

08/06/2020 Joint Committee Meeting of Courts of Justice and Public Safety Committees

First Name	Last Name	Organization	Residence	Topic of Interest	Written Feedback
Charles	Ward		Albermarle	School Resource Officers	<p>July 31, 2020</p> <p>Senator R. Creigh Deeds, Delegate's Chris Runion and Robert Bell, Virginia Joint Committee Meeting of Courts of Justice and Public Safety Committees</p> <p>I completely support keeping School Resource officers (SRO's) in our public schools as long as the school boards, state, and police departments understand their specific purposes.</p> <p>As a former member and Chairman of the School Board for Albemarle County Public Schools (ACPS), I supported putting SRO's in our schools to accomplish several goals. Our Superintendent, along with the Chief of Police, and under oversight of the elected school board, chose the best qualified from our police force to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Set an example to personify the police are here to help and protect us. In my experience, ACPS chose only those officers with the best skills, including sound judgment, good moral character, excellent interpersonal skills with students, to be allowed to work in our schools. •Explain and discuss with our students our nation's, state's, and local laws. We, striving to be civilized society in this fallen world, need to know there are boundaries for our actions and consequences for misbehavior. In my experience, the SRO's spent a clear majority of their time educating students and helping them understand the roles and responsibilities of police. Yes, they are also there to protect the students, teachers, staff, and others on school grounds. •Show students police have families too. In addition to being officers, they too are mom's and dad's caring for and raising children. •Open students to consider the law enforcement profession. Students see from observing that our SRO's have a very demanding profession, responsible for performing a tough, but honorable tasks 24/7, in all kinds of weather, day and night. The SRO's are always looking for students with sound judgment, good moral character, and leadership for our future police force. <p>Students need well-adjusted adult role models that have a solid moral value system that knows right from wrong. Yes, we understand they are also law-enforcement officers and will from time to time have to cite people for legal infractions. However, most of their time was learning about students, teaching and just being there as a role model.</p> <p>We do not want to remove SRO's from our schools as it will lead to more misunderstandings from rumors and false perceptions. We need to understand more about our governments, not less, and SRO's help with this, provided they have goals that ACPS instituted years ago.</p> <p>Respectfully,</p> <p>Dr. Charles M. Ward</p>
Jeffrey	Fogel		Charlottesville	Remedies for police misconduct	<p>I am an attorney who has spent nearly fifty years litigating police misconduct cases. I support all of the work you are doing to make criminal justice reform a reality.</p> <p>I would like to focus on remedies for police misconduct. I understand that you are considering changes both to sovereign immunity of municipalities and to the defense of qualified immunity. Both have been obstacles to the compensation of victims. In addition, there needs to be an incentive for lawyers to take such cases. In a typical personal injury case, the lawyer takes a large percentage of any judgment but you will be hard pressed to find a lawyer to represent someone where the likely recovery is small. Cases involving a violation of constitutional or statutory rights are different since the lawyer is acting as a private attorney general to enforce those rights. Many such cases have small recoveries and the law will not be enforced unless successful litigants can obtain attorney's fees as is the case in federal law. 42 U.S.C. § 1988.</p>
Kimberley	Felts		Chesterfield	Good Time Credits	<p>I am in total favor of the good time credit bill providing you make the following amendments. To exclude child sex offenders where the child is under 15 years. For this amendment to include the possession and production of images where a child is under 15. It is a known fact that sex offenders stick together in prison and they share stories, feeding their addiction to their sexual preference of a child. If you speak to promote second chances, then it should mean a second chance, so with this in mind, this bill should exclude violent people who have been in prison on 2 or more occasions for an act of violence. This will release a vast amount of people, but wont be as drastic as releasing everyone at once. 2 or more acts of violence should go before the parole board for a more in depth study. Also according to the DOC wanted list, sex offenders appear to be the ones who disappear upon release. It is your duty to protect our children. The people who like to have sexual images of children create a market, and material will continually be distributed by like minded individuals.</p> <p>Thankyou for your time Kimberley Felts</p>
Marjorie	Signer	Virginia Chapter, National Organization for Women (NOW)	Arlington County	The impact on girls and young women of the school-to-prison pipeline and the abuse-to-prison pipeline; especially affects girls and young women of color	<p>The Virginia Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) – the nation's largest feminist advocacy organization – welcomes this opportunity to submit comments on the impact on women and girls of racial inequities in the criminal justice system. We represent more than 5,000 members and supporters throughout the Commonwealth, dedicated to advancing equal rights and gender equity. We commend the House leadership for holding these hearings and emphasize the pressing need to address the impact of racism in our justice system on women and girls of color. The impact of the school-to-prison pipeline and the abuse-to-prison pipeline on girls and young women is one of the most critical priorities.</p> <p>A 2008 U.S. Department of Justice study showed that the increased arrest and incarceration of girls over the past 20 years has not been the result of increased criminal activity or violence. Instead, more girls are being arrested and incarcerated because of the aggressive enforcement of non-serious offenses, many of which stem from abuse and trauma.</p> <p>The Virginia Legal Aid Justice Center reported in 2015 that "Resource starvation, unaddressed academic failure, suspension and expulsion, and school policing are pushing students out of school and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems." The impact on Black students was much greater than on White students; however, there was no data on gender disparities.</p> <p>The National YWCA, which is dedicated to serving women and girls, reported in a briefing paper that "From police responses to domestic violence and threats in their homes and neighborhoods, to the policing of pregnancy and motherhood, to their experiences of 'driving while female,' girls and women of color experience criminalization and racial profiling by law enforcement in ways that are overlooked by the current policy narrative." [Source: We Deserve Safety - Ending the Criminalization of Women & Girls of Color, 2017]</p> <p>Also in 2015, a major report by Georgetown University and others stated that "the girls' sexual abuse to prison pipeline" cuts across every divide of race, class, and ethnicity and especially criminalizes girls of color. "The facts are staggering: one in four African American girls will experience some form of sexual violence by the age of 18. . .And in a perverse twist of justice, many girls who experience sexual abuse are routed into the juvenile justice system because of their victimization. Indeed, sexual abuse is one of the primary predictors of girls' entry into the juvenile justice system."</p> <p>The organization Justice Forward Virginia, writing about school resource officers and the funneling of children from the school system to the criminal legal system (the "school-to-prison pipeline"), says: "The data suggests . . . that the presence of police in schools leads to the overcriminalization of youthful behavior. . .The most striking data related to Black girls, who made up 17% of the school population, but made up 43% of the students arrested or referred to law enforcement for prosecution."</p> <p>We need a comprehensive legal approach to decriminalizing behaviors in school that will dismantle the "school-to-prison pipeline" and the "abuse-to-prison pipeline" that applies to girls and young women. Virginia NOW asks the General Assembly to make this a priority.</p> <p>Thank you</p>
Arthuretta	Holmes-Martin		Woodbridge	Racial Bias within the Courts of Justice	<p>I am represented by Delegate Jenniffer D. Carroll Foy. In 2019, Governor Northam established a commission to identify racial inequality in Virginia laws. Almost 100 Jim Crow statutes were still within the Virginia Acts of Assembly. While legislators voted to have those laws removed, biases both conscious and unconscious remain unchecked. As a result of the senseless murders of African Americans, we can no longer say that these are the actions of a few bad apples. There is overwhelming evidence that racial bias permeates the judicial system. The next task for legislatures is to acknowledge that policing is the tip of the iceberg. When we speak of Courts of Justice, we need to not only focus on the criminal but every aspect of what is referred to as the Judicial system. Neither the Virginia State Bar Association nor the Judiciary Review Committee collects track or monitors complaints of racial, gender, or disability biases in treatment by those responsible for maintaining the system. The citizens of the commonwealth should know that they do not have to be subjected to abuse of any type from officers of the court. We should know that if anyone exhibits this type of behavior there are reliable and unbiased methods of accountability in word and deed. While the Judiciary Review Committee has a structure, the State Supreme Court is the only body that can take disciplinary action against a Judge according to the committee's website.</p> <p>A friend of mine, who is an African American Veteran, sent an email to me at 4:30 in the morning sharing that she was still traumatized by the manner in which a Circuit Court Judge treated her about 12 hours earlier. He held her without reason because she filed a complaint that he was to adjudicate. Rather than review the matter before him, he verbally insulted and abused her. His attacks were so vile it brought her to tears. Yes, she can file a complaint with the Judiciary Review but the damage was done.</p> <p>I have personally been verbally abused by an attorney I was paying thousands of dollars to represent me with degrading sexist and racist taunts. This happened in the presence of another attorney I was also paying. The observing attorney said, "I cannot help you." Meaning he would not testify to what he witnessed. I went to the VA Bar's Complaint processing page. The VA Bar states that it will not process "rude behavior" by an attorney.</p> <p>There are no obligations for a lawyer to not spew racially charged or sexist language towards their clients. The standards of conduct for lawyers in the State of Virginia are lower than for Judges. Accountability for racist conduct does not exist. Lawyers, like police officers, see it as their duty to protect their colleague's reputation. This system and structure of loyalty to each other, over their obligation as officers of the court, leave the most vulnerable in our society, specifically African Americans, exposed to abusive Judges and attorneys. I strongly urge you to: Support the VLBC's Resolution to Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis in the State of Virginia. The underlying racist biases within the legal and court systems both criminal and civil have maintained and exacerbated economic and health disparities. * In solidarity with the 2020 Virginia Democratic Convention, I ask that this committee provide the resources that will reinstitute disparate impact analysis in all government programs and policies.</p>
Jennay	Shankin		Colonial beach	Earned Good Time for All	<p>We support Earned Good Time for All bill now. We want this done now in Special session.</p>
Michael	Glyer	None	Arlington	Racial Justice in policing	<p>I am a resident of Arlington County and have been a Virginia resident for 31 years. I believe that the Virginia legislature needs to pass comprehensive racial justice in policing reform and do this soon. Colorado has shown that it doesn't take months to take action on a critical issue. We need to pass meaningful reform that will make the people of color in Virginia safer and break the cycle of police violence in those communities.</p>
Joseph	Grieshaber		RESTON	Civilian Review Boards	<p>I strongly urge the committee to consider and incorporate the following criteria in the development of Civilian Review Boards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Every board should have diverse and representative membership. This should include women, people of color and religious minorities or non-religious individuals. 2. Members should not be elected, but should be appointed. Elections will restrict low-income community participation, excluding the very perspective most needed. Elections cost money that can be better spent elsewhere. 3. Boards should be completely autonomous from the jurisdiction's attorney and should have independent legal counsel. 4. Boards should be completely independent and autonomous from the jurisdiction's police department or sheriff's office. 5. Boards should be housed separately from the police department, unless otherwise prohibitive. 6. The public should be made aware that they have the right to make complaints to the Civilian Review Board without fear of retribution. 7. Every board should have the capability to suggest corrective measures and use subpoena power as needed. 8. Every board should have access to the record of officers when investigating complaints. 9. Every board should have tracking methods to maintain historic records of complaints and resolutions against officers.

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Chianti Wilson	Baltimore	Prison Reform, Parole For All, and The Good Time Bill	I am asking that you please support legislation to bring parole for all offenders and the bill to expand the earned sentence credit system for all people behind bars during the special session in august. With the Parole Bill and expansion of the earned sentence credit system a way to reduce the prisons will be back by data showing the release of those who have become better people. Therefore they're better citizens helping keep the Commonwealth safe for us all. Also, I hope to encourage you to support the legislation for the criminal justice, policing, and prison reform. Thank you (Chianti Wilson)
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Keonna Burroughs	Baltimore	Prison Reform, Parole For All, and The Good Time Bill	I am asking that you please support legislation to bring parole for all offenders and the bill to expand the earned sentence credit system for all people behind bars during the special session in august. With the Parole Bill and expansion of the earned sentence credit system a way to reduce the prisons will be back by data showing the release of those who have become better people. Therefore they're better citizens helping keep the Commonwealth safe for us all. Also, I hope to encourage you to support the legislation for the criminal justice, policing, and prison reform. Thank you (Keonna Burroughs)
Dianne Holland	Fairfax	Joint Hearings on Criminal Justice & Police Reform	(Part 1 of 3 from Dianne & Kevin Holland) Our state and our country are at a moment of reckoning after George Floyd's murder. Are we going to continue as a country to criminalize and penalize people of color, the poor, the homeless, the mentally ill, addicts? Are we going to continue to use the prison system to solve our social ills? We need to start now to break away from this flawed hurtful policy and address the impact of systemic racism. We are asking the House to write and pass legislation during the special session on police reform on the following topics. We would like the legislation to have an emergency clause so it can be implemented immediately. We cannot wait any longer. This is the time for action - no more studies, no more talk. Accountability - Civilian Review Panel (CRP) We urge the General Assembly to enable local governments to create independent Civilian Review Panels with investigatory and subpoena powers and the ability to recommend changes to policing policy as well as disciplinary actions. Allow the CRP to choose its own counsel and get rid of VA Code 15.2-1542 where the CRP counsel is chosen by the County Attorney. The CRP should oversee the Sheriff so incidents like those involving Natasha McKenna's (https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/local/wp/2015/04/13/the-death-of-natasha-mckenna-in-the-fairfax-jail-the-rest-of-the-story/) can be reviewed. In Fairfax County where we live, we have a Civilian Review Panel and Independent Police Auditor that is a toothless body with no supporting staff and is hampered by lack of independent legal counsel. The General Assembly needs to allocate funding for the CRPs. Accountability - Qualified Immunity Why are taxpayers paying for the legal settlements of officer abuse? Lynchburg had its largest payout in May with at least \$500,000. These claims cost US taxpayers over \$300 million in FY2019. Police agencies should bear the cost of these settlements out of their own budgets to provide a financial incentive to reform. The General Assembly must pass a Cause of Action (right to sue officers in state court) bill that will allow Virginians or their families to receive damages when they are hurt or killed by police violence. This law must specifically state that qualified immunity is not a defense to these lawsuits, so police no longer have this legal shield to hide behind. The General Assembly should amend the VA Tort Claims Act or enact a new statute to allow individuals to bring an action against law enforcement officers (LEOs) who violate VA state constitutional provisions. We do not want police unions included in the new collective bargaining agreement passed this year (HB562). Accountability - Decertification Only 33 officers have been decertified in VA, compared to thousands in other states. Decertification (VA Code 15.2-1707) needs to be expanded to include excessive force, unethical conduct and officers deemed to be Brady/Giglio (A Giglio or Brady list is a list compiled usually by a prosecutor's office or a police department containing the names and details of LEOs who have had sustained incidents of untruthfulness, criminal convictions, candor issues, or some other type of issue placing their credibility into question.) (https://www.theiaop.org/sites/default/files/Brady-Giglio.pdf) The VA Police Chiefs and the VA Sheriff's Association are already in favor so this is doable.
Dianne Holland	Fairfax	Joint Hearings on Criminal Justice & Police Reform	(Part 2 of 3 from Dianne & Kevin Holland) Refocus Police Role It is long overdue to bring parity back to social service funding. Up until the 1980s, our country spent roughly the same amount on law and order and social welfare. Now we spend twice as much on law and order. Let's reallocate what the police for a long time have said they don't want and can't do - mental health and social services. Funds now invested in policing needs to be reinvested in public services, education, health, crisis intervention and other services preventative in nature. Let the police concentrate on serious crimes. The current state funding formula, which incentivizes arrests, needs to be revised to promote alternatives. The General Assembly should establish a statewide "Marcus Alert" whereby trained mental health professionals are on call for crisis situations or wellness checks. End Policing of Low Level Offenses Virginia has been the leader in locking up people for a long time. VA locks up 700 per 100,000 people vs. the EU's about 100 per 100,000. The General Assembly should change the laws to avoid custodial arrests for minor transgressions such as disorderly conduct, panhandling and trespassing that criminalize people who are mentally ill or homeless. The Assembly should reinstate parole and implement automatic expungement for dismissed and acquitted charges, substance convictions and pardoned offenses. The Assembly should establish guidance that summons will be used in lieu of arrest unless the law requires it or there is imminent risk of harm. Cash bail should be reformed so the poor are no longer criminalized. The Assembly should fund detox program alternatives to drunk in public and DWIs. Transparency We need a public statewide police officer termination database for those who are decertified and unfit to serve. The Virginia Legislative Black Caucus and the VA Sheriff's Association are both in favor. We want police disciplinary records made public. The General Assembly needs to strike the current FOIA exemption for law enforcement disciplinary records in the VA Freedom of Information Act to allow CRPs and the public access to police personnel records. Use of Force (UOF) Excessive use of force should be clearly defined and restricted. We want required attempts at de-escalation and the exhaustion of all other means prior to use of force. The General Assembly needs to ban choking (since George Floyd's murder wasn't considered a chokehold), chokehold/neck restraint and strangleholds and to pass "Breonna's Law" to end no-knock warrants. If local police have disproportionate UOF incidents in their jurisdictions, their VA supplemental funding (HB599 funding) should be suspended. Body Worn Cameras The General Assembly needs to expand statewide the use of body worn cameras and follow the ACLU Model Act on their use.

Dianne Holland	Fairfax	Joint Hearings on Criminal Justice & Police Reform	(Part 3 of 3 from Dianne & Kevin Holland)	<p>Police Hiring We want to prohibit the hiring of officers fired or resigned during use of force investigations from being hired in other states. The General Assembly needs to mandate the hiring agency to investigate the officer's separation from prior agencies. Right now if the hiring agency doesn't inquire, they will not be made aware of the cause of the separation. The Assembly should allow the hiring agency to have full access to an applicant's previous employer's record. The Assembly needs to change state law that officers can only be citizens to include legal permanent residents to increase diversity.</p> <p>Police Training Include outside trainers, and "best and brightest" from within the department, to address key issues such as de-escalation, implicit bias (virtual reality with simulated incidents) and explicit bias. The General Assembly should pass a law mandating a duty to intervene protocol by fellow law enforcement officers and fund peer intervention training modeled on EPIC (Ethical Policing is Courageous). The VA Sheriffs' Association is in favor of the duty to intervene proposal. No "fear based" or "warrior training" should be included. Officers who have been the subject of complaints should not serve as field trainers.</p> <p>Demilitarize Equipment & Training The General Assembly should pass a state law to prohibit military weapons, equipment & warrior training (including outside training), to restrict the use of tear gas and other militarization tactics and weapons against civilians. The federal government's 1033 program and Homeland Security grants should be terminated.</p> <p>School Resource Officer (SRO) Programs The General Assembly should eliminate the SRO program. This program, which criminalizes youthful behavior, disproportionately affects black, brown, and disabled students, sending them into the school to prison pipeline. It also sends undocumented students into the deportation pipeline. The funds should be shifted instead to mental health professionals.</p> <p>Re-establish Definition of Misdemeanor Assaults on LEOs The General Assembly should restore the categorization of misdemeanor assault as it was in the 1980's - when the officer isn't physically hurt and there is no serious injury. The case of a young Hispanic woman with mental health issues charged with a felony in 2013 for throwing a sliver of an onion ring that hit an officer's arm is emblematic of the problem. The Virginia State Police's 2019 Annual Crime Report recorded 1,939 charges involving law enforcement victims. Serious injuries occurred in about 5% of the nearly 2,000 charges where an officer was the victim that year. However, 70% of officer-victim cases resulted in no injury to the officer and 25% involved minor injuries.</p> <p>Thank you for your consideration, Dianne & Kevin Holland</p>
Portnoy Evans-Johnson RTAP	NORTH CHESTERFIELD	Public Safety & CRB	RTAP has asked if I could speak to the benefits & importance of having an authentic CRB for public safety.	
Laura Jackson	Lawrenceville Va	Earned Sentence Credit	<p>It is my hope each of you plans to support the legislation being brought up during special session in August, which would create a fair and equitable opportunity for people behind bars to earn the chance at showing their growth & change made while incarcerated. I reach out on behalf of my husband who is currently incarcerated at Lawrenceville Correctional, which I am sure you are aware is having a slow but steady outbreak of COVID 19 and social distancing is impossible in these settings. Several have confirmed positive in his own pod to which they have been quarantined together in since the start of this so it may be inevitable that he becomes infected as well.</p> <p>Supporting this bill will in turn allow for a reduction in overcrowded prisons with a merit-based option to which those who have truly grown from their incarceration are allowed to prove that they have become productive members of society. A second chance EARNED will result in goal-oriented individuals being given a real chance to make up for prior mistakes and they will have achieved all the right tools meant to rehabilitate.</p> <p>The most dangerous phrase in the English language is: "We have always done it this way" PLEASE consider these positive changes!!</p> <p>Thank you Delegates for taking the time to do these public meetings and I just want you to know I Support Criminal Justice Reform and I Support the Good Time Earning Credits being raised!!!</p> <p>To whom it may concern:</p> <p>I am asking that you please support legislation to bring parole for all offenders and the bill to expand the earned sentence credit system for all people behind bars during the special session in August. With the Parole Bill and expansion of the earned sentence credit system a way to reduce the prisons will be back by data showing the release of those who have become better people. Therefore they're better citizens helping keep the Commonwealth safe for us all. Also, I hope to encourage you to support the legislation for the criminal justice, policing, and prison reform. Thank you</p>	
Jacqueline Orza Spring	Virginia Beach California	Good Time Earning Credit Bring Back Parole for Adults	<p>Thank you Delegates for taking the time to do these public meetings and I just want you to know I Support Criminal Justice Reform and I Support the Good Time Earning Credits being raised!!!</p> <p>To whom it may concern:</p> <p>I am asking that you please support legislation to bring parole for all offenders and the bill to expand the earned sentence credit system for all people behind bars during the special session in August. With the Parole Bill and expansion of the earned sentence credit system a way to reduce the prisons will be back by data showing the release of those who have become better people. Therefore they're better citizens helping keep the Commonwealth safe for us all. Also, I hope to encourage you to support the legislation for the criminal justice, policing, and prison reform. Thank you</p>	
Karla Turman	Floyd County	Parole	<p>My name is Karla Turman. My dad, Wythe County Deputy Clifford Dicker, was killed in the line of duty on December 6, 1994, by Christopher Shawn Wheeler, who, at 15-years-old had been in and out of juvenile detention for most of his life. That morning, when dad went to pick him up on another juvenile petition, Wheeler confessed that dad allowed him to change out of hunting clothes. Instead, he retrieved his .22-caliber hunting rifle and shot dad, then used dad's own service weapon to fire a fatal shot into his head.</p> <p>Wheeler was found guilty of murdering my dad and sentenced to 43 years in prison. As the murder happened just 26 days before Virginia's No Parole Law went into effect, my family knew that he would be eligible for parole at some point. We didn't realize that it would come just short of seven (7) years into his 43-year sentence. To date, he has been eligible for parole 12 times, most recently just last month. We are still waiting for that decision. I have included his parole record below. When someone is denied parole because the Parole Board considers them to be a risk to the community, they should not be considered for parole again the next year.</p> <p>Each time that Wheeler has a parole hearing, my family relives that terrible day in 1994. It is like constantly knocking off a scab, causing the wound to bleed again. In 1994, my family was handed a life sentence. We were given a life without our husband, our dad, our granddad, and our great-granddad. We will never get parole from our life sentence. His murderer should have to serve every second of his 43-year sentence.</p> <p>My family is not the only one affected by the parole eligibility of the offenders. There are many victims that are submitted to the torture of fighting to keep their offender in prison. Whether it is annually or not, every parole hearing rips that scab off a healing wound.</p> <p>Today, I am asking that Virginia's No Parole Law not be abolished. Please do not only consider the offender in this decision. I ask that you consider the victims, as well.</p>	
Elizabeth Carr	the people	Richmond	public safety via police reform	
ROBERT Stewart	SALT	FAIRFAX	PRIVATE PRISONS	
			<p>We need to prohibit and eliminate private prisons. Below is SALT's rationale for eliminating private prisons in the state.</p> <p>The private prison industry, which reached its zenith during the peak of mass incarceration but has roots in the Jim Crow South, has no place in our communities. The profit driven motives of the private prison companies creates an inherent conflict between the financial interests of the companies and the best interest of incarcerated Virginians and their communities.</p> <p>The private prison industry is inextricably linked to the Jim Crow South and its exploitation of Black communities for profit. For example, the co-founder of CoreCivic (formerly Corrections Corporation of America) originally made his name as a warden in Jim Crow Texas' prison plantations for Black Americans in the 1960s. CoreCivic was the original operator of VA's only private prison, Lawrenceville Correctional Center.</p> <p>Additionally, a 2016 Department of Justice report found that for profit facilities were more dangerous for both guards and inmates. Staff were 163% more likely to be assaulted by inmates and inmate on inmate violence was 30% higher than in government operated facilities.</p> <p>Private prisons have motivation to minimally train their staff, provide them with the lowest wages the market will bear, and staff their facilities at low levels. A Sentencing Project report found that employees earn about \$5,000 a year less and receive 58 hours of training fewer than employees of public prisons. These cost reduction techniques result in dangerous, violent facilities.</p> <p>Some of the complaints levied against the GEO group (which currently operates Virginia's only private prison) include operating facilities in which prisoners are perpetually underfed and held in vermin infested cells, provided inadequate mental and physical healthcare, beaten by guards, and sexually assaulted by other inmates and guards. The GEO group has been fined by local authorities or forced to settled civil suits multiple times.</p> <p>Given the large number of financial firms (JP Morgan, Wells Fargo, and Sun Trust to name a few) that have already cut ties with the private prison industry, there is every reason to believe that dangerous cost cutting practices will increase.</p> <p>The most common argument in defense of privatizing prisons has been that it saves money. However, multiple reports have shown that private prisons result in the state paying more per prisoner, in some cases over \$1,600 per year per prisoner.</p> <p>It is in the best interest of the state to provide humane and rehabilitative care to the citizens in its custody in order to maximize their chance of rejoining society.</p> <p>Corporations, on the other hand, have not been selected by the people, and are (therefore) not accountable to (them) the people. The motivation of corporations is to create a profit, which causes private prison corporations to behave in ways that do not reflect the best interest of the Commonwealth.</p> <p>Fortunately, there is an easy solution to this problem: strike from the state law the language that allows the state to enter into contracts with private entities for the management and operation of jails and prisons.</p> <p>Illinois, California, and Nevada have each passed legislation inhibiting private prisons. Virginia should, too.</p> <p>Several years ago, a family member who is addicted to alcohol and a medical professional was driving while intoxicated. Unfortunately, the family member was involved in an accident and spent several months in the county jail.</p> <p>This individual was suffering from an addiction to alcohol, which is a disease. Instead of incarceration, the sentence should have been mandated treatment for the alcoholism and a period of followup to determine if the family member was in a recovery program.</p> <p>This incarceration did nothing for her recovery and made her unemployable. She continues to be unemployed and frequently "fall off the wagon" because she never was required to get into a recovery program.</p> <p>The state needs to rethink how it deals with those that are addicted. Simply incarcerating them will not get the job done. Also, this is not the way we treat other people who are suffering from a disease.</p>	
Robert Stewart	Fairfax	Incarcerating those who are addicted instead of mandating treatment	<p>Several years ago, a family member who is addicted to alcohol and a medical professional was driving while intoxicated. Unfortunately, the family member was involved in an accident and spent several months in the county jail.</p> <p>This individual was suffering from an addiction to alcohol, which is a disease. Instead of incarceration, the sentence should have been mandated treatment for the alcoholism and a period of followup to determine if the family member was in a recovery program.</p> <p>This incarceration did nothing for her recovery and made her unemployable. She continues to be unemployed and frequently "fall off the wagon" because she never was required to get into a recovery program.</p> <p>The state needs to rethink how it deals with those that are addicted. Simply incarcerating them will not get the job done. Also, this is not the way we treat other people who are suffering from a disease.</p>	

Allan-Charles	Chipman	Initiatives of Change USA	Richmond City	Police Accountability, Civilian Review Boards, and Protecting First and 4th Amendment Rights	<p>Greetings Chair,</p> <p>My name is Allan-Charles Chipman. I live in Richmond Virginia. Richmond, VA has been a hotbed for protest and calls for accountability and transparency for police. We have had children, clergy, protestors, elected officials, members of the press, and residents expressing their first amendment rights teargassed, pepper sprayed, wrongfully arrested, hit with police vehicles on two occasions all without consequence to the officers involved. Our current police chief of staff and former interim chief Jody Blackwell killed a black air force veteran named Jeremy Onnassimus Gilliam. All of this happened despite Mr. Gilliam not fitting the description and not having prints found on the gun attributed to him to justify his killing. The family was told in 2002 that Officer Blackwell was no longer with the force but last month Mayor Stoney appointed him as the Interim Chief and now currently the chief of staff of police. On June 19, 2020 Judge Karen Eady Williams issued a restraining order against the police chief Gerard Smith's former police department in North Carolina for the very use of tear gas after a lawsuit by the NAACP and the ACLU. As a global peace builder, I remind you all that the use of tear gas and other chemical weapons were banned by the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and in 1969 in the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 2603 and 1972 by the Biological Weapons Convention and the 1993 Chemical Weapons Convention.</p> <p>The Richmond Police even used Virginia Code VA 18.2-406 to declare an Unlawful Assembly on a group of students and children who were hosting a "teach-in" in front of city hall. They tear gassed these students and still have faced no consequences.</p> <p>We also know since at least 2006 the FBI has been warning of white supremacist ties within police departments. We saw this here in Richmond on April of 2019 when Capitol Police officer Robert Stamm was fired for links to white supremacist group Asatru Folk Assembly. Chesterfield Police Officer Daniel Morley was fired for white supremacist ties to Identity Evropa.</p> <p>1. We also must contest the times and context of the laws such as Virginia Code VA18.2-406 that equips police with justification to use asphyxiating gases (banned by the Geneva Convention) in the midst of a Covid-19 pandemic that targets the respiratory system. We need to rewrite this code that provides protection for those who are addressing their grievances against the police state from being brutalized and attacked by the very police they protest. We need a requirement for fully funded civilian review boards independent of 2. We must fully fund and equip localities to provide residents with a civilian review board independent of police with subpoena power.</p> <p>3. We must redirect civil asset forfeiture funds to over policed communities instead of police budgets. Obama's Department of Justice sought to greatly limit asset forfeiture under Eric Holder's DOJ. It was reinvigorated under Trump's DOJ and Jeff Sessions. Police have violated residents and received incentive to discriminate and fund their budget. In the Supreme Court Case Utah v. Strell, Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor noted search and seizure (that occurs during this type of civil asset forfeiture) will disproportionately affect and violate the 4th amendment rights of people of color. We must disincentivize discrimination and perhaps ultimately end or severely limit this practice.</p> <p>4. Ban tear gas</p> <p>Thank you, Allan-Charles Chipman</p>
Naobi	Cook-Tabron		Winchester	Criminal Justice Reform - Good Time Bill	<p>It's important to note that the offenders behind bars ARE still people. They are parents, siblings, children and they matter. They have people on the outside that care about their health and want to see them come home and DO BETTER for those they love and for themselves. There are many people who deserve a second chance and have learned from their mistakes. It's also crucial to point out that this good time bill is not something that will be handed to them but is something they will have to earn. It's a great bill that needs to be implemented immediately. Some offenders do deserve to be in a correctional facility in respect to victims but there are countless people that have been given unjustifiable sentences that deserve to be home, too. I on the behalf of many who were not able to comment, write or signup to speak ask that you take this bill into consideration and think about the good people who are deserving of it.</p> <p>Thank you Naobi C.</p>
Karen	Wolfe	Karen Wolfe	Dillwyn	Criminal Justice Issues-Parole of Felons who kill Police and Pub Safety Officers	<p>Before considering parole for criminals, especially those who murder Officers during the commission of a felony, I wish the Board would consider the pain and long term effects release would have on the family and friends of the murdered officer. A criminal gets to visit and interact with their family during holidays and on the coronial facility, but the family and friends of the officer must go to a graveyard to have a one way conversation. The emotional impact is unbelievably long term. Please have someone investigate and consider that impact on the Public Safety families and co-workers (suicide, depression, PTSD, department instability, behavioral issues and study problems of the children) PRIOR to scheduling a hearing.</p> <p>Thank you, Karen Wolfe, Concerns of Police Survivors (VA and MD)</p>
Kelly	Harris-Braxton	Virginia First Cities	Richmond	Public Safety/Police Reform	<p>I am Kelly Harris-Braxton, Executive Director of Virginia First Cities Coalition, a 16-member strong association of the Commonwealth's older, core cities. Virginia First Cities was a thought and policy leader by proposing and helping implement the Community Wealth Building Program, known in the state budget as the TANF for Employment Grant Program. The underlying principle of this program is to remove the silos that persist in the provision of social service delivery to citizens of the Commonwealth to create greater opportunity for jobs that create self-sufficiency. This program is having a significant, positive impact in many of our local communities receiving grants. It is for this reason, we urge the General Assembly to please look at the issue of criminal justice reform in a non-siloed manner. Genuine success for citizens in one policy area is often interrelated to other supporting policy areas. A Community Wealth Building approach will foster equity in justice, as well as equity in healthy communities for all.</p> <p>Virginia First Cities convened a panel of our member city police chiefs/city managers and council members back at our 2019 Annual Meeting of our Board of Directors in Charlottesville. These VFC police chiefs participated in a panel discussion entitled, "Every City a Baltimore - Policing Today." The purpose of this deliberative panel was to make recommendations for reforms in the aftermath of the senseless use of force used on Freddie Gray in Baltimore, MD and Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO. The time is now for the General Assembly to enact long overdue reforms for 21st century policing. We urge the General Assembly and Governor to adopt these proposals so that our police departments can be re-imagined and more effective as soon as possible. VFC has done a lot of work around the issue of community-engaged policing and spoken to chiefs of police, both current and retired, from a variety of localities in the Commonwealth. We understand that many police departments need to refocus their efforts on real community based policing to meet trust among citizens, and particularly those located in areas that have higher police interaction. Community policing is sorely lacking and strategies must be employed to remedy this problem.</p> <p>VFC Priorities Sampling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Need community input and participation in the hiring of law enforcement recruits. -A diverse police force that mirrors the community it serves, should be a priority. Overarching accountability through DCJS to recruitment, training and continuing education is crucial. -Replace law enforcement's traditional role in mental health crises by allowing the creation of a statewide Mental Health Co-Response Team. State funding is necessary. -Require anti-bias/anti-racism training for recruits and in-service continuing education. This should be a statewide mandate and training centralized through VCJS to ensure quality expert consistency and coverage. -Require enhanced standardized training for all trainers. -Create consistent standards for high-quality training for all officers, regardless of location in the Commonwealth. -Leadership Training for law enforcement leaders - This will encourage needed cultural changes in policing and provide education on the latest 21st century policing strategies. Make this training a prerequisite for becoming a Virginia Chief of Police or Sheriff and require all current Virginia Chiefs of Police and Sheriffs to attend.
Santia	Nance	Brilliance Behind Bars	Henrico	Earned Sentence Credits NOW!	<p>With all of the racial injustices going on in the world, it's hard to even imagine how much of our prison system here in Virginia is full of them. No one even has to THINK about the men and women behind bars and can sleep at night. But think of them and their families... how would you feel knowing your loved one has been locked away for an extended amount of time when they don't deserve to be.</p> <p>That's what happens to so many black and brown families here in Virginia, simply because they did not have the resources at the time to do better.</p> <p>The way we can fix this now is through extending the earned sentence credit system in Virginia, in the special session this month. Not only will it incentivize those incarcerated, it'll give a chance to those who have already been doing well behind bars. My fiancé, for one, is a model inmate who has mentored and helped others, gotten his GED and started taking college courses, taught himself and others ta chi, and has written essays and public speeches about mental and family health. He was well over-sentenced and has been in prison for 12 years, when he could have been out here doing the exact things for our community.</p> <p>Please consider discussing this and talking about it in the meeting tomorrow, and voting yes on the bill, as well as others that will bring back justice to Virginia. Thank you.</p>
David	Wells	None	Bedford	Defunding Law Enforcement and School Resource Officers	<p>It is a dangerous concept to defund law enforcement in Virginia or anywhere. Tactics and any take down methods can and should be addressed through DCJS, but having non sworn officers handle domestics, traffic stops or just a reduction of funding will cause unnecessary deaths in those new unprepared first responders.</p>
Fionnuala	Fisk		Richmond	Qualified Immunity	<p>Removing School Resource Officers from our school is a bad decision or even thought process. All it will take is ONE critical incident. ONE child being hurt and the public will be calling for every legislators head. A school is a soft target we do not as parents, grandparent or citizens support this in any way. You need to listen to those who live in rural areas, suburbs and the folks who financially support Virginia through our tax dollars. We provide for paying the bills, don't be foolish, we listen, we vote.</p> <p>I am calling for the end of qualified immunity here in Virginia. We are all held accountable for the actions we take as private citizens. The same principle must apply to those that serve our government in any capacity. No one is above the law, and the fact that police unions could be opposed to accountability shows just how important it is. Police are unable to hold themselves accountable as we have seen in case after case, high profile and otherwise. Thus, we must have legal redress. The Black lives in our community are too important to not pass this fundamental reform.</p>
Robin	LEE		23666	Parole/Fishback law	<p>I am Robin Lee and I am writing on behalf of my brother who is incarcerated and was not eligible for parole. I am writing inquiring about the steps needed to ensure a parole date as it relates to the Fishback law. What is the status of this law and what is time frame for those who fit the criteria, and how when will they be notified.</p> <p>Not a question, brief history for consideration</p> <p>My brother Jason Lee is one of the offenders who fell under the no parole in the late 1990's and was convicted of a crime and was not able to get good legal representation and was appointed a court appointed attorney, who did not represent him and his best interest. I will not suggest that my brother was this great person but for the crime he was not guilty. We will not fully blame the legal system, there was a lack of knowledge and fear on our family's part that allowed things to not work in his favor. After being convicted in Feb 1998, and having served 22 years in the department of corrections, my brother says it hasn't been any easy journey, but in all of this, he believes being incarcerated may have saved his life because he has learned some things and has he has grown as a man. Every inmate has a story, some guilty, some not, and while I believe that there were some inconsistencies in his case, I will not suggest or plead his case either way. What I am asking is that we receive the necessary steps to receive parole review and date as he and I believe he meets the requirements for this opportunity and would like to know my options and steps according to Fishback law.</p> <p>Thank you for your time and consideration.</p>
Gay	Gardner	Interfaith Action for Human Rights	Springfield	Prison reform and accountability	<p>My name is Gay Gardner. I currently serve as a volunteer Senior Advisor for Interfaith Action for Human Rights (IAHR), a nonprofit organization that advocates for humane treatment of incarcerated people in Virginia, Maryland, and DC. I am in touch with scores of people in Virginia detention facilities and many of their family members.</p> <p>What I would like to bring to your attention today is the need for independent oversight over the Department of Corrections (DOC). There is currently no entity specifically charged with ensuring the DOC is accountable to Virginia taxpayers. What follows is a sampling of the kinds of issues IAHR is aware of that have not been addressed effectively because of this void.</p> <p>Allegations of violent assaults by inmates and officers have gone without any discernible effort by the DOC to investigate them. In some cases, DOC investigators have pressured prisoners to withdraw their complaints.</p> <p>Dogs have been allowed to maul completely subdued and compliant inmates, resulting in serious injuries, including permanent nerve damage.</p> <p>Men have sometimes been kept in cells with no water or functioning toilet for hours, days, or weeks on end. (Mr. H. was kept in a cell with a toilet he could not flush for more than a month (March-April 2020) at Wallens Ridge State Prison. He reported having to stack books on the seat in order to keep from touching the accumulated fecal matter. He has identified investigators and other staff who allegedly knew about this and did nothing.)</p> <p>IAHR continues to receive complaints from people placed in isolated confinement for many weeks and months without being informed of the specific reasons why they are considered to be a security threat.</p> <p>People with a credible case for protective custody have instead been kept in prolonged solitary confinement and subjected to unnecessary and punitive restrictions.</p> <p>People with serious medical conditions are not provided with appropriate care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Mr. S. at Wallens Ridge has epilepsy. He "checked himself into" segregation because his condition was not recognized and treated properly by staff. His cellmates have ridiculed, mistreated, and assaulted him. -Mr. V. at Red Onion is not being permitted to obtain a diagnosis of the cause of his significant loss of bone tissue in his leg over the last 3 or 4 years. Without a diagnosis, he cannot receive treatment. -Prisoners with sickle cell anemia have not received effective pain management and are not being adequately protected from the coronavirus even though they are known to have severely weakened immune systems. <p>The grievance procedure available to Virginia prisoners does not afford them a genuine opportunity to challenge disciplinary charges against them. There is no way for prisoners to compel the review of security video, and their requests for witness testimony are often denied as not relevant, without explanation.</p> <p>These and many other examples show the need for an independent, impartial entity to ensure that prisoners are treated humanely. When allegations turn out to be false, the DOC will be vindicated. Any allegations that are substantiated should lead to corrective action. This is the result citizens of the Commonwealth and those incarcerated in its prisons deserve. Whatever crimes they have committed, prisoners do not deserve to suffer from neglect or injury that is not part of their sentence and which the Commonwealth has a responsibility to prevent.</p>

Kenneth Hester	Montgomery County Sheriff's Office Citizen Support Group, President	Christiansburg	No-knock warrants, civilian review boards, and use of force	<p>As law enforcement continues to be attacked throughout our Country, I implore our Commonwealth to not follow suit and figuratively handoff our law enforcement officers. There seems to be a rush to place blame on hundreds of thousands of law enforcement officers for the actions of an isolated few. In other situations, we are encouraged to not stereotype a group because of a few individuals, but we are quick to do the opposite for law enforcement. One cannot challenge or diminish some of the recent officer actions. But these are out of millions of interactions that occur annually. We are letting the actions of the "few" impact the "many".</p> <p>I would also ask the Subcommittee to consider action similar to the last session where municipalities and counties were given leverage to determine when and if handguns were allowed at festivals, parks, etc. A park or festival in Fairfax is not the same as one in Christiansburg or Gate City. Let the local governments govern based on the needs of their residents and not a cookie cutter approach to be applied across the Commonwealth.</p> <p>To the specific Agenda Items, 'no-knock warrants'. The element of surprise is frequently what allows law enforcement to keep these situations from becoming deadly. Criminals who are given any leverage over law enforcement just makes the probability of violence greater. I use the example of the Wythe County Deputies who were ambushed recently during a response. Rather than take away the use of 'no-knock warrants' away perhaps incorporating more diligence into insuring the action merits a 'no-knock' situation would be a compromise.</p> <p>Utilizing the community to engage with law enforcement is a great idea. However, "review board" implies some level of control or management. I am President of a Support Group and have seen quite a bit in the last 4 years, but I do not think that remotely qualifies me to challenge of question any law enforcement actions. I do think an advisory or liaison role within the community could be valuable for giving law enforcement the communities perspective, but not as a review board.</p> <p>Use of force is a difficult topic. When and how much depends so much on the circumstances. It is also one that is hard to critique after the fact. Unless you are in that situation, it is a little unfair to play arm chair quarterback and come up with the 'perfect' response. The women and men that are placed into these situations are highly trained with many coming from military backgrounds. Their lives are put into danger everyday. How many times do we read that a routine traffic stop becomes deadly? How often are officers murdered while sitting in their cars or eating a meal? Their jobs are dangerous everyday. So, putting them into situations where they have to question their responses will only lead to more deaths. Criminals are surely not going to stop and consider. Don't force officers to give them that opportunity by second guessing. Let their training and experience determine their actions.</p>
Pam Pouchot		Yorktown	law enforcement/ schools	<p>It is imperative that law-enforcement officers who are fired for excessive use of force permanently lose their Virginia certification. It must be required by law that this is documented in their personnel files.</p> <p>I have not heard any legislator call for gun-free schools in a decade. The only people who should possess a firearm on school property are law-enforcement officers while engaged in their duties as such or when used in school approved curriculum. Currently it is legal for a student to possess an unloaded firearm in their vehicle while parked on school property. It must be properly stored in a firearms rack in or upon a motor vehicle or in a closed container. Ammunition may be present in the vehicle. This allows for easy access to the firearm. There is no reason that is necessary. School staff may also possess a firearm in their vehicles if not expressly forbidden by the school division as a condition of their employment as stated in their contracts. Staff are human with human frailties. Leave your firearms at home. Schools need to be a place of peace.</p>
Jacob Regal		Richmond	Use of Force, Civilian Review Board, and No Knock Warrants	<p>Hello,</p> <p>My name is Jake Regal and I am a resident of Richmond. I am asking for the following to make our communities safer and to make sure that all persons are treated fairly by the police:</p> <p>Abolish qualified immunity Ban no-knock warrants Give every municipality a properly-funded Civilian Review Board with subpoena power to hold officers accountable for misconduct and improper use of force</p> <p>And implement the following policies regarding the use of force by police:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Ban all chokeholds and strangleholds -Require de-escalation -Require warning before shooting -Exhaust all other means before shooting -Require officers to intervene and report misconduct -Ban shooting at moving vehicles -Require use of force continuum -Require comprehensive reporting of incidents <p>These are just some of the first steps to protect our communities from police misconduct and abuse.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p> <p>Jake Regal</p>
Diana Bodmer		Russell county, Va	Parole laws and opposition to release of violent offenders	<p>I am a family member of a victim from 1980 —before "No parole laws" went into effect. For the past 40 years, Every 1-3 years, we - the victim's family have had to relive the emotional roller coaster of the violent crime committed against our loved one- Gina Renee Hall. We attend parole hearings as well as do many others fearful the convicted criminal will be released & retaliate and cause harm to others. It is a violation of our rights to continue to have to fight to keep a violent offender in prison fulfilling the sentence the system already deemed appropriate to that crime. The victim's families and anyone associated to rendering that decision should also have rights and a no parole system provides some security.</p> <p>2. When the decision of Life in prison handed down by our judicial system to a criminal has the potential to be reversed by allowing parole, then those who originally are making the conviction happen could fear the process. It is human nature to shy away...and the result could be that appropriate decisions for the safety of our citizens might not be as it should. We will have more criminals not convicted because of this fear- it will become a lenient system when the jurors, the prosecutors, the policemen, etc know that the criminal they help to put away could be right back out in the street with vengeance against all involved especially the family connected to the victim. So again a parole eligible society violates my rights - my safety as a victim's family member. Aside from the fact that it is the right thing to do, Another reason we have fought for 40 years for parole denial is fear for our own family considering the violence of the offender. An offender who already received a life sentence but gets to meet with a panel of a few people and present why he should be released-And once age 65 he gets two chances for release every 1-3 years. This all costs money - why should a sentence renders not just be upheld...why is the system so concerned about a murderer's rights...and ignores the protection, the rights, an entire system of good people who put him there. And if released, it will cost the state far more to put him back in when he is tried for another offense.</p> <p>In my own situation, Stephen Eperly wrote down every name and address of every juror and they still express their fear, as does the prosecuting attorney. A witness who testified still has nightmares regarding Eperly mouthing to her You are Dead as she testified ...and on and on ...when those helping to serve justice realize Parole could happen, they will be fearful to help those bringing justice to these violent criminals. These are violent criminals who should not ever be released to live amongst a civilized society...the system will fail...the no-parole system honors those who helped to bring justice - it respects the system. Anything less dishonors those who stepped up and made the already fearful decisions to testify, prosecute, render decisions, etc. unlike what we all endured in 1980 and still endure every 1-3 years- Fear- a very real fear about our safety.</p> <p>3. The numbers and data in Virginia since the "no parole laws" went into effect support the good that has come to Virginia. Why would Virginia reverse what seems to now work. Please see vccs.virginia.gov for data supporting the progress in the last decade. The numbers paint the picture of a safer Virginia and I am Hopeful those who govern us will keep our safety their top concern.</p>
Portnoy Evans-Johnson	RTAP	NORTH CHESTERFIELD ALEXANDRIA	Public Safety & authentic CRB	Good Morning!
Emily Kruger		ALEXANDRIA	Criminal Justice	<p>My name is Emily Kruger, I am a constituent from Alexandria, VA. In this moment, I am feeling catalyzed to share my views with my state and local government. I am honored to be in community with my neighbors as a part of Racial Justice Alexandria. We are a group of abolitionists who seek to center the demands of Movement for Black Lives. I have known of and wholeheartedly supported these demands since their creation in 2015. At this moment, these are the ones we find most important for our legislators to take into serious consideration (as expressed directly to Delegate Levine, Delegate Herring, Senator Barker, and Senator Ebbin over the past 2 weeks):</p> <p>End the War on Drugs: Immediately and retroactively decriminalize drug and prostitution-related offenses and invest savings into programs and services identified by people in the drug and sex trades, and implement a full and comprehensive reparations package for people, families, and communities harmed by the drug war and criminalization of prostitution.</p> <p>End the Death Penalty: Abolish the death penalty, life without the possibility of parole (LWOP), and death by incarceration</p> <p>End the Surveillance of Black Communities: An end to the long-standing monitoring and criminalization of Black people, especially through the use of body-cameras worn by police. Diversion of public funds used for surveillance to meeting community needs. Elimination of gang databases and related information sharing, and provisions giving individuals placed on gang databases with notice and an opportunity to seek removal.</p> <p>End to Pretrial Detention and Money Bail: End money bail and pretrial detention. Eliminate risk assessments. Eliminate criminal punishment fees and fines</p> <p>Demilitarize Law Enforcement: We demand an immediate ban on the use of military equipment by law enforcement and Border Patrol in all circumstances. We demand an immediate end to the transfer of military equipment to federal, state, and local police, and campus law enforcement agencies, and an immediate end to the use of military equipment by any law enforcement agency, including Customs and Border Patrol. We demand immediate disclosure of all military equipment transferred and acquired and its intended use by federal, state, and local governments</p> <p>End the Use of Past Criminal History: Eliminate restrictions and exclusions on access to housing, education, employment, social programs and benefits, voting rights, parental rights, and other civil rights based on prior criminal convictions.</p> <p>I hope you all will take our demands seriously, as they are truly transformative.</p> <p>Sincerely, Emily Kruger 205 E Glendale Ave Apt 4 Alexandria, VA 22301</p>
Norman Achin		Woodbridge	Secret Police Activity Online/Internet	<p>The police thrive on being heroes, and often they are. Because they are virtually unregulated, as the debate about qualified immunity shows, they often abuse authority and not just where you can see it in video footage, but ALSO online.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1). REQUIRE cops to get a warrant for probable cause when online especially in dating sites. They attacked and netted ME for doing nothing more than legally dating. They dangled a purported child which they impersonated, and when I tried to help what I thought was a victim, I was arrested. My life has been destroyed, my teaching career, over. And they aren't going to get away with it. This was NOT a tip they were following up; it was trolling and harassment. 2). AMEND the law to READ that VA Code 18.2-374.3 must be subordinated to VA Code 19.2-61 - 68 "Wiretap Code." Then it will be explicitly a felony for cops to intercept electronic communication. CW attry argues absurdly they are "intended recipients" of communications! Who intentionally communicates with cops lawfully on a dating site?? This all ready violates federal statutes for anyone to impersonate and intercept communications without a warrant. 3). Tighten Qualified Immunity if possible. Police must be accountable under same standards as everyone else. Teachers don't get a special break, even if falsely accused. There must be a bad cop database, just like for teachers, that prevents hiring crooked cops. 4). VA Cops can and do use technology to tunnel past passwords and other security using bit torrent and stingray, among others. Make these expressly illegal without a warrant. Require cops and prosecutors to disclose their sources. Nationwide, they are preferring to dismiss cases rather than have to be forced to explain their illegal sources/methods. I have proof. 5). VA should join the civilized world and NOT allow CW to amend indictments up to the DAY BEFORE the trial. VA all ready has grand juries that meet MONTHLY. Do you know that no other states do this? And when states do, it's for big item (murder, kidnapping, extortion, etc), not petty ones. 6). Mandatory minimums must be removed. It cannot be that innocent people are forced to plead guilty to crimes they didn't commit to minimize the damage to their lives. Cops brag on ICAC grant applications they force pleas. I have not pled, and will fight it to my dying day! Please continue to improve things in CW of V. These changes benefit all political parties! <p>Thanks, Norman M. Achin</p>

Alex	Oxford		Charlottesville	Police use of force	<p>I urge you to ban the use of all chemical weapons by police. I have been pepper sprayed and tear gassed repeatedly while attending and reporting on nonviolent protests. It's a truly horrible experience, and such weapons are rightfully prohibited in warfare. They should not be legal to use against civilians.</p> <p>Second, any time force is used by police officers, the victim should be examined by a medical professional and treated if necessary. Over the past two months, many people in Richmond have been injured by police and left untreated for hours, or even days. These injuries include burns from pepper spray being left on the skin for hours, nerve damage from excessively tight handcuffs/zip ties, and broken fingers, among other things.</p> <p>Finally, it is completely unacceptable that protesters are being assaulted by police officers who haven't been trained in how to use their weapons. I have personally witnessed an officer in Richmond misuse so-called "less lethal munitions" (which, even when used correctly, kill 3% of the time, and cause serious injuries 15% of the time), firing directly at a protester's torso, at close range, with no warning or apparent cause. The Richmond Police Chief later admitted that officers had not had any training in how to use these weapons, despite having spent two months using them against nonviolent protesters. If an officer hasn't been trained to use a weapon, then they shouldn't be permitted to use it</p>
Michelle	Evans	Michelle Evans-Virginia Citizens Coalition for Police Accountability	Virginia Beach	Civilian Review Panels	<p>Civilian oversight is an important first step toward police accountability and transparency in our communities. The General Assembly should pass legislation permitting localities to establish Civilian Oversight Boards. These boards should be granted subpoena power to compel the production of documents and witness, allowing them to gather, analyze, and review information, produce public reports, and to make recommendations related to policing issues. Civilian review boards should be tasked with making the final decision on disciplining police officers. Civilian oversight of law enforcement does not work unless it is transparent, with a mandate to investigate and audit the institution, and the power to access the information it needs to achieve that purpose. Anything less than this and the police are simply policing themselves. Meaningful oversight means CRP's must be independent authorities, not subsidiaries of the police departments they oversee, or controlled by a municipality's county or city attorney office. CRP's must be empowered by statewide repeal of laws that prevent public access to police records on discipline. Meetings and reports should be public, and all operations should be transparent.</p> <p>I ask lawmakers to repeal the protections law enforcement officers have, including statutory procedural guarantees when faced with discipline or firing that no other public official enjoys, and qualified immunity. It is from personal harm caused to me by the Fairfax County Police Department that I became a police reform advocate in Fairfax County and began advocating for civilian review with the Virginia Citizens Coalition for Police Accountability. After filing a complaint against three Fairfax Officers in 2011, the Fairfax County Attorney's office acted in collusion with the Commonwealth's Attorney to use the Courts to protect police officers guilty of gross misconduct.</p> <p>Thousands of email exchanges obtained through Virginia FOIA requests clearly demonstrate collusion between the FCPD, County Attorney Karen Gibbons and former Chief Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Casey Lingan, who not only withheld material evidence proving my innocence but directed the arresting officer to enter perjured testimony. In a classic trial by ambush, Fairfax prosecutor Jessica Greis-Edwards provided the court a falsified vehicle data transcript, altered to appear to corroborate the officers perjured testimony. The falsified Commonwealth's vehicle "evidence" was ultimately released to my defense attorney when I noted my appeal, and instead of disciplining the officers guilty of misconduct and dropping the charge, the Commonwealth withheld county collected data validating my complaint to force a plea. The CA acted in the direction of the County Attorney, filing Motions the county attorney believed would help prevent me from filing a civil suit against the offending officers. In one email County Attorney Karen Gibbons states to Fairfax Chief Deputy Commonwealth's Attorney Casey Lingan:</p> <p>"there is no doubt that Mrs. Holden will be filing a civil lawsuit as a result of her arrest and in order to short circuit such a lawsuit, the Circuit Court must find...that the evidence was sufficient to find her guilty".</p> <p>Civilian Review would have provided the checks and balance to reach the correct outcome. As recently as yesterday, prosecutor Greis-Edwards directed the County Attorney to respond to my inquiry regarding the falsified vehicle document.</p>
Breanne	Armbrust		Henrico	Police force	<p>I spoke last months regarding a similar topic. I am gravely concerned about the level of police violence and brutality that we have seen in Richmond at the hands of Virginia State Police, Richmond City Police, and supporting agencies. This violence continues, with police aggression against protesters being used to have a chilling effect on 1st Amendment speech.</p> <p>I am requesting that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Police be required at the locality level to provide quarterly reports to applicable General Assembly Committees that oversee public safety and the criminal justice system. These reports must be made publicly available and accessible through posting on the General Assembly website or other statewide website. The data should include the types of traffic stops made, including demographic data, as well as similar data related to arrests. 2) All local police departments and the Virginia State Police should be barred from the use of chemical weapons and militarized artillery (i.e. "non lethal" bullets) against protesters and mandatory training in crowd control that utilizes deescalation tactics should be required. 3) The Virginia General Assembly should have oversight of the future acquisition of, and the current retention of, militarized equipment (MRAPs, etc) by Virginia State Police. This oversight should include chemical weapons, including tear gas. <p>Thank you for your time.</p>
Elizabeth	Webster		Gloucester	Criminal Justice Reform	<p>The United States, due to the timing of it's Revolution, left the British Empire before Peelian Policing reforms occurred.</p> <p>Peele focused on the fact that policing required the implied consent of the policed, and if that were lost, the police became ineffective. We have reached that situation in Richmond, certainly.</p> <p>There is zero reason for a local police department to carry out a no-knock warrant, and limited indications for the State Police. I've been disappointed by VSP. I expect the States to be mature.</p> <p>Having statewide requirements for use of force continuum would be a good idea. Also, public disclosure of officer discipline records. Statewide educational requirements and continuing education for police and deputies. Ongoing counseling for anger management, for all of them.</p> <p>Uniform reporting for use of force. The gun comes out of the holster, it gets documented. Short one pager. put sensors in the holsters.</p> <p>Ban choke holds. If the academy isn't already state run, make it so. Have civilian oversight of both the training and the police/sheriff forces. Give them teeth to get rid of bad officers, and de-certify them.</p> <p>Last, read this chapter from 1998 about how police escalate confrontation at protests until violence occurs. Nothing new under the sun.</p> <p>http://davidschweingrub.com/docs/McPhail&1(1998).pdf</p>
Lynn	Murphy		Waynesboro		<p>I have been the victim of multiple unprovoked attacks by the Richmond Police Department with chemical weapons while protesting peacefully. I urge you to ban the use of these horrific weapons of war on civilians immediately, especially in light of the current pandemic. The first time I got tear gassed, I was coughing for days and the residue of pepper spray clung to every imaginable surface, spreading around my car and home and causing me to develop rashes randomly when tying my shoes, or touching the steering wheel of my car, for over a week. These weapons are being deployed indiscriminately and in residential areas. Please, get them out of the hands of cops who only see them as a tool to terrorize and abuse those who dare to protest against police violence.</p>
Alexander	Caligiuri		Richmond	Use of Force	<p>Virginia police departments for the last three months have been using lethal and so-called "non-lethal" force indiscriminately. As residents in Virginia protest police violence and murder, the police departments of Virginia CONTINUE to use the very methods that are being protested.</p> <p>Violence is the only thing they know and the only thing they will use. You doubtless have more representatives of the various police departments on this meeting saying that they need more money for training and such, but you should be asking one very hard question: "Why should we spend money on expensive training when you don't use it?" Because they DO NOT USE IT! Do not continue to waste money on them! This money would be better served funding social workers, teachers, community-led efforts, initiatives like the Marcus Alert. These organizations are trained for things like de-escalation and helping members of our communities. The police are an armed force first and de-escalators and social workers second or never.</p> <p>Many police regulations about use of force acknowledge that an officer's mere presence is a weapon. The mere PRESENCE of an officer is a threat, a promise, of violence. As a resident of Virginia, I am begging you, PLEADING with you, to not give them more money. Do not waste the public's money on their requests for training they won't use, for military equipment they don't need, for more personnel to fill their already burgeoning staff.</p> <p>Defund the police and invest in our communities instead!</p>
Michael	Jackson	Chesterfield Collaborative for Equal Justice	Richmond	Reopening the chain of trust	<p>Thank you members of the Joint Committee for the opportunity to speak with you and provide comments at today's hearing.</p> <p>We Need to go as far and fast as it has ever been done before to put an end to the episodic cycles of social unrest due to the excess use of force on unarmed black people.</p> <p>While we in Virginia are not facing a current challenge such as those facing Minneapolis, Louisville, Georgia, Colorado, whether it be 6 hours, 6 day, 6 months or 6 years from now VA could Very well be facing its own crisis. We need only to look back to Charlottesville</p> <p>So now is the time to act to repair what is broken and what has been broken all over this land is the trust between the community and the police. And especially in Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities where trust levels are at an all-time low.</p> <p>In order to repair this broken trust in BIPOC communities, we must usher in changes that include community inclusive accountability (I believe you call these Civilian Review Boards), this community inclusive accountability will lead to greater transparency, this greater transparency will lead to greater understanding and increased trust, this greater understanding and increased trust will lead to stronger partnership between communities and police.</p> <p>A chain is only as strong as its weakest links And if the community inclusive accountability (CRB) link is weakened by the legislative process then one should not expect that your action will produce greater trust and understanding, or form stronger partnership with BIPOC communities and police based on such a weak link.</p> <p>While I am a founding member of the Chesterfield Collaborative for Equal Justice I am not speaking on behalf of that organization and my comments should only be attributed to me personally.</p>
Caleb	Loving		Richmond	Use of force, no knock warrants, and civilian review board.	<p>My name is Caleb Loving and I'm a 25 year old living in the city of Richmond and I'm horrified by the way the RPD has handled mostly peaceful protest. I myself and many of my friends have been teargassed indiscriminately on multiple occasions. The RPD's actions have galvanized the people or Richmond to stand up to RPD. I personally had an officer threaten to pepper spray me on my front porch for being on the porch after curfew, and I actually watched them pepper spray my neighbor on his porch. I'm just wondering how those kind of eggressions are supposed to deescalate these situations and faster trust in the people that swore to protect EVERYONE in the city. What's up with police harassing people that have tents outside of Lee Circle, these people are outside serving their community regularly. Many of the laws used to justify these actions are based in historically racist policies meant to "protect" the property of the wealthy at the expense of the less fortunate. We're in the middle of a pandemic, with many not having a job, and the city is harassing people selling tee shirts without a license. No knock warrants are an infringement on the rights of people to life and liberty, as apparent with Briana Taylor's case. As to the civilian review board, it's apparent that the police are incapable of policing themselves and the opportunity to do so would come at the expense of those whose lives have been affected by police misconduct.</p>
Dillon	Woods	Dillon Woods	Franklin	Public safety	<p>I am EXTREMELY concerned about rogue CIA agents like the family based in Los Angeles who are killing innocent Vietnamese and innocent Americans, creating chaos, orchestrating mass shootings and school shootings, manipulating elections, blackmailing politicians, judges, attorneys, CEO's of corporations large and small, infiltrating newspapers to control the press and stopping the flow of information Americans need to know. What is going on with these rogue CIA agents is VERY VERY VERY SERIOUS for residents of Virginia and all Americans. SOMETHING MUST BE DONE TO STOP THESE PEOPLE. I have written CIA director Gina Haspel to complain to her and I encourage everyone in Virginia to do the same. THIS IS A RED ALERT EMERGENCY SITUATION. There is nothing more dangerous than Harvard degreed, billionaire CIA agents with a license to kill, cloaked in an invisible blanket of "national security", with decades of CIA experience, to cause more problems in Virginia and beyond. People should know the truth of what is going on with this CIA family because if people don't know the truth, you can't get at the root of the problems to solve the problems. For more information on this situation, PLEASE read this long letter I uploaded to my Google Drive that explains more about this family and what they are doing to Virginia and America (I used to work for this family so I know them well and this is not a "conspiracy theory").</p> <p>https://drive.google.com/file/d/1IA_205g10gvCT8p3zPR_ZWN3ch9jGM</p> <p>Sincerely,</p> <p>Dillon Woods</p>

Michael Jackson	Chesterfield Collaborative for Equal Justice	Richmond	Repairing the chain of trust	<p>Thank you members of the Joint Committee for the opportunity to speak with you and provide comments at today's hearing.</p> <p>We need to go as far and fast as it has ever been done before to put an end to the episodic cycles of social unrest due to the excess use of force on unarmed black people.</p> <p>While we in Virginia are not facing a current challenge such as those facing Minneapolis, Louisville, Georgia, Colorado, whether it be 6 hours, 6 days, 6 months or 6 years from now VA could Very well be facing its own crisis. We need only to look back to Charlottesville</p> <p>So now is the time to act to repair what is broken and what has been broken all over this land is the trust between the community and the police. And especially in Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities where trust levels are at an all-time low.</p> <p>In order to repair this broken trust in BIPOC communities, we must usher in changes that include community inclusive accountability (I believe you call these Civilian Review Boards), this community inclusive accountability will lead to greater transparency, this greater transparency will lead to greater understanding and increased trust, this greater understanding and increased trust will lead to stronger partnership between communities and police.</p> <p>A chain is only as strong as its weakest links And if the community inclusive accountability (CRB) link is weakened by the legislative process then one should not expect that your action will produce greater trust and understanding, or form stronger partnership with BIPOC communities and police based on such a weak link.</p> <p>While I am a founding member of the Chesterfield Collaborative for Equal Justice I am not speaking on behalf of that organization and my comments should only be attributed to me personally.</p>
Michael Jackson	Chesterfield Collaborative for Equal Justice	Richmond	Repairing the trust	<p>Thank you members of the Joint Committee for the opportunity to speak with you and provide comments at today's hearing.</p> <p>We need to go as far and fast as it has ever been done before to put an end to the episodic cycles of social unrest due to the excess use of force on unarmed black people.</p> <p>While we in Virginia are not facing a current challenge such as those facing Minneapolis, Louisville, Georgia or Colorado. Whether it be 6 hours, 6 days, 6 months or 6 years from now VA could very well be facing its own crisis. We need only to look back to Charlottesville.</p> <p>So now is the time to act to repair what is broken and what has been broken all over this land is the trust between the community and the police. And especially in communities of Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) where trust levels are at an all-time low.</p> <p>In order to repair this broken trust in BIPOC communities, we must usher in changes that include community inclusive accountability (I believe you call these Civilian Review Boards), this community inclusive accountability will lead to greater transparency, this greater transparency will lead to greater understanding and increased trust, this greater understanding and increased trust will lead to stronger partnership between communities and police.</p> <p>A chain is only as strong as its weakest links And if the community inclusive accountability (CRB) link is weakened by the legislative process then one should not expect that your actions will produce greater trust and understanding, or form stronger partnerships with BIPOC communities and police based on such a weak link.</p> <p>While I am a founding member of the Chesterfield Collaborative for Equal Justice I am not speaking on behalf of that organization and my comments should only be attributed to me personally.</p>
Meredith Polson Caroline Brown	Charlottesville Fairfax County	No knock warrants Mandatory Minumums		<p>No knock warrants should not exist. They result in the deaths of POC disproportionately.</p> <p>I am writing today to ask you to utilize this special session to make bold, meaningful change to criminal justice policies. I appreciate the progress made during the regular session, but it was not enough. Unfortunately, Virginia has to play catch up after two decades of tough on crime policies, that aren't effective but also devalue the lives of residents, especially black and brown Virginians.</p> <p>Criminal justice reform wasn't an issue focused on until the past few years. Like many white, upper middle class residents of Fairfax County, my interactions with police were limited. But for the last 15 years I've volunteered in a low income neighborhood in the area, and as the kids I tutored became young adults, I started to see how differently they were treated by the police and the criminal justice system.</p> <p>One incident that really opened my eyes to how others are treated was during an ice cream social in the neighborhood. The police came through looking for something. One of the young men stood there watching as he ate his ice cream. A police officer knocked the bowl of ice cream out of his hand and it landed on the police officer's shoe. The young man was arrested for assaulting a police officer. (Yes, I know you may be thinking SURELY there is more to this story. But there isn't. Eventually the charges were dropped, but still I was SHOCKED that this kind of thing happens in America. But I was naive - I shouldn't have been shocked. This kind of thing doesn't happen in my neighborhood, but it does happen in America. While this happened in Washington, DC, in Virginia, this could have resulted in a felony charge and would carry a mandatory minimum sentence of 6 months in jail. Since that time, this young man has worked for the District government for the past 6 years and raised 2 kids. And every time I see the kids I think about how their father's life could have been thrown off track by a bogus charge. That in Virginia, that this law abiding citizen would have spent 6 months in jail highlights for me that we don't value the lives of poor black people. We don't think about how 6 months away from his job would have put his kids back in a homeless shelter - a place they had already been after the apartment they had been renting was condemned. And it would have been traumatic. It would probably be prevented from getting another job where he made enough money to support his family. In a world where we give people 20 years to life on a regular basis, 6 months doesn't sound so bad, but it is! We aren't even 6 months into Covid-19 and we feel our lives are turned upside down.</p> <p>The assault on a law enforcement statue needs to go. It's abused and used to force people to take a plea, even in situations where they didn't do what they are accused of. The same can be said of mandatory minimums in general. I encourage you to get rid of them - all of them, not just those that are for non-violent offences. People will still be punished and go to jail without the mandatory minimums. But there will also be flexibility to address specific circumstances like mental illness.</p> <p>Finally, I ask you to address pretextual policing this summer. Again, these are infractions used to target black and brown people, and that is simply wrong. We must have laws that are fair and don't stack the deck against people.</p>
Tyler Begley		Burke	Criminal Justice Reform	<p>My name is Tyler Begley, and I moved to Burke, Virginia a year ago. I am a behavioral health specialist that has worked to address several epidemics in Ohio that disproportionately affect communities of color. I have become very involved in my Virginian community as a public servant volunteering for state and local organizations.</p> <p>I appreciate this committee hosting multiple hearings to allow me to provide my testimony and expertise on this subject as I hold it near and dear to my heart as it affects my African American brothers and sisters. Forthright, we as Virginians have an opportunity to lead the nation in addressing systemic racism. However, the first step in doing so is to have a holistic approach to eradicating the disease of racism that has plagued our Virginian communities.</p> <p>I understand the agenda is on No-knock warrants, civilian review, use of force. We can address those issues perfectly and it still would only be a bandaid attempt on addressing the disease of racism. You have to go deeper to the root core of what is causing the symptoms that lead to no-knock warrant deaths that result in the death of Breonna Taylor.</p> <p>The Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) and other public health authorities have stated that racism may lead to African Americans having unnecessary, disproportionate encounters with law enforcement officials¹. This is a health statement based on health statistics, it is not purely a criminal justice statistic. And that is because it is the science of sociology, epistemology, the spectrum of behavioral health, which is stigmatized as being separate from health. We don't have to look far from seeing the stigma lived out through our legislation at the state and even at the federal level with lack of enforcing Parity Laws.</p> <p>An important factor in this holistic approach is the need for a public health framework when addressing public safety. Health professionals such as counselors, social workers, EMTs, and the like should be brought to the table whenever we are looking to address public safety issues.</p> <p>Our law enforcement officers are asked to be many things and wear many hats to the best of their abilities throughout their job as a first responder, but that expectation can no longer be the norm. We must reimagine what responding to distress calls of 911 has always looked like, as if there is always a wrong-doing criminal at the scene. That is not always the case, however it is always the case that there is a person who is someone's child, a fellow Virginian, and fellow American, that needs our help and support.</p> <p>I have been here for a year, this is my home now. My testimony is a plea for my new home of Virginia to learn and build upon the progress made by other States and Cities throughout the country where criminal justice reform is happening in a transformative way.</p> <p>Police are still playing a role, but they are not alone anymore responding to community needs.</p> <p>Ohio recognized that their law enforcement officials were not trained to be 5 different occupations at once and should not be expected to be trained and perform certain tasks that should be required to be performed by other licensed professionals.</p> <p>Further recommendation is provided in the written testimony submitted via public comment email.</p>
Kortenay Gardiner	Alliance for a Progressive Virginia	Richmond	Policing reform	<p>Thank You Chairwoman Herring, Chairman Hope, and committee members:</p> <p>I'm Kortenay Gardiner, Deputy Director with the Alliance for a Progressive Virginia.</p> <p>I want to thank you for having these hearings. Today, it is abundantly clear that there is a need for police reform. Since its inception, a decade ago, APV has called for a package of reforms including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A system wide re-evaluation of policing techniques with an emphasis on community policing, conflict resolution and de-escalation A systemic re-examination of hiring and recruiting An end to the decades long militarization of police forces Reconsideration of the legal concept of "Qualified Immunity" Enactment of a crisis alert system, such as that proposed by Princess Blanding and family, which would allow local Police and Behavioral Health Authorities to work together on calls related to people experiencing a mental or behavioral health crisis. Requiring a public database of officers removed from duty for misconduct. Establishment of independent civilian review boards with power of subpoena. An end to so called no-knock warrants End the use of choke holds <p>Across the Commonwealth and the nation as a whole, confidence in our institutions and in law enforcement in particular, has diminished. Americans are waking up to a reality people of color have known forever, that law enforcement acts as a way to suppress, punish, and control, rather than actually serving and protecting.</p> <p>We stand at a potential turning point, a chance for fundamental change that could impact the lives of generations to come. APV looks forward to working with the General Assembly to craft this change. We urge you to see this as an opportunity for redress and reconfiguration. We can do better.</p>
Steven Thomas		Harrisonburg	criminal justice reform	<p>Steven Thomas of Harrisonburg, Virginia:</p> <p>I am writing to encourage the Democratic members of the Joint House Courts of Justice and Public Safety Committees to work toward securing (private) funding to retain on their respective staffs in the coming months and prior to the 2021 gubernatorial election, formerly incarcerated men and women who know personally and deeply the shortcomings of, and the need for reform, of the criminal justice system in the Commonwealth of Virginia.</p> <p>Given that it is more often than not the Democratic members who are and will be leading both movements for police and criminal justice reform in the Commonwealth, formerly incarcerated community leaders in the Commonwealth make this very specific request and suggestion. Thank you.</p>

Sheriff Tony	Lippa	Caroline County Sheriff's Office	Caroline County	Citizens Review Committee (Board or Authority)	<p>We are here because of what happened in Minneapolis and what happened to George Floyd is definitely a tragedy, but this is not Minnesota. After all, Minneapolis has had a Citizens Review Authority since 1990 and the Police Department is not Accredited...</p> <p>As an elected Sheriff and Constitutional Officer, I along with all Sheriffs are responsible to the people every four years. All employees serve at the will and pleasure of the Sheriff. Police and Sheriffs are different on this topic as stated above. The Chief is responsible to either a County, City or Town management, to include Mayor or Administrators controlled by Board of Supervisors, Town or City Council. When I was with the VSP as a First Sergeant, it took over 1 and 1/2 years for a trooper to be terminated. Police have the Police Officers Bill of Rights; where a deputy could be terminated immediately.</p> <p>What is the purpose of the CRC Citizens Review Committee? Board or Authority? In short, what systemic or other problems have been identified within any jurisdiction that would cause for an additional layer of review? Please give me examples of excessive force or shooting that have occurred within Caroline County for the past 16 1/2 years. 1.What systemic issue(s) has been identified that would justify establishing the CRC? 2.Is the concern of issues identified of public perception or community relations? 3.Composition: How will members be selected to serve on the CRC and for what term? This is an important issue since many CRCs are simply an extension or cronies of local political leaders. I would caution the General Assembly, that if the CRC comes into fruition, a comprehensive vetting process should include a thorough background check. This is necessary to ensure that the members are held to an objective standard for fairness to avoid personal animus for law enforcement. 4.Scope of Authority: What kind of investigative powers will the CRC possess? Are they reliant upon the agencies investigative outcomes? Will the General Assembly have independent investigators, not assigned to the law enforcement agency, and under what authority would they act or what their powers would be? 5.Reporting Outcomes: Where will the findings of the CRC review go? Will the report become public information subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)? 6.Timing of Investigations: At what point will the CRC become involved in an investigation/issue? 7.Legal Consideration: Since many investigations involve both an administrative and criminal inquiry, how will the CRC ensure that the due process rights of the deputy are protected? I have just scratched the surface of a very complex issue that should be examined very carefully to ensure that the process is utilized to improve the delivery of service to the citizens of Caroline County, rather than damage the reputation of the Caroline County Sheriff's Office. A full service law enforcement agency that is fully accredited by the Virginia Accreditation of Law Enforcement Agencies Professional Standards Commission (VALEPSC). First Accredited in 2008 and re-accredited in 2012 and 2016. This Office has and continues to be the CCSO Community Committed Service Oriented. Under the leadership of Sheriff A. A. "Tony" LIPPA...Leadership Integrity Pride Professionalism and Accountability.</p>
Steven	Thomas		Harrisonburg	criminal justice reform	<p>Attorney General Mark Herring has urged reform of Virginia's cash bail system.</p> <p>Herring is looking to shift bail decisions away from wealth and has stated: "Virginia's current system of cash bail too often determines who has money, not who is dangerous, and we can't have a justice system that determines fairness and freedom based on wealth and means."</p> <p>He highlighted the viability of alternatives to cash bail by articulating the \$82.00 a day savings the government gets for putting someone on pretrial services (WITHOUT electronic monitoring) instead of incarceration.</p> <p>We must end money bail in the Commonwealth of Virginia.</p>
Sara	Palmer		Arlington	Criminal Justice Reform	<p>I am writing to advocate passage of the Criminal Justice Reform Bill. I think that chokeholds and no knock warrants should be banned in police forces in the state of Virginia, given the murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor. I think that all police forces should have an outside civilian police accountability board and that there should be a database nationally to show the names of those police officers who commit unnecessary violence. There should be limited qualified immunity for such officers, and the power of the police unions to protect evildoers should be limited so that there are more convictions for the wrong actions that sully the reputation of the police forces.</p> <p>I hope that once we move past COVID 19, there will not be jail time for people who are innocent or guilty of minor misdemeanors and cannot afford bail. I don't know whether prisons for profits are still being built in this state, but I would like to see this banned. This encourages the prisons to be filled up for financial gain.</p> <p>As an Episcopal priest and follower of Jesus Christ who tells us that when we visit people in prison, we are visiting Him (Matthew 25: 39,40), my prayer is that our nation puts a stop to our being one of the countries with the highest rate of incarceration per capita, discriminating against people of color and the poor. May we be a true beacon of hope in this suffering world.</p> <p>I urge you to approve this bill for Criminal Justice Reform. I am praying that you will do this.</p> <p>Sincerely, The Rev. Sara Palmer Arlington, VA</p>
DONDRA MAIDEN E			Fredericksburg	Police	<p>Good morning,</p> <p>My name is Dondrae Maiden and I am an attorney from Spotsylvania County, Virginia. I am providing written comments urging the General Assembly to take action in regard to reimagining law enforcement/policing. Over the past few years, even in the Commonwealth of Virginia, we have seen examples of unequal treatment of minorities by law enforcement officers. On a national scale, we have seen the unlawful killings of Tamir Rice, John Crawford, Philando Castile, Eric Gardner, Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and countless others. In most of these cases, the guilty law enforcement officers have escaped punishment.</p> <p>Empirical evidence exists that shows that black people are 2.5 times more likely to die at the hands of police than non-persons of color, even though black people only make up about 13% of the population. In large cities like New York City, black people are stopped almost 88% of the time by police officers even though they are a minority in the city's population.</p> <p>There are bills currently pending during this Special General Assembly Session that should be immediately passed and enacted. I urge your support for Senate Bill 5002 which bans the use of chokeholds by law enforcement officers. This prohibition should already be written into policies and procedures for all law enforcement bodies but since it is not, I urge you to take action on the state level.</p> <p>I also urge you to support SB 5005, which redefines the role of police academy training throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. I have met with local sheriffs and police officers and they all have advised that changes in police training are badly needed. In an ideal world, officers would receive training that teaches police officers to not use chokeholds or other exotic restraints, and those practices would also be written into policies and procedures at their law enforcement offices. We can make this a reality by redefining the roles of state police academies at the State level.</p> <p>Finally, I urge your support in establishing the Civil Rights Policing Commission through supporting SB 5003. We won't fully understand the nature and extent of the problems in policing until we have a commission that is established to study it.</p> <p>Thank you very much for your time and consideration.</p> <p>Dondrae N. Maiden, Esq.</p>
Amanda	Eisenhour		Alexandria	Racial Justice, Policing, and Incarceration	<p>My name is Amanda Eisenhour, and I am a college student and member of the abolitionist group Racial Justice Alexandria.</p> <p>I am writing to encourage legislators to be innovative and bold in their response to police violence and mass incarceration in Virginia. In particular, I ask that they follow the lead of the Movement for Black Lives, who have developed an extensive, thoroughly researched policy platform to, among other goals, end the war on Black communities in this country. More specifically, they demand that governments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Divest from surveillance, policing, mass criminalization, incarceration and deportation. - Invest in making communities stronger and safer through quality, affordable housing, living wage employment, public transportation, education, and health care that includes voluntary, harm reduction and patient-driven, community-based mental health and substance abuse treatment. - Invest in community-based transformative violence prevention and intervention strategies, that offer support for criminalized populations - Uncouple access to services, care, and support from the criminal punishment system. - Provide reparations to survivors of police violence and their families, and to survivors of prison, detention and deportation violence, and their families." <p>In Virginia, during this special session, there is a unique opportunity to pass legislation in furtherance of these goals. While defunding policing and prisons is chiefly an appropriations issue, the Courts of Justice and Public Safety Committees must write the policies to make the eventual defunding of the police feasible. Specifically, we ask you to prioritize:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measures to enhance community control of public safety, including accountability mechanisms like citizen review boards with actual power to investigate and remove officers found responsible for misconduct; - Ending Virginia's relationship with ICE in any capacity; - Legalizing Marijuana and decriminalizing all other drugs in order to end the war and drugs and liberate those incarcerated. - Measures like the Earned Sentence Credit Reduction program to decarcerate state prisons; - Shifting the responsibility for handling mental health crises to trained, professional, and unarmed crisis intervention staff, instead of the police; - Fully "Banning the Box" in Virginia, ensuring conviction history cannot be used to discriminate against applicants for employment, education, and occupational licensing; <p>These are only minuscule first steps that can be taken towards the eventual goal: a complete abolition and reimagining of public safety to a model prioritizing prevention and transformative justice, rather than retaliation and punishment.</p>
Steven	Thomas		Harrisonburg	criminal justice reform	<p>Eliminate the financial burden of the daily "keep fees" paid by families of prisoners at city, county & regional jails in Virginia; permitted but not mandated by 53.1-131.3.</p> <p>Families are already struggling in this pandemic.</p>

Kimberly Jenkins-Snodgrass	Interfaith Action for Human Rights (IAHR) / Virginia Constituent	Stafford	Criminal Justice and Prison Reform, Ending Solitary Confinement in Virginia	<p>Good morning Chairpersons Herring and Hope, and honorable committee members.</p> <p>My name is Kimberly Jenkins-Snodgrass, and I speak as a Virginia resident, a veteran, an advocate, and, more importantly, the mother of a beloved son who is currently wrongfully incarcerated. I am committed to the Black Lives Matter movement and bringing good trouble to the state legislature.</p> <p>As to your agenda focus today, I do support an end to no-knock warrants, creation of civilian oversight at the state and local levels, and establishment of severe penalties for misuse of force by police officers, including de-licensure.</p> <p>Also, as chair of Interfaith Action for Human Rights, we stand in solidarity with our advocacy partners. Supporting eliminating Virginia private prisons, paying a reasonable wage for mandated prison labor, earned sentence credit, reinstate parole, and criminal cases; sentencing reform.</p> <p>I want to spend most of my time discussing a topic that is not on your agenda but is, without a doubt, just as urgent a matter of reform to our criminal legal and corrections systems, which disproportionately and permanently harm Black people.</p> <p>As you are aware, the practice of solitary confinement in Virginia's prisons, as well as local and regional jails, is far too prevalent and causes irreparable mental and physical harm to those upon whom it is inflicted. Solitary confinement is barbaric and has been condemned by the World Health Organization, the United Nations, and other human rights organizations.</p> <p>Depriving a person of human contact and other normal stimulation for 22-24 hours a day is inhumane on its face. Too often, however, it is imposed by corrections officers as retaliation or punishment for behavioral or mental health issues not related to one's criminal sentence.</p> <p>Continuing use of this torturous and potentially fatal practice during a global pandemic is even more unconscionable. Extended placement in isolation weakens one's immune system and increases contact with guards who themselves may be infected. The Virginia Department of Health has recommended that solitary confinement units not be used to house people for medical isolation, but the Department of Corrections has not yet said if it will avoid doing so.</p> <p>If the Virginia General Assembly didn't have enough reasons to legislate an end to solitary confinement already, the need now is greater than ever. We can't count on the DOC to do the right thing! Please take this opportunity now to end solitary confinement, which places Black people and others at even higher risk of harm during this on-going pandemic.</p> <p>Thank you for your time.</p>
Susan Mead		Rocky Mount	use of force and the "Marcus Alert" proposal	<p>Good day, Chairs Hope and Herring, and members of the Joint Committee. My name is Susan Virginia Mead. I am currently a resident of Rocky Mount and am a native of the Lexington/Rockbridge area; the Commonwealth has always been my home. I am honored to speak with you all on the 55th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act, with Congressman John Lewis in mind, because we still haven't solved problems he faced more than half a century ago.</p> <p>As a sociology professor for 35 years, I have taught hundreds of criminal justice and social work students. I am deeply committed to keeping these public servants safe in our communities; I am equally committed to addressing and eradicating the embedded racism undergirding our court and public safety systems. We MUST make changes now to the issues you are considering on today's agenda. Today I will address my concerns related to use of force.</p> <p>Law enforcement should focus only on criminal behavior, while mental health and social work responders know best how to de-escalate emotionally confrontational reactions. The public health issue of unreasonable use of force in crisis situations must be addressed through multi-disciplinary response teams familiar with the people and their problems. As programs in Ann Arbor, Michigan have shown [1], the most effective responders are those involved and invested in the neighborhoods where the crisis is occurring. 911 dispatchers could determine appropriate paths for coordinating an emergency response—beyond just sending police. We need to get the right people to the right scenes with the right tools—our citizens' lives depend on it.</p> <p>One remedy is to pass legislation proposing a "Marcus Alert" system—supported by the Legislative Black Caucus and others—which would mandate that responders use crisis intervention and de-escalation techniques in all situations [2]. This is especially important because systemic racism continues to plague us. "Due to a host of social, economic and environmental factors, Black people are more likely than white people to have chronic health conditions, more likely to struggle when accessing mental health care, and are also nearly three times as likely as white people to be killed by police" [3]. Legal expert Talia Lewis calls this a "double bind" which the nation witnessed in the visceral video of the police-involved death of Elijah McClain and Virginians witnessed with Marcus-David Peters. We have the chance to turn the tide in memory of Marcus—right here, right now, by passing legislation that will counter tragic use of excessive force. This is in your hands.</p> <p>I urge you to address the VBLC priorities related to your agenda in the special session [4]. As one who discusses these issues, and your responses, with members of a coalition of more than 100 like-minded Virginians each and every week, I will be watching!</p> <p>Respectfully submitted, Susan Virginia Mead, Ph.D.</p> <p>[1] https://www.coursera.org/learn/police-brutality-in-america-teach-out/bbab-34b94aad948.html</p> <p>[2] https://richmond.com/opinion/letters-to-editor/letter-to-the-editor-june-26-2020-marcus-alert-program-needed-throughout-state/article_3e8761c7-1891-50ca-b2b8-34b94aad948.html</p> <p>[3] https://time.com/5857438/police-violence-black-disabled/</p> <p>[4] https://www.vablackcaucus.com/news/00/47508787/vbc-special-session-priorities</p>
Virginia McDowney		COLONIAL BCH	Good time bill	<p>I am writing in favor of the good time bill for all. Its not given to the inmate but earned. Some inmates made bad decisions and costly mistakes but if he or she is willing to be a positive part of prison society and show reform in asking the bill gets passed for all to earn. Virginia prisons are over populated and not maintained for all the people Virginia is locking up. The Doc doesn't seem to be able to know the conditions these people are housed in. Stop ignoring the problem and turning a blind eye. This is a bill that can have people EARN their freedom and be a productive part of society. Thank you for your time.</p>
Jenn Michelle	Pedini Virginia NORML	Richmond	House Joint Committee Hearings	<p>Dear Committee Members,</p> <p>We appreciate the efforts of the House Joint Committee Hearings to collect citizen input for Special Session. We are a coalition of criminal justice advocates, medical cannabis patient advocates, and concerned citizens writing to you to ask for support for narrow, specific reforms in alignment with the COVID-19 and law enforcement reform priorities identified for Special Session in August.</p> <p>We, of course, support previously identified priorities, especially support for local civilian review boards with subpoena power and other reforms. We also appreciate both the emergency response efforts, such as providing emergency rent relief to tenants, and the ongoing studies and workgroups on equitable legalization of cannabis.</p> <p>Acknowledging these ongoing efforts, we implore the House to consider these specific interventions that support health equity for medical cannabis patients and continue to advance the criminal legal process towards legalizing cannabis. Medical cannabis is directly tied to broader criminal legal issues. The five asks we have all support the two core goals of criminal justice and health equity:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. End the use of "odor of marijuana" for probable cause to justify searching individuals or their cars or homes. There is no way for an officer to identify by odor whether someone has a criminal amount of cannabis on their person or property. There is also no measurable evidence that can be produced and contested in court to support a person's innocence. 2. Reinstate the funds to automatically seal all minor cannabis infractions, as passed in SB2/HB972 earlier this year. This was a critical step in the decriminalization bills. Automatically sealing these records will provide individuals impacted by disproportionate enforcement of the war on drugs the fresh start they deserve. Sealing these records will improve access to economic opportunities and housing, which are especially challenging to find under the stresses of COVID-19. 3. Legalize paraphernalia, expanding decriminalization. Currently, Virginians may legally purchase pipes and vaporizers marked "for tobacco use only." However, once owned by an individual, there is no protection against having the same device identified as paraphernalia and facing criminal charges. 4. Family protections to ensure medical cannabis patients do not lose parental or housing rights for treating their illnesses. The risk of losing housing in particular disproportionately impacts Black and Brown Virginians who are less likely to be homeowners, and more likely to be impacted by COVID-related economic impacts from evictions to unemployment. 5. Allow pharmaceutical processors to provide botanical cannabis products to patients. This is the most affordable product for patients to buy, and as we continue through the COVID-19 caused economic downturn, affordable medicine is even more urgent than it was before. Until botanical products are allowed in dispensaries, too many patients will continue to purchase untested, unregulated products from illicit sources. <p>Many of us have advocated for these changes for years. Now is the time to enact them and ensure all Virginians can remain healthy and safe.</p>
Angela Adinolfi		Richmond	Please Support Increased Earned Sentence Credits	<p>Delegates,</p> <p>My name is Angela Adinolfi and I wanted to quickly share with you my support for the earned sentence credit bill. This bill will make a difference for so many families. There are people behind those walls that are rehabilitated and ready for release. However, their lengthy sentences are stopping that from happening and they are being incarcerated for longer than necessary. This bill requires good time credits to be earned. No one is just going to be walking out of those doors without proving they have made leaps and bounds towards rehabilitation. The entire resident population should be eligible for earned sentence credits. This piece of legislation will also help thin the population inside the DOC facilities and jails across the state in order to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and potentially save many lives. It will also help the state's budget crisis. I am asking you to please support this amazing piece of legislation. Thank you for your time. Stay safe.</p> <p>Angela Adinolfi</p>
Sonja Brown		Fairfax County	Justice Reform	<p>Providing Treatment programs, Educational, and job training Opportunities for young adults 18-25 years old in the adult Criminal Justice System by placing them back into the Jurisdiction of Juvenile Justice. Evidenced based best practice would help provide better outcomes of the most vulnerable economically disadvantaged young adults. Bring back parole and community supervision. Many young offenders have support systems in place, but mandatory sentences prevent them from accessing these resources. My Grandson has been offered many opportunities he has not been able to accept because of the severe sentencing guidelines that strip the dignity from young Black and Brown Citizens. He could be a part of the solution by participating in reform activities. His vulnerability and the law enforcement unconscious biases have affected his outcome. He has many letters of support from the community and I myself have started a petition for change in how we handle cases such as his. We should take time to provide these young adults the help they need to be active working community members. By restoring the value of their life, we are strengthening our communities. No 20-year-old should be locked away in jail without fresh air. I ask you to consider each person as an individual, not as a group. While we may need Jails for the most egregious crimes. My Grandson doesn't fall into that category. Himself a victim of severe abuse as a child left him with challenging behaviors that gave him poor coping skills. Many believe him, like me that he is reformed. But because of the microaggressions against young black males. His vulnerability by having a juvenile conviction, left him without the belief that maybe he is telling the truth. If he was still in the jurisdiction of DJJ they Judge could have more options of treatment if needed. This is the type of thing that makes a community safer. These young adults many will have better outcomes if we reinvest in them. Prisons do not make good places to put people with immature brains. Best Practice fills us the Brain is not formed until a person turns 25-28 years old. I am myself invested in Outcomes and not going backwards. I speak with him and encourage him to look towards the future and never look backwards. Outcomes is more important and giving back to the community is a must do in our family. Thank you so much for reading my statement and any consideration you give to the young adults. I would love to speak to anyone one that would like more information. Please contact me via email or phone</p>

Adrienne Fikes	Racial Justice Alexandria	Alexandria	Joint Meeting of Courts of Justice Public Safety Committees Testimony	<p>Racial Justice Alexandria is a multi-generational, multi-racial, abolitionist collective of individuals, groups, and organizations taking action to implement the Movement For Black Lives policy platform.</p> <p>We call for this special session to develop proactive and preventative measures to uplift the rights, dignity, and well-being of Black people. Racial injustice is violence, and must be aggressively treated as such. Despite constant exploitation and perpetual oppression, Black people have bravely and brilliantly been a driving force pushing toward collective liberation.</p> <p>We call for a significant reduction of interactions between Black people and the criminal justice system. We call for even more aggressive reorientation of Virginia's public safety away from the kinder, gentler, better trained policing model. We do not want any additional funding allocated to these agencies. That includes funding for surveillance technology, such as body cameras, recruitment, or additional training.</p> <p>These measures have not, and will not reduce the marginalization, harassment, or brutalization of Black bodies. We call for the divestment of these practices, and the immediate release of urgently-needed community resources to realize real public safety.</p> <p>We call for direct democratic community control of local and state law enforcement agencies. We call for communities most harmed by destructive policing to have the power to hire and fire officers, determine disciplinary action, control budgets and policies, and subpoena relevant agency information. We call for the end of qualified immunity, lethal use of force for any reason, and the militarization of law enforcement. Exceptions make it nearly impossible to see any consequences beyond the most egregious cases.</p> <p>There is a highly-effective model for justice and public safety that already exists in every locality in our Commonwealth. This model, once expanded, will immediately free up the necessary resources to make significant investments in economic, education, health, and housing justice. That method is simply to police Black communities with the same measure of care and concern currently enjoyed by wealthy, white, and influential people.</p> <p>Virginia knows exactly how to honor the dignity and humanity of wealthy, white, influential Virginians. I did not find one occurrence of local, state agencies, or courts requiring even a half hour of training, review of body camera footage, or community policing to ensure these Virginians are protected and served. Body cameras only exist because our criminal justice system refuses to give merit to the testimony of Black people regarding police misconduct. That's an incredibly expensive way to call us liars.</p> <p>As you head into the regular legislative session, we call on you to move even further towards racial justice. Ending the war on Black people also means providing repair for past and continuing harms, protecting people over property, and taking any and all measures necessary to enforce equal justice under the law.</p> <p>We call for the systematic fair treatment of people of all races, resulting in equitable opportunities and outcomes for all. We call for the end of discrimination and inequities. We call for the presence of deliberate sustainable systems and supports through proactive and preventative measures. Our complete list of necessary policy demands and resources to imagine safety beyond policing is at https://bit.ly/RacialJusticeAlex Thank you</p>
Tyla Matteson	citizen	Richmond	require citizen review boards on policing	<p>Dear Legislators,</p> <p>Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments for the joint public hearing held on August 6, 2020, to the members of the House Courts of Justice and Public Safety Committees.</p> <p>It is essential to address disparities in policing which have surfaced recently across the nation, as a result of undue police force. There is a general feeling of despair and a lack of trust in the police system that must be examined in Virginia as well as in other states. We must build trust and equitable justice for all, in particular for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).</p> <p>An important step is to establish transparency and inclusive accountability. This can be done with civilian review boards with significant representation from the BIPOC communities. It is recommended that the laws of Virginia require such a board, where not yet established, in every jurisdiction of Virginia.</p> <p>An excellent example has been proposed for Chesterfield County by the Chesterfield Collaborative for Equal Justice. These boards would examine allegations of excessive force and violations of police department policy.</p> <p>Yours truly, Tyla Matteson Chesterfield County, VA</p>
Richard Kennedy		Fairfax	Sensible Marijuana Policy in Virginia is Half a Century Overdue	<p>In a special session that focuses on criminal justice there is one no-brainer: start treating marijuana for what it is—a drug that is much less harmful than alcohol or tobacco. For the record, I am a PhD economist who has never tried marijuana but served 31 years as a CIA analyst and was awarded the Agency's Career Intelligence Medal in 2004.</p> <p>I graduated from Princeton with an engineering degree in 1963, got my economics PhD from Rice, and what engineers, economists, and CIA analysts have in common is a commitment to gather the facts and follow wherever they lead.</p> <p>I also have a special interest in human rights that comes from visiting East and West Berlin two weeks after the wall went up, and being a civil rights worker in Mississippi in 1964.</p> <p>At Rice in 1970 I read a new book by a Stanford law professor titled "Marihuana: The New Prohibition", and it made a compelling case that the new prohibition was at least as bad a mistake as the old one.</p> <p>1970 also saw passage of the Controlled Substances Act, which put marijuana in Schedule 1, but also created a National Commission to review that decision. It had four members of Congress and nine people appointed by President Nixon, who despised marijuana. In 1972 they voted 13-0 for decriminalization but Nixon ignored it and about 27 million Americans have since then been arrested for marijuana.</p> <p>And 1970 was the year when two young UVA law professors wrote a 450-page law review article on the history of marijuana law, which showed that much racial prejudice but very little research had gone into the making of that law. One of them said in a speech: "in the period 1958 to 1969, in the Commonwealth of Virginia the most heavily penalized crime was possession of marijuana, or any other drug. It led to a mandatory minimum sentence of twenty years, no part of which you were eligible for parole or probation."</p> <p>The other UVA law professor, Richard Bonnie, is still around, and in an email to me, said "It's hard to believe that it's taken 40 years to move the ball six inches down the field."</p> <p>I haven't thrown out a lot of numbers but here are some on the annual numbers of drug deaths: tobacco-approximately 480,000, alcohol-approximately 88,000, and marijuana-approximately zero.</p> <p>And you all surely know that Blacks and Whites use weed at about the same rate but Black users are almost four times more likely to get busted. That was bad in the 70's when annual arrests nationwide were in the tens of thousands but catastrophic when arrests reached 900,000 annually (and are still around 700,000).</p> <p>I also haven't talked about medical use, but for some people it is nothing less than a miracle drug, and it shows promise of being useful against many diseases but research is severely hampered by its Schedule I status.</p> <p>As an analyst, I am struck by the fact that marijuana has been studied by competent, non-partisan groups, both public and private, in many countries, starting with a 3000-page report by the UK government in 1894, all concluding that it does not pose major problems.</p> <p>Finally, I testified for the medical and decriminalization bills of Delegate Harvey Morgan—a pharmacist and professor of pharmacology—in 2010 and 2011. I thank Delegate Watts for providing the only Yes vote in the Criminal Sub-committee hearing, and forgive Delegate Herring for voting No because many good people at the time still believed the anti-marijuana propaganda.</p>