

# Legislative & Policy Priorities



**2024 General Assembly Session**



## **AAUW-VA Legislative & Policy Priorities 2023-2024**

AAUW (American Association of University Women) advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, and research to improve the lives of women and their families. [AAUW-VA's 2022-2024 Public Policy Priorities](#) encompass issues related to economic security; education; and equality, individual rights, and social justice. The following legislative and policy priorities are those we will focus on for the 2024 Virginia General Assembly legislative session and beyond:

- Advocate for abortion rights and for a reproductive rights Virginia Constitutional amendment
- Advocate for economic security and equity for women in the workplace
- Make childcare affordable and readily available for all families
- Ensure full public-school funding and a strong system of public education that promotes equity, diversity, and inclusivity
- Protect full access to voting through a Virginia Constitutional amendment

*AAUW-VA is a non-partisan statewide membership organization with 23 branches and approximately 1,000 members. For more information on our legislative and policy priorities, contact Janine Greenwood and Denise Murden, Co-VPs for Public Policy at [aauwvpublicpolicy@gmail.com](mailto:aauwvpublicpolicy@gmail.com) or visit <https://aauw-va.aauw.net/>.*

### **AAUW-VA Branches**

- Alexandria
- Arlington
- Fairfax City
- Falls Church Area
- Greater Manassas
- Greater Richmond
- Hampton
- Harrisonburg
- Lynchburg
- McLean Area
- Mt. Vernon
- Newport News
- Norfolk
- Portsmouth
- Reston-Herndon Area
- Roanoke Valley
- Smith Mountain
- Springfield-Annandale
- Vienna Area
- Virginia Beach
- Winchester
- Woodbridge
- Wytheville



January 31, 2024

To Our Virginia Lawmakers:

Thank you for your service to the Commonwealth of Virginia and its residents.

American Association of University Women of Virginia (AAUW-VA) members have been meeting today with lawmakers on a variety of issues, including reproductive rights, economic security for women and families, workplace issues and, of special importance, high quality public education for all. We hope some of our members have been able to speak with you or a member of your staff.

AAUW-VA is a non-partisan statewide membership organization with 23 branches and more than 1,000 members and supporters. AAUW National advances equity for women and girls through advocacy, education, philanthropy, and research to improve the lives of women and their families.

Our ongoing legislative and policy priorities are described in this packet, supported by fact sheets on specific legislation that we support or oppose in the following areas:

- Reproductive Rights
- Maternal Health
- Electronic Meetings
- Paid Family & Medical Leave
- Paid Sick Days
- Salary History Ban
- Workplace Discrimination & Harassment
- Public School Funding

Feel free to contact us if you would like more information or we can be of assistance to you and your staff in working together to advance equity for women and girls and economic security for Virginia's families.

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## AAUW-Virginia Legislative & Policy Priorities for 2024

### **Equality, Individual Rights, and Social Justice**

- Reproductive rights
  - Advocate for reproductive rights autonomy including the right of individuals to make decisions on abortion care
  - Advocate for a reproductive rights Virginia Constitutional amendment
- Maternal health
  - Support legislation that requires unconscious (implicit) bias training as license requirement for health care professionals
  - Support other initiatives for maternal health care equity
- Marriage rights
  - Support protection of same sex marriage, including a Virginia Constitutional amendment
- Voting rights
  - Support a Virginia Constitutional amendment that would ensure automatic restoration rights for convicted felons who have completed their sentences
- Public meeting access
  - Support legislation to permit virtual meetings for non-elective public bodies

### **Economic Security**

- Paid Family & Medical Leave
  - Advocate for Paid Family & Medical Leave bill
- Paid Sick Days
  - Support the Paid Sick Days (PSD) coalition agenda
- Workplace equity
  - Advocate for a salary history ban covering all employers
  - Support legislative initiatives from other organizations that champion workplace equity
- Childcare
  - Support Virginia Promise Partnership legislative agenda
- Minimum wage
  - Support reenactment of minimum wage legislation to bring Virginia to \$15/hour

### **Education**

- Public school funding
  - Oppose diversion of public K-12 funding
  - Support the Fund Our Schools (FOS) coalition agenda
- Post-secondary education
  - Advocate for adequate and equitable funding of Virginia colleges and universities
- Gender equity
  - Advocate for the rights of girls and women to equity in STEM programs and sports



## AAUW of Virginia 2024 Legislative Priority Reproductive Rights: Abortion and Abortion Care

AAUW-VA trusts that everyone can make their own informed choices about their reproductive lives within the dictates of their own moral and religious beliefs. We believe that these deeply personal decisions should be made without government interference. For these reasons, AAUW-VA asks Virginia lawmakers to support [HJ1/SJ1](#), a Virginia constitutional amendment that would ensure reproductive freedom. As drafted, the amendment would provide a fundamental right to reproductive freedom and the right to make decisions about one's own pregnancy.

Most Virginians feel that abortion should be legal. No matter an individual's own feelings, they should not and cannot make this decision for another. Providing better maternal health care and supporting other family friendly policies like paid family leave and affordable childcare are much better state expenditures than creating enforcement mechanisms to police personal reproductive choice.

The Virginia Senate passed the same version of the amendment in 2023. If the measure is approved in the next two consecutive legislative sessions, it would appear on the ballot in 2026.

AAUW of Virginia also supports:

### **Contraceptive Equity Act [SB238/HB819](#) (Boysko, King/Srinivasan)**

- Addresses cost barriers to contraceptive access and equity by eliminating burdensome co-pays, cost-sharing, reimbursement requirements and coverage delays.
- Requires insurers, corporations, and health maintenance organizations to offer coverage for prescription contraceptive drugs, devices, or equivalents without co-pays, cost-sharing.

### **Contraception: Right to Obtain [SB237](#) / [HB609](#) (Hashmi/Price)**

- Establishes a right to obtain contraceptives and engage in contraception, as defined in the bill.
- Creates a cause of action that may be instituted against anyone who infringes on such right.

### **Protect Virginia Health Workers "Board of Medicine" Bill [HB519](#) (King)**

- Amends the provisions of the Code relating to the Board of Medicine's disciplinary authority to clarify and specify that adverse action may be taken only for abortion care that is explicitly prohibited by Virginia law.
- Prohibits adverse action taken based solely on the alleged provision or receipt of abortion care that is not prohibited by Virginia law, regardless of where such abortion care was provided or received.
- This bill may be packaged into a larger Reproductive "Shield Bill" in the Senate

**Menstrual Data Privacy [SB16/ HB78](#) (Favola, Watts/Seibold), [HB1359](#) (Convirs-Fowler)**

- Prohibits any search warrant or subpoena from being issued for menstrual data that is stored on third party apps used to track period health that is stored on a computer, computer network, or other device containing electronic or digital information.
- Improves privacy and security of sensitive reproductive health information.

**Extradition Prohibition, Reproductive Health Services [SB15/HB1493](#) (Favola, Seibold/Perry), [HB1539](#) (Simon)**

- Provides that no person charged with a criminal violation of a law in another state shall be extradited if the alleged violation is related to legal reproductive healthcare in Virginia that was provided in Virginia.

AAUW of Virginia opposes the following bills:

[HB664 \(Freitas\)](#)- "Interference in Family Medical Decisions"- mischaracterizes abortion care and imposes Class 4 felonies on providers

[HB1202 \(P. Scott\)](#)-Seeks to impose criminal penalties for "fetal manslaughter."

[HB1184 \(P. Scott\)](#)- Prohibits abortion ban based on the "sex or ethnicity" prohibited

[HB404 \(Griffin\)](#)- Ban on public funding for abortion care

[HB1364 \(Griffin\)](#)-Total abortion ban with exceptions

# FACT SHEET



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804-643-2474 • [www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org](http://www.virginiainterfaithcenter.org)

**Chief Patrons: Senator Locke, SB35  
Delegate Hayes, HB1130  
Chief Co-Patrons: Senator Head, Delegate Coyner**

**Problem: Virginia’s maternal mortality rate more than doubled between 2018 and 2020, from 37.1 deaths to 86.6 deaths per 100,000.**<sup>1</sup> In Virginia, Black women experience higher rates of pregnancy-associated deaths compared to their White counterparts.<sup>2</sup> Black infants are dying before their first birthday at a rate almost double the rate of other babies<sup>3</sup>. High quality care is integral to improving maternal and infant mortality. Unconscious/implicit bias is directly correlated with lower quality of care.<sup>4</sup> Virginia’s rural maternity care deserts compound the problem.<sup>5</sup>

**Policy solution: Virginia** must make evidence-based unconscious bias and cultural competency training a criterion for licensing for all health care professionals licensed by the Virginia Board of Medicine and the Virginia Board of Nursing. Unconscious bias is a bias that is present but not consciously held or recognized. It has long been identified as a factor contributing to lower health care quality for Black Americans. In 2003, the Institute of Medicine Report acknowledged the existence of unconscious bias. The National Coalition to Address Racism in Nursing

acknowledges the prevalence of unconscious bias and includes identifying and addressing unconscious bias in the workplace.<sup>6</sup>

**Costs: VICPP** recommends one part-time consultant to work with the Board of Medicine and the Board of Nursing for 6-9 months (\$20-\$25,000) to facilitate the process to comply with this legislation. The consultant will schedule and convene the meetings, take minutes, and produce a report to document the process.

**Who benefits: All Virginians.** This Board of Medicine and Board of Nursing collaboration to affirm the dignity of care for all patients sends the message that Virginia is ALL in for ALL birthing families.

**Supporters:** The PUSH Coalition has led work to support unconscious bias training. Members include: VICPP, Birth In Color, Urban Baby Beginnings, Voices for Virginia’s Children, The Commonwealth Institute, American Association of University Women (Southeast District), Burke United Methodist Church, Eastern Virginia Association of the Southern Conference of The United Church of Christ, National Women’s Political Caucus, Carried to Full Term, League of Women Voters Virginia, Virginia Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Birth Sisters of Charlottesville, Accotink Unitarian Universalist Church, Luna Midwifery, March of Dimes, New River Valley Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Virginia ACNM, NACPM, Postpartum Support Virginia, and New Virginia Majority.

<sup>1</sup>“Virginia Maternal Mortality Review Team Triennial Report 2018-2020”: <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/content/uploads/sites/18/2023/07/VDH-32.1-283.8G-Maternal-Mortality-Team-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> March of Dimes, Mortality and Morbidity Data for Virginia, Retrieved October 9, 2023 from <https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/data?reg=99&top=6&top=92&lev=1&slev=4&obj=1&sreg=51>

<sup>4</sup> Bani Saluja and Zenobia Bryant. How Implicit Bias Contributes to Racial Disparities in Maternal Morbidity and Mortality in the

United States. *Journal of Women’s Health*. 2021 30:270-273.

<https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/epdf/10.1089/jwh.2020.8874>

<sup>5</sup> March of Dimes (2023) Where You Live Matters: Maternity Care in Virginia.

<https://www.marchofdimes.org/peristats/assets/s3/reports/mcd/Maternity-Care-Report-Virginia.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> National Commission to End Racism in Nursing, Racism in Nursing Report Series, May 2022, <https://chietaphi.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/racism-in-nursing-report-series.pdf>



## AAUW of Virginia 2024 Legislative Priority Electronic Meetings

AAUW-VA strongly supports [HB 894 \(Bennett-Parker\)](#), which increases flexibility for eligible non-elected public bodies to hold virtual meetings from a cap of 25 to 50 percent and adds additional guardrails to current law to ensure public access and transparency.

The work of AAUW builds upon responsible public participation at the local, state, national, and international levels. We advocate public discussion to ensure enlightened decisions on matters of public importance. We work to increase the number of women and other underrepresented populations in policy- and other decision-making positions and strive for our work to be inclusive and intersectional, collaborating with diverse allies and coalitions to achieve equity for all.

Virginia state government's quick embrace of electronic meetings during the COVID-19 declared emergency increased public participation and ensured continuity of government business in a transparent manner. We urge that recognition of the advantages of electronic public meetings should not be limited to a pandemic emergency.

Advisory bodies across the Commonwealth at both the local and state level have had to cancel meetings over the past year due to a lack of in-person quorum. Important work is not happening, and the current restrictions create barriers to public service. Members of the public have difficulty attending meetings in-person for many reasons that should qualify for electronic participation. Women are particularly impacted because they often must balance the demands of work, both inside and outside of the home, with caring for children and aging parents. Many people must travel as a requirement of their job. Others have lengthy daily commutes to and from their jobs and rely on public transportation. Still others work schedules that conflict with scheduled public meetings. Virginia needs to follow the model established by other states and allow public bodies to meet electronically outside of an emergency.

### ***Status of legislation:***

AAUW-VA supports [HB 894](#), which would afford greater participation in government by residents across Virginia who volunteer their time and expertise to serve our Commonwealth. The bill amends current law to increase the cap on the number of meetings that a body may meet virtually to 50 percent. The bill retains significant guardrails to ensure public access and transparency and adds additional ones that 1) require that members be on camera and have functional audio during video meetings to be considered present; and 2) requires bodies to vote annually on their virtual meeting policy (currently a one-time vote).

AAUW-VA is joined by the following organizations in endorsing this bill: AARP of Virginia, League of Women Voters of Virginia, Virginia Chamber of Commerce, The Arc Virginia, Virginia Conservation Network, Northern Virginia Aging Network, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Virginia Association of Counties, Virginia Association of Planning District Commissions, Virginia Grassroots, Virginia Municipal League, and Northern Virginia Chamber of Commerce.





## AAUW of Virginia 2024 Legislative Priority Paid Family & Medical Leave (PFML) Program

AAUW-VA urges support of [SB373 \(Boysko\)](#) and [HB737 \(Sewell\)](#), which would establish a statewide, self-funding paid family and medical insurance program that would help to eliminate employees' fears of losing their jobs or risking their economic security while taking necessary time off from work. Ultimately, this bill will benefit workers, their families, businesses, and our economy. PFML is a comprehensive and sustainable solution that would address the Commonwealth's paid family and medical leave needs, benefit working people and their families, and provide affordable solutions for employers.

As of October 2023, 14 states have adopted a PFML program. Nine of those states have already implemented their programs, and the remaining five states will do so by the end of 2026. If Virginia is to attract and retain workers, it is time for the Commonwealth to join this movement.

A statewide PFML program will build stronger families, healthier workers, successful businesses, and improve overall health outcomes. Paid leave contributes to improved newborn and child health by allowing both parents the time they need to help with healthcare decisions and responsibilities. It also enables people to help their loved ones, including older family members with health problems, and to recover from illness and avoid complications and hospital readmissions, thus reducing health costs.

PFML benefits businesses by keeping people in their jobs while reducing turnover costs. Companies typically pay about one-fifth of an employee's salary to replace that employee, making such unnecessary turnover very costly. As just one example of PFML's benefits, in California, a state that has a successful family leave insurance program, workers in low-wage, high-turnover industries are much more likely to return to their jobs. Updated analysis based on the original *The Cost of Doing Nothing* report finds that women in the U.S. still participate in the labor force at lower rates than those in Germany and Canada—two countries that have national paid leave and other family policies and higher rates of public spending on policies for families and children. If women's labor force participation were the same as in Germany and Canada, roughly 5 million more women would be in the labor force, translating into more than \$775 billion in additional economic activity per year.

### ***Status of legislation:***

Legislation to establish PFML in Virginia has been introduced in every legislative session since 2020. Following the 2020 session, funds were approved and directed to a study of the development, implementation, and costs of a statewide PFML program. The resulting study recommended that a full, independent actuarial study be conducted to understand the costs associated with the implementation of a PFML program in Virginia. Funding for such a study was provided to the Virginia Employment Commission through a budget amendment during the 2021 Special Session I. The resulting study conducted by the Weldon Cooper Center for

Public Service at the University of Virginia demonstrated the financial feasibility and viability of a PFML program in Virginia.

As she has in past sessions, Senator Jennifer Boysko has introduced [SB373](#) to establish and administer a PFML program. Delegate Brianna Sewell has introduced a companion bill, [HB737](#). Funding for the program would be provided through premiums assessed to employers and employees beginning in 2026.

It would provide workers with up to 12 weeks of partial income replacement (up to 80% of their average weekly pay) when they take time off for serious health conditions or caregiving purposes for themselves or family members. It would cover workers in all companies no matter the size and permit self-employed people to participate. The program would be funded by small employee and employer payroll contributions at a rate to be established by the Virginia Employment Commission.

### **RESOURCES:**

Cooper Center Study on Virginia Paid Family Leave

<https://www.coopercenter.org/research/virginia-paid-family-medical-leave-study>

“Paid Leave,” National Partnership for Women and Families\

<http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/workplace/paid-leave.html>

Boushey, H., and Glynn, S., Center for American Progress, “There Are Significant Business Costs to Replacing Employees,” November 2012

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/there-are-significant-business-costs-to-replacing-employees/>

The Cost of Doing Nothing

<https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WB/paid-leave/CostofDoingNothing2023.pdf>

# FACT SHEET



**Virginians for  
Paid Sick Days**

VAPAIDSICKDAYS.ORG

## Support paid sick days for all workers

### **HB 348 (Ward)**

**Problem:** Approximately 41 percent of private sector workers, **1.2 million workers in Virginia, have no paid sick days** or any paid time off (PTO). This creates a crisis for low-wage workers who must choose between taking a sick day for themselves or their children and getting paid. Workers who go to work sick endanger their co-workers, the public and the ability of the business to remain open.

**Policy solution:** Create a paid sick day standard to require all employers to provide five paid sick days (40 hours) each year for full-time workers that can be used for themselves or to care for sick children. Part-time employees could accrue fewer paid sick hours based on hours worked. PTO policies qualify as paid sick days.

**Who benefits:** Almost everyone benefits from a paid sick day standard, which is why 83 percent of Virginia registered voters support a policy proposal to provide paid sick days. Strong majorities of Democrats (96 percent), Independents (78 percent) and Republicans (72 percent) all support a paid sick day standard. Paid sick days help:

**Workers and their families** - When a worker takes 3.5 unpaid sick days, the average family loses a month's worth of groceries. Workers are forced to choose between feeding their families and caring for themselves or their children.

**Schools** - Parents who don't have paid sick days are more than twice as likely to send their children to school sick, than parents who have paid sick days. Sick children can't learn. Sick children spread germs to children and teachers.

**Public health** – Workers in low wage sectors are the least likely to have paid sick days. More than 80 percent of food industry workers and 75 percent of childcare workers have no paid sick days. More than half of all Norovirus outbreaks can be traced back to sick food service workers who were forced to choose between working sick and losing pay or their job. An October 2020 report in Health Affairs showed that the paid sick leave provision of the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) reduced the spread of coronavirus. Researchers called paid sick days “a highly effective tool to flatten the curve.”

**Businesses** - Employers lose \$160 billion annually in productivity due to “presenteeism” (the practice of coming to work despite illness or injury). Providing paid sick days results in reduced turnover – saving businesses money. The restaurant industry, which has a high turnover rate, found that implementing workplace benefits can reduce turnover by 50 percent.

**People of color** – In the US, about 38 percent of African Americans and 50 percent of Latinos do not have access to a single paid sick day. More than 25 percent of Latino households and 30 percent of African American households have no savings and cannot afford to take unpaid time off from work.

### **Can Virginia businesses afford paid sick days?**

Most Virginia businesses already provide paid sick days or PTO. The pandemic has made clear that businesses need a paid sick day policy. Fifteen states have already passed paid sick day standards and most of them rank higher than Virginia in overall health.

*Sources: Family Values @ Work, National Partnership for Women & Families, United Health Foundation, U.S Bureau of Labor & Statistics, YouGov American poll*



**AAUW-VA is a member of the Virginians for Paid Sick Days**

*Virginians for Paid Sick Days is a coalition of organizations fighting to establish a paid sick day standard that keeps Virginians healthy and keeps our economy running.*



## AAUW of Virginia 2024 Legislative Priority Salary History Ban

Relying on salary history to set future salary assumes that prior salaries were fairly established in the first place. Using salary histories, which may have been tainted by bias, means that discriminatory pay follows workers wherever they go, whatever their job, no matter their abilities. Curtailing this practice will go a long way in our fight for pay equity.

As such, beginning in 2016, many states and localities began regulating the use of salary history in the hiring process. While there are differences between the provisions, 36 states or municipalities have opted to enact laws that either ban asking for salary history altogether or ban employers from using that information against potential employees. By executive order, former Governor Northam banned state agencies from asking for salary history in 2019 but this does not prohibit private employers from requesting or using salary history.

### ***Status of legislation:***

Senator Jennifer Boysko has introduced a bill [SB370](#), which prohibits a prospective employer from (i) seeking the wage or salary history of a prospective employee; (ii) relying on the wage or salary history of a prospective employee in determining the wages or salary the prospective employee is to be paid upon hire; (iii) relying on the wage or salary history of a prospective employee in considering the prospective employee for employment; (iv) refusing to interview, hire, employ, or promote a prospective employee or otherwise retaliating against a prospective employee for not providing wage or salary history; (v) failing or refusing to provide a prospective employee the wage or salary range for the position for which the prospective employee is applying prior to discussing compensation and at any time upon the prospective employee's request; and (vi) failing to set a wage or salary range in good faith. The bill establishes a cause of action for an aggrieved prospective employee or employee and provides that an employer that violates such prohibitions is liable to the aggrieved prospective employee or employee for statutory damages between \$1,000 and \$10,000 or actual damages, whichever is greater; reasonable attorney fees and costs; and any other legal and equitable relief as may be appropriate. The bill also provides for civil penalties for violations not to exceed \$1,000 for a first violation, \$2,000 for a second violation, and \$4,000 for a third or subsequent violation.



## AAUW of Virginia 2024 Legislative Priority Workplace Discrimination & Harassment

AAUW strongly advocates for new laws and policies to battle the problem of workplace harassment and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, or religion. Workplace sexual and other harassment threatens women's mental health and physical safety, erodes women's short- and long-term economic security, and contributes to the leadership gap. Although Title VII protects women in the workplace, one [study](#) published in the Harvard business Review found that 34% of female employees say they have been sexually harassed by a colleague. Although federal law appears comprehensive and robust, employees who are harassed or experience inequity at work are often unable to access justice. Barriers include business size (small businesses are exempt); exclusion of various categories of workers, e.g., contractors, interns, from coverage; limited time frame for bringing federal charges; onerous standards of proof; reduced liability; and nondisclosure agreements and mandatory arbitration.

### ***Status of legislation:***

AAUW-VA supports the following Workplace Discrimination & Harassment bills:

**HB1344 (McQuinn)**. *The Silenced No More Act*, would limit the abusive use of Nondisclosure Agreements and Nondisparagement agreements (NDAs) to silence employees from speaking up about discrimination, including harassment, retaliation, sexual assault, wage and hour violations, and waste, fraud, or abuse.

**HB569 (Henson)**. *Know Your Rights* requires employers to inform workers of their rights to file a charge of discrimination with the U.S. EEOC or the Virginia Office of the Attorney General within 300 days after an alleged unlawful discriminatory practice occurred. The bill requires an employer to provide this information as part of any new employee training provided at the commencement of employment or anti-discrimination training provided to an employee and when an employee makes a complaint.

**HB370 (Martinez)**. Provides for *Workplace Harassment Training* to help reduce legal costs, protect corporations from liability, and protect workers from discrimination by mandating regular anti-harassment training across industries to cover all forms of unlawful discrimination. This bill requires each employer with 50 or more employees, including the Commonwealth and its agencies, institutions, and political subdivisions, to provide annual interactive training and education regarding sexual harassment and workplace discrimination by January 1, 2024.



## AAUW of Virginia 2024 Legislative Priority Public School Funding

*As a member of the [Fund Our Schools Coalition](#), AAUW-VA supports and advocates for our FOS 2024 Legislative Priorities*



**Making sure the state pays its fair share of school costs:** When we place the biggest burden of school funding on local communities rather than the state, it means the quality of each child's education depends entirely on the neighborhood they happen to live in. Last summer, JLARC published a comprehensive report on Virginia's current public education funding showing yet again that the state is not sufficiently funding our public schools and suggesting policy changes to remedy that. We support JLARC's recommendations, including updating the state funding formula to more accurately reflect the needs of our public schools. This is a crucial opportunity for legislators to address research-backed, nonpartisan recommendations to ensure children across urban, rural, and suburban communities all can attend well-funded schools.

- We support [HB359](#), [HB360](#), [HB624](#), [HB761](#), [HB825](#), [SB128](#), [SB227](#), [SB228](#), and [SB609](#) to advance this priority.

**Keeping public funds in public schools:** Politicians across the country are using private school vouchers and tax credit programs to shift resources from our public schools to private ones. These programs divert vital resources from our public schools to subsidize private schools instead. Research clearly shows that voucher programs do not improve educational outcomes, but fully and fairly funding our public schools does. We will fight to ensure that public funds in Virginia remain with public schools and continue to stand firm that public funds belong with public schools, and the best way to support our students is to make sure their schools are properly resourced. We will stand against any attempt to divert public money to private schools.

**School-based mental health support:** Virginia students are navigating a mental health crisis. We know that our students can't learn as well when they're struggling emotionally, so mental health support for our K-12 students is a necessity. It's time to ensure students have access to school counselors, social workers, and therapists by increasing funding and improving student-to-counselor ratios. When we prioritize our students' mental health it allows them to focus on their classes and prepare for life after graduation. This year, legislators can expand mental health services by decreasing ratios for school counselors, licensed mental and physical health staff, and other student support staff as well as expanding flexible school-based mental health funding.

- We support [HB181](#), [HB386](#), and [SB127](#) to move this priority forward.

### **Creating safe and restorative environments for every student**

Making sure students feel safe, welcomed, and valued in their schools is essential for their well-being and academic success. Our schools are safest when students and families feel welcomed, valued, and supported. An investment in creating positive school climates is an investment in the safety and well-being of our students. This legislative session our elected representatives can support safe and restorative environments for our students by investing in

positive behavioral intervention programs, increasing support for community schools programs, and supporting mentorship programs to provide students with additional supportive adults from similar backgrounds who can make them feel safe, supported, and heard.

- We support [HB398](#), [HB625](#), [SB586](#) and [SB608](#), all of which would lead to safer and more restorative school environments for our students.

**Stop blocking local communities from using sales tax for school construction:** Without adequate revenue, we cannot provide adequate school funding. Currently Virginia law bans communities across our state from choosing whether to raise the revenue needed to support their neighborhood schools. This limits the amount that localities can raise for their schools. It's time to change this and allow localities to institute a local sales tax via referendum if they feel it's needed to support their schools.

- We support [HB458](#), [HB600](#), [HB805](#), and [SB14](#), which would all help with this issue.



<https://aauw-va.aauw.net/>

A hyperlinked version of this document can be found at:

<https://aauw-va.aauw.net/files/2024/01/2024-Lobby-Day-packet-2.pdf>