



**ON THE FRONT LINES:
Defending Education
and Equity for Women
and Girls**

AAUW-VA Conference 2026, Glen Allen, April 18

**AAUW of Virginia Northwest District
Invites you to join us in Glen Allen
on April 18th at the
Drury Plaza Hotel Richmond
11049 W Broad Street, Glen Allen, VA
For our 101st State Conference**

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**Pre -conference activities and entertainment
On April 17th**

Carol Stephens - Conference Chair

Susan Burk & Leslie Tourigny - AAUW-VA Co-VPs for Program

Mary Anne Graham - Northwest District Representative

Conference Registration Overview

Conference Registration fee includes Saturday lunch and all day beverages

Member Registration - must be received by March 15 \$ 85

Member Late Registration received March 16-27 \$110

Non-member Registration received by March 15 \$105

Non-member Late Registration received March 16-27 \$130

Student registration received by March 27 \$ 50

NO REFUNDS AFTER MARCH 27

Optional Friday afternoon activity choice must be included in your registration. Transportation is being provided by GRAAUW members. All tours leave at 1:30 pm and return 4:00 - 4:30 pm

Optional Friday Tours

Guided Tour of the Capitol Building (grounds if weather permits)

You have been to the General Assembly to Lobby, but it is so crowded you never get to really see the building itself.

Guided Tour at Virginia Museum of History and Culture

1 hour guided tour of 250th Year Anniversary exhibit + 1 hour introduction to special collections room and vault in the library
This is a special opportunity to see some of the valuable permanent items in their collection.

Guided Tour of Black History Museum & Cultural Center of VA

Richmond was the Capitol of the Confederacy as well as the seat of the slave trade. It has also served as a cultural hub for the African American population of Virginia.

Friday evening entertainment! Sassy Soulful Sirens 8:00 pm

Pre-Conference Activities on April 17th

Optional Tours

1:30 ~ 4:30 pm

Conference Check -In

5:00 ~ 7:00 pm

Kickback Hour Buffet

5:30 ~ 7:00 pm

(Free for hotel guests, \$16 per person if not registered at hotel)

Entertainment

8:00 ~ 8:30 pm

Sassy Soulful Sirens

Drury Hotel registered guests - free hot breakfast buffet and free Kickback Hour Buffet - alcoholic beverages for purchase

Others may purchase the breakfast buffet for \$14 per person and the Kick- back Hour Buffet for \$16 per person

Sample items for the buffets <https://www.druryhotels.com/menu>

Equity Through Education

“When a woman is educated, she unlocks not only her own power but the potential of entire communities. Education isn’t just a right — it’s the foundation of equity, the engine of the opportunity, and the key to a future where every woman can thrive.”

Gloria L. Blackwell, AAUW CEO

AAUW’s story began in 1881, when a small group of female college graduates banded together to open the doors for women’s career advancement and to encourage more women to pursue higher education. And now, 144 years later, our robust belief that high quality public education is the foundation of a democratic society and the key to improving economic prosperity and gender equity, is under assault. Public education is underfunded. Teachers are underpaid and disrespected, most recently by federal government decisions to remove advanced degrees in education as a category of professional degrees. Curricula are changed to present an idyllic view of history. DEI is eliminated and demonized. Books are banned. Academic freedom at colleges and universities has been threatened. Title IX enforcement has waned. Aggressive efforts have been taken to dismantle and then eliminate the United States Department of Education.

In 2026 we are truly ***On the Front Lines: Defending Education and Equity for Women and Girls***. Come to our 101st State Conference and hear from an exciting array of excellent speakers!

Conference on April 18, 2026

Conference Check - In

7:30 am - 10:30 am

Morning Session

8:30 am - 12:00 pm

Lunch 12:00 pm - 1:15 pm

Afternoon Session

1:15 - 4:30 pm

Conference Presentations on Saturday, April 18, 2026

Keynote Address

ON THE FRONT LINES: Defending Education and Equity for Women and Girls

Virginia State Senator Schuyler T. VanValkenburg (District 16)



When we gather in Glen Allen on April 18, 2026—14 miles from the State Capitol in Richmond—we will physically be in the Virginia Senate 16th District, covering parts of Western Henrico County, and represented by State Senator Schuyler T. VanValkenburg. We will also be 5.4 miles from Glen Allen High School, where, for the past 15 years, the Senator has taught History and United States Government. As the only public school teacher in the Virginia Senate, Senator VanValkenburg is uniquely qualified to address the state of public education in the Commonwealth as a professional practitioner, as well as an elected policymaker.

Senator Schuyler VanValkenburg is a father of three and grew up in Johnstown, New York, where he went to public schools, graduating high school in 2000. He went on to the University of Richmond, graduated in 2004 and found his new home in Henrico County, Virginia. The next year, in 2005, he started teaching at a middle school in the Henrico County Public Schools. During that time, he pursued a master's degree at Virginia Commonwealth University in History, which he completed in 2008.

In 2017, the Senator expanded his role as a public servant and ran for the 72nd District seat in the Virginia House of Delegates. He won and went on to serve three terms in the House of Delegates, from 2018 through 2023. In 2023, he was elected to the Virginia State Senate. He serves on the Senate Committees of Education & Health, Privileges & Local Government, General Laws, and Rehabilitation & Social Services.

During Senator VanValkenburg's tenure in the Virginia General Assembly, he has championed many of the issues that are priorities for AAUW. As a delegate in the 2020 session, he was one of the patrons of the ERA in the House of Delegates when it was ratified. As the only public school teacher in the Senate and Chair of the Subcommittee on Public Education, Senator VanValkenburg is committed to investing in our public school system to ensure that it has the resources for every student to succeed and to attract talented teachers. He also specializes in legislation to make it easier for Virginians to access their right to vote and serves as the Chair of the Joint Subcommittee to Study the Consolidation and Scheduling of General Elections. Besides elections and education legislation, Senator VanValkenburg champions legislation to address the affordable housing shortage, to increase the production of clean, affordable energy, and to better regulate social media companies, especially to protect minors.

In December of 2025, he was appointed Chair of the Senate Committee of Rehabilitation & Social Services. In response to this appointment, Senator VanValkenburg said, "This committee touches the lives of Virginians in a deeply personal way. From child and family support, to aging services and community wellbeing. I'm committed to ensuring our policies reflect our values and expand opportunities across the Commonwealth."

We are honored that Senator VanValkenburg will welcome us to Glen Allen, deliver the keynote address to kick-off our conference, and answer some of our questions.

Farmville: Birthplace of America's Student-Led Civil Rights Revolution **Leah Brown, Associate Director of Education and Collections,** **Robert Russa Moton Museum**

No discussion of public education in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 2026 is complete without traveling back in time to Farmville, in Prince Edward County, Virginia, in 1951. That's when the student body of the all-black Robert Russa Moton High School, which now houses a museum and National Historic Site, under the leadership of student Barbara Johns, "...walked out in protest of unequal educational facilities." This "...launched a thirteen-year court battle to achieve educational equality..." The resulting school desegregation lawsuit, "*Davis v. Prince Edward*, was the only student-initiated case of the five cases that comprised the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*." In *Brown*, the court overturned its 1896 decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* and concluded that "in the field of public education the doctrine of separate but equal has no place." However, there were some school districts in Virginia that defied the Supreme Court and demonstrated "massive resistance",

i.e., they closed public schools instead of desegregating them. “At the local level, Prince Edward County was the only county in the nation to close its schools for five years, between 1959 and 1964, rather than desegregate. In *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County*, the Supreme Court intervened again to reopen the schools.” Leah Brown, Associate Director for Education and Collections, for the Moton Museum, will use the Moton High School story as a case study to discuss the Supreme Court’s role in preserving public education and desegregating schools.

Challenges and Opportunities in Education for Promoting Student Equity and Success

**Alexander Blocker, Senior Organizer
Legal Aid Justice Center**

**LaRhonda Johnson Horton
Dean of Retention and Student Success
Virginia Peninsula Community College**

The AAUW Strategic Priorities call us to action with these words: “In a time of growing challenges to education access, AAUW must meet this moment.” This panel is designed to help us meet this moment. Although the list of challenges to education is long and daunting, we need to identify and understand them, find the opportunities, and then get to work.

Our panel brings together two professionals, who are no strangers to AAUW, to get us ready for the task. Our first speaker is Alex Blocker from the Legal Aid Justice Center. Like AAUW-VA, the Center is a member of the [Fund Our Schools](#) coalition. “Fund Our Schools is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals who believe that every child in every zip code across the Commonwealth of Virginia should have access to a high-quality public education.” Alex joined us in Richmond in January 2025 to brief us before we set off around the General Assembly Building for our Lobby Day. In April, he’ll provide an overview of K-12 education funding in Virginia, including the impact of federal cuts and policy changes actions the Commonwealth has taken in response. Our second speaker is Dean LaRhonda Johnson Horton from Virginia Peninsula Community College, who will focus on the challenges facing higher education through the prism of a community college. She’ll also discuss the impact of federal cuts and policy changes on her institution and how they are moving forward. Dean Johnson Horton was the well-received speaker at the October 2025 AAUW-VA Southeast District meeting about “Empowering Equity Through Education,” and she is a new member of our Hampton Branch.

AAUW-VA Mini-Grants: No Need to Reinvent the Wheel

**Anita Booth and Sue Christie, Members of the Falls Church Area Branch
Program Planning Committee**

Healing the Gender Divide in an Era of Pervasive Social Media

**Janet Hedrick, President, Fredericksburg Area Branch
Human Trafficking Awareness**

**Sally Daniel, President, Virginia Beach Branch
Women's Fight for the Vote – Showing *Iron Jawed Angels* to Community Members**

Every year, for over a decade, the AAUW-VA State Board has allocated funds for mini-grants to support branch proposals for projects that promote AAUW's public policy priorities. These mini-grants provide seed money for innovative and tried-and-true projects. Over the years, branches have pursued a wide variety of projects supported with AAUW-VA mini-grants that have embodied our public policy priorities, and raised our visibility of and opportunities for recruitment for AAUW-VA. Mini-grant projects also have been used to promote and enhance diversity, equity and inclusion within AAUW and in the community. Our panelists will describe successful projects their branches have undertaken for which they received mini-grant support. Branches will come away with information on how they can apply for mini-grants for projects they are planning, as well as ideas for projects they might replicate in their communities.

The Conundrum of Remote Work for Women

**Dr. Emma Harrington, Assistant Professor of Economics
University of Virginia**

How does remote work impact the labor market opportunities of women? Dr. Harrington will share with us her research that suggests that remote work's effects differ sharply by career stage. For young women, remote work has out-sized career costs. When working apart from their colleagues, young women receive much less mentorship --- suggestively because they are more reluctant to ask for it --- and, as a result, make less advantageous career moves. For more experienced women, however, remote work can be liberating. It enables them to focus more on their own projects and reduces the pressure to do some “non-promotable” tasks that often fall disproportion-

ately on women. Moreover, evidence shows that remote work helps women persist in the workforce after becoming mothers, by allowing them to better balance career and family. This presentation will provide evidence on both sides of this debate and aim to spark a conversation about the nuanced consequences of remote work for women.

The Changing Nature of Virginia Politics: Reviewing the Pivotal 2025 Election and the First Session of Virginia's First Madam Governor

Dr. Stephen Farnsworth, Professor and Director, Center for Leadership and Media Studies, University of Mary Washington

The partisan tides go in and out in Virginia politics, a place where there are no permanent majorities and no permanent minorities. Dr. Farnsworth will discuss Virginia's pivotal 2025 election and what it says about the future of politics and public policy in Virginia. He will also share his views about the policy impact (so far) of Virginia's first Madam Governor, who came into office with a new Democratic political trifecta in Virginia - and the party's biggest majority in the House of Delegates in a generation.

“Life is either a daring adventure or nothing.”

— Helen Keller, *Let Us Have Faith*



AAUW -VA 2026 State Conference



COME JOIN US AT

THE DRURY PLAZA HOTEL RICHMOND

11049 W. Broad St. Glen Allen, VA 23060

Amenities:

Indoor/Outdoor Pool & Whirlpool
24 -Hour Fitness Center
Free Wi-Fi
Relaxing lobby
Kitchen + Bar 5:00 pm - midnight
Free Parking

Guest Rooms AAUW VA discount rates apply Thursday - Sunday April 16-20. Rates vary by type of room and floor they are located on as well as days. **All rooms are non- smoking.**

Each room includes Wi-Fi, TV, microwave, refrigerator, ironing board/iron, hairdryer

King and Double Queen beds **Fri./Sat \$170.99**

Upper floor Double Queens **Fri./Sat. \$180.99**

Double Queen beds **Thurs./Sun \$134.99**

King & Upper Floor Double Queens **Th/Sun \$144.99**

Rates do not include taxes and fees. Rates do include a free complimentary hot breakfast buffet 7:00 - 10:00 am and Kickback Hour buffet 5:30 - 7:00 pm. **Cut off date** for booking rooms **March 15th.**



Reservations

American Association of University Women

<https://www.druryhotels.com/bookandstay/newreservation/?groupno=10150185>

****Please Note: Dates automatically populate for Apr 16 – Apr 20, please change dates for accurate pricing and availability****

Please make your reservations **by Sunday, March 15, 2026** to receive your group rate. Reservations made after this date will be subject to prevailing rates and availability. **Reservations may also be made by calling 1-800-325-0720 and referring to your group number 10150185.**

Transportation

1. You can drive.

Drury Plaza Hotel Richmond can be accessed immediately off I-64 at Exit 178 Broad St. Rte 250 heading East. The entrance to the hotel and parking lot is a right hand turn into a business park. Turn right again toward the hotel . **Parking is free.** If you are coming from I-95, exit at I-295 towards I-64 W and take Broad St. east exit.

2. You can take Amtrak.

You will want to take the train to the Staple Mills Station and get a taxi or Uber/ Lyft to the hotel. The Drury is approximately 7.5 miles away.

Places of Interest in Richmond Area*

Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens - The gardens will be beautiful at this time of year with the azaleas in full bloom.

Virginia Museum of Fine Arts (VMFA) - There are always amazing exhibits to see for free, but if you wish to visit the featured exhibit, be sure to purchase your tickets in advance.

Virginia Museum of History & Culture (VMHC) - See the special exhibits that celebrate our nation's 250th Anniversary

Valentine Museum - Learn more about the history of Richmond and its culture

Black History Museum and Cultural Center of VA- Learn about the history of slavery and civil rights in Richmond and VA

Virginia Holocaust Museum - located in Shockoe Bottom 2000 E. Cary St. Sat. & Sun. 11 - 5 Admission \$10. (Link is not working)

Maymont - 100 acre green space with a Gilded Age Mansion, petting zoo, nature center and curated gardens

* Click on name of place of interest to go to live link for more information



AAUW Greatest Needs Fund Raffle Basket Fundraiser*

Creatively themed baskets provided by the branches in AAUW VA with lots of wonderful items to enjoy! Put all your tickets in one basket or put several tickets in several baskets. You have a great chance to win!

TICKETS FOR SALE

1 Ticket for \$7

3 Tickets for \$15

7 Tickets for \$30

- Print your name and cell phone # on each ticket.
- Put ticket in the bag of basket you hope to win.
- No limit on the number of tickets you can put in a bag.
- You or someone with your ticket must be present to win a basket at approximately 4 p.m. on Saturday, April 18th.

Raffle Room Hours:

Friday 5 PM- 8 PM. and following evening entertainment for 30 minutes
Saturday 7:30 AM. – 9:00 AM and during lunch

** Winners limited to winning 2 baskets.*

AAUW -VA 2026 State Conference

AAUW-VA 2026 Pre-Conference/Conference Registration Form

Pre-conference activities on Friday, April 17, 2026

Conference on Saturday, April 18, 2026



Drury Plaza Hotel Richmond
11049 West Broad Street,
Glen Allen, VA 23060

REGISTER ONLINE.

or

FOR THOSE WHO PREFER TO REGISTER BY MAIL, PRINT OUT, COMPLETE, AND **MAIL ALL PAGES OF THIS FORM WITH A CHECK**, FOLLOWING THE **INSTRUCTIONS** ON THE LAST PAGE OF THIS FORM.

1. PLEASE FILL IN EACH BLANK:

Name: First _____ Last _____

Email : _____

Preferred Name for Badge: _____

Branch: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip Code: _____ Phone: _____

2. CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:

☐ First Time Attendee

☐ AAUW-VA Branch Member

Branch _____

☐ Past AAUW-VA State Board President

☐ Past AAUW-VA State Board Member

☐ Current AAUW-VA Branch President

☐ Current AAUW-VA State Board Member

☐ Presenter

☐ AAUW National Member

☐ Non-AAUW Member

☐ Other AAUW State Member

State Name _____

☐ Student

AAUW -VA 2026 State Conference

3. CONFERENCE REGISTRATION PRICE INCLUDES SATURDAY LUNCH AND ALL-DAY DRINKS.

CHECK THE APPROPRIATE BOX:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member registration received by March 15 | \$ 85 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member registration received by March 16 to March 27 | \$110 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-member registration received by March 15 | \$105 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-member registration received by March 16 to March 27 | \$130 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student registration received by March 27 | \$ 50 |

Registration Total \$ _____

FINAL REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS March 27, 2026. NO REFUNDS AFTER THIS DATE.

4. LUNCH IS INCLUDED IN THE PRICE OF YOUR REGISTRATION. Please choose only one of the two meal options. Option 1 is a **sandwich/wrap** and includes a bag of chips and a cookie. Option 2 is a **salad** and includes a cookie. Check the appropriate boxes below.

IF YOU HAVE FOOD ALLERGIES OR SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS, PLEASE CONTACT TESS THOME AT THOMETESS@GMAIL.COM.

- ☐ **OPTION 1: SANDWICH/WRAP.** Comes with lettuce, tomato, cheddar cheese, and condiments. Check one.

- ☐ Turkey
- ☐ Ham
- ☐ Tuna Salad
- ☐ Fajita Vegetable

Check one.

- ☐ Wrap
- ☐ Sub Roll

- ☐ **OPTION 2: SALAD**

Check one.

- ☐ Garden Salad with Roasted Chicken
- ☐ Chef Salad
- ☐ Southwest Salad with no Chicken

Check one dressing.

- ☐ Ranch
- ☐ Balsamic

AAUW -VA 2026 State Conference

5. GUEST LUNCHES:

Your registration fee includes lunch so only pay the cost for a guest lunch if you have a guest coming to lunch.

- ☐ Guest Lunch is \$25

Lunch Total \$ _____

Guest Name _____

Please **choose only one of the two meal options for your guest.** Option 1: a **sandwich/wrap**, includes a bag of chips and a cookie. Option 2: the **salad** includes a cookie. Check the appropriate boxes below.

IF YOUR GUEST HAS ANY FOOD ALLERGIES OR SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS, PLEASE CONTACT TESS THOME AT THOMETESS@GMAIL.COM.

- ☐ **OPTION 1: SANDWICH/WRAP.** Comes with lettuce, tomato, cheddar cheese, and condiments.

Check one.

- ☐ Turkey
- ☐ Ham
- ☐ Tuna Salad
- ☐ Fajita Vegetable

Check one.

- ☐ Wrap
- ☐ Sub Roll

- ☐ **OPTION 2: SALAD**

Check one.

- ☐ Garden Salad with Roasted Chicken
- ☐ Chef Salad
- ☐ Southwest Salad with no Chicken

Check one dressing which will be on the side.

- ☐ Ranch
- ☐ Balsamic
- ☐

6. ACCESSIBILITY NEEDS:

Please be specific.

AAUW -VA 2026 State Conference

7. OPTIONAL PRE-CONFERENCE ACTIVITIES ON FRIDAY, APRIL 17, 2026.

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY:

TOURS (Do NOT select more than one tour because they are offered concurrently. Advance registration is required for all tours and advance payment is required for tours where a cost is stated.)

All tours will leave the hotel at 1:30 pm for 2:00 pm start times at locations. You will be returned to the hotel no later than 4:30 pm. Transportation will be provided by GRAAUW members.

- ☐ Capitol Tour - no cost but limit of 10 people allowed on tour

Virginia Museum of History and Culture - limit 10 people allowed on tour

- ☐ \$13 for 65+
- ☐ \$15 regular admission
- ☐ Free to members - must have your card

Black History Museum & Cultural Center of VA- limit 10 people allowed on tour

- ☐ \$10 regular admission
- ☐ \$8 for 65 +

Tour Total \$ _____

FRIDAY EVENING SOCIAL

- ☐ I plan to attend this.

IMPORTANT: Add totals from #3, #5, & #7. Enter sum as **Final Conference Total \$** _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

Register and pay online HERE by the appropriate received by deadline, **OR** complete all pages of this registration form and **mail at least a week before the deadline** with a check payable to AAUW-VA to:

Theresa Merkel
Attn: 2026 Conference
412 Castleman Drive
Winchester, VA 22601

This must be received by the appropriate deadline.

If you have questions or need additional information, please contact:

Theresa Merkel at theresa.merkel@comcast.net or (540-664-1266) or

Marsha Gochenour at mgochen@yahoo.com or (540-533-8069) or

Pat Kadel at patriciakadel52@gmail.com or (717-314-4470)