

Together, we can...

Support Safe Communities

Whatever our race, background or zip code, we all want our children to know they can live, learn, work, and play without fear of violence.

Too often, we face violence against and within our communities. One area that warrants lawmakers' attention is youth violence, which affects communities across Virginia. While we can't provide all the answers for why it's happening or how to end it, we do know that lawmakers have made choices to invest heavily in some communities while leaving others to fend for themselves.

There's no singular solution to eradicating youth violence. Still, we must address root causes we are aware of, such as barriers to adequate family income and shortage of safe and affordable housing. It also helps to intentionally

engage with and invest in our community's youth, particularly through community-centered programs that uplift their well-being and development.

State lawmakers can play a critical role at each stage by engaging with communities to co-create solutions — such as advancing policies that create greater economic opportunity and funding critical supports like education and affordable housing, as discussed throughout “Collective Agenda” — so that communities can create safe and vibrant places to live and to ensure full and healthy futures for our kids.

What can we do?

Advance commonsense policies

- Making meaningful investments in community-based programs and resources that promote greater economic opportunity for youth and their families and affordable health care access provides youth and their families a sense of peace and stability and helps to *prevent* violence.
- *Diversion* programs help keep kids from involvement in and reduce further engagements with the legal system. Creating alternative avenues for youth, such as community-based and extra-curricular activities, can go a long way in helping them maintain positive ties to their communities and give them a sense of hope that they have not been given up on.
- Youth exiting the legal system are often left unprepared for returning to their communities and saddled with court debt. Connecting them to resources such as well-funded education, affordable housing, and health care; helping them establish genuine community relationships; and eliminating youth fines and fees fosters *restoration* and can empower them to return to and positively impact their communities.
- Violence can have a resounding impact on community members' physical and mental health. Programs like peer support groups can create a safe space for youth to process and support their mental health. Creating long-term solutions for broader community care in concert with youth and their families will foster a sense of belonging and make sure community members feel heard and that their needs are met.



Our youth and young adults deserve to grow up and live out their dreams. We must support efforts that lift families out of poverty, provide resources to community members returning from incarceration, and expose children to experiences that expand their minds.

- Sulaymaan A. We R Me Foundation | Richmond

Learn more & engage

Connect with organizations who are working to make sure families have what they need to thrive, including:

- RISE for Youth
- Debt Free Justice Coalition
- Legal Aid Justice Center
- New Virginia Majority
- Pre-Trial Justice Coalition
- Voices for Va's Children
- Hebron VA Inc
- NolefTurns
- FailSafe
- K.U.S.P
- We R Me
- I Vote Me

