support for substantial change; they did not specify what that should look like. VOICE and allies at the assembly, including the NAACP, YIMBYs, and League of Women Voters, among others, want the County Board to vote early in 2023 to allow multifamily structures of up to 8 units on the same footprint as a single-family home. We’re asking for enough flexibility in the new zoning language to enable the Missing Middle Housing plan to meet its goals of increasing housing supply and diversity and encouraging greater affordability, environmental sustainability, and economic vitality.

State Funding for Crisis Receiving Centers

This year VOICE and our allies have fought hard to win substantial funding from the state to create and expand mental health Crisis Receiving Centers (CRCs) throughout the Commonwealth, especially in our backyard in Northern VA.



On December 4, 500 VOICE leaders representing 40 faith communities filled Trinity Presbyterian Church in Herndon and demanded action to fund Crisis Receiving Centers in Northern VA. Chairs Jeff McKay

(Fairfax) and Ann Wheeler (Prince William) attended and committed to working closely with VOICE.

On December 15, Governor Glenn Youngkin unveiled his three-year plan to transform Virginia's behavioral health system, entitled "Right Help, Right Now." Included in the Governor's budget is $58 million to increase the number of Crisis Receiving Centers across the state. This compares with

$85M

At the time of the publication of this annual report, we have nearly reached the end of the General Assembly. As a result of the collective power that VOICE and our coalition partners have built around this issue, the House has recommended $83 million towards CRC funding ($13 million above our initial $70 million ask) and the Senate recommended $88 million ($18 million above our initial ask). Last year, the state only allocated $7.5 million total for CRCs, so this is great progress.

Among many other actions VOICE has taken, over the past few weeks, a team of 40 VOICE leaders have conducted 20 small group meetings with General Assembly members to urge support for this funding and several more are scheduled. There is still a long way to go to ensure this funding stays in the final budget, but your work is paying off.

Fairfax and Prince William Crisis Receiving Centers

In our December 4 action, VOICE leaders proudly announced our coalition with the Virginia Hospital & Health Care Association and the Virginia Association of Chiefs of Police.



In a critically important first step, VOICE Fairfax leaders won a commitment from Chair Jeff McKay to work closely with VOICE during Fairfax's next budget cycle. The goal: provide the necessary funding for the full build-out of the Crisis Receiving Center in Fairfax, an integral piece of the larger network of care across Northern VA. He made a hard commitment to meet with VOICE leaders in March and also made a strong commitment to partner with VOICE on our statewide work.

VOICE Prince William leaders also gained strong commitments from Chair Wheeler to make building out the full continuum of the CRC in PWC, including the youth component, a budget priority for Prince William County in FY2024. This will build upon the $14m in local, state,

federal, and philanthropic support VOICE has helped to organize towards the establishment of the PWC CRC.

Given the wide-reaching commitments, the 500 VOICE leaders left Trinity Presbyterian Church with a renewed spirit of hope and determination to transform Northern Virginia's mental health system and more broadly in the state of Virginia.

Prince William Public Defender's Office Is Up And Running



Prince William leaders celebrated, for the first time in person since the pandemic, the hard-fought win of the Office of the Public Defender in Prince William County. The office is up and running, providing quality, equitable representation but VOICE leaders made clear that the $350,000 supplement from the County was not keeping pace with the rising costs and the resources needed to keep and attract qualified attorneys. Chair Wheeler has promised to make the Office of the Public Defender a priority in FY2024.