

## Justice for Youth

### *RISE for Youth 2020 Legislative Agenda*

Inspired by Langston Hughes poem of similar name, RISE for Youth and our allies have asked the question, “**Will America be America to Black youth?**” Our legislative agenda represents our efforts to ensure that Virginia answers this question in the affirmative. We center **Restoration** and **Fairness**; giving young people from every walk of life who have committed harm the opportunity to heal, learn, and grow, just as more privileged young people are afforded. We also believe crime would be significantly reduced if disenfranchised communities of color have fully funded & equitable schools, high quality jobs and the political rights to advocate for them. So, our legislative agenda encourages Virginia to travel on a new path towards **Restoration** and **Fairness** for those youth who have endured the status quo; and begin a new day of equity in; **Education**, **Economic Justice**, and **The Expansion of Democracy**.

### RESTORATION

**Support HB 551:** Healthy Communities Secure Care legislation

*The Healthy Communities Secure Care legislation will ensure that Virginia is following the best documented practices for juvenile justice, departing from a racist and destructive status quo. Ensuring that secure care happens in small facilities, 30 beds or less, within the communities youth are from is a critical step forward for Virginia. It promotes young people being treated justly and given the opportunity all young people deserve, to learn and grow from their mistakes. Further, it moves us towards a deep and sustainable public safety that can only be secured through combining investment in young people with investment in communities.*

*HCSC is supported by: ACLU-VA, the NAACP of Virginia, Virginia Organizing, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance, The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis, Justice Democrats and NOVA Equity Agenda Coalition.*

**Support SB 91:** Reinstatement of parole and **SB 103:** Juvenile offenders; parole

*Parole offers incarcerated individuals the opportunity to demonstrate they have paid their debt to society and are rehabilitated. Parole is consistent with public safety, and it's prohibition has led to overcrowded prisons that siphon public dollars away from other needed public services.*

### FAIRNESS

**Support HB 274:** Raises minimum age a child can be tried as an adult from 14 to 16.

*Youth funneled into adult prisons do not have access to rehabilitative services that the juvenile justice system provides. And, adult prisons can be dangerous for teens. As our awareness increases about the cognitive development of young people, our policy must follow suit. Teenager's brains are still developing and there is evidence that youth are more likely to commit additional crimes if they are prosecuted as adults.*

**Support HB 286:** Increase the Felony Larceny threshold from \$500 to \$1500.

*Felony convictions can have wide-ranging and long-lasting consequences, including an inability to obtain a job making a livable wage, lack of access to federal assistance for higher education, lack of access to housing and financial assistance, and severed social bonds with family and friends. Raising the felony larceny threshold to \$1,500 is a commonsense way to ensure when it comes to theft, the punishment better matches the offense.*

## EDUCATION

**Support HB 1316 / SB 728:** Fully fund the Standards of Quality as recommended by the Virginia Board of Education

*Our state's staffing standards (for both instructional and support positions) do not reflect what schools have or need. Underfunded positions include counselors, social workers, mental health staff, nurses, assistant principals, and teachers for English language learners, among others. These bills fully fund the staffing standards as recommended by the Board.*

**Support HB 8 / SB 3:** Eliminates the Class 1 misdemeanor charge of Disorderly Conduct on school properties or at school activities.

*Schools should be a place where young people are able to make mistakes and adults around them, help them learn from their mistakes and understand the consequences. Schools should be places where young people can learn how to handle conflict safely and constructively. That can only take place if students are able to trust their schools are a place of safety and protection for them, where internal school discipline is used to convey lessons, not punishment and referral to law enforcement.*

**Support HB 109:** Sufficient cause; schools shall not suspend or expel students for instances of truancy or other non-violent behavior.

*Loss of instructional time is not an appropriate way to discipline young people. It is antithetical to conveying the value of learning. Suspension and expulsion must only be pursued as a last resort, when no other options are available, and never for truancy or other non-violent behaviors. Long-term suspension and expulsion cannot be used to shirk a public school's responsibility, in other words we cannot normalize using suspensions and expulsions as a substitute for fully staffing schools and making them able to meet the needs of kids. We must fully fund schools and eliminate suspensions and expulsions for non-violent behavior.*

**Support HB 271 / SB 170:** Collect and report data on SRO engagement with students.

*We must make informed public policy decisions on the effects and effectiveness of School Resource Officers (SROs). We can only do this if we are keeping track of the interactions between SROs and students.*

**ECONOMIC JUSTICE:** *We know that poverty has a direct relationship with crime. Too often however we are led to believe that poverty is the result of poor individual choices, rather than the result of public policy decisions. The policies RISE supports this 2020 legislative session, undo racially motivated exclusionary policies, and will create more opportunity and more security for Virginia's families, resulting in healthier and safer communities. We **Support HB 433**, raise the minimum wage to \$15/hr, **Support HB 338** to remove the exemption from the Virginia Minimum Wage Act for persons employed in domestic service, and **Support HB 153**, to repeal so called, "Right to Work" laws that enable employers to exploit their workforce through prohibiting their collective bargaining power.*

**EXPANSION OF DEMOCRACY:** *Our democracy is most likely to succeed when more people are participating. The below measures undo some of the efforts used historically to disenfranchise African-American voters and seek to make voting as accessible as possible for all Virginians. We **Support HB 1, HB 18, HB 201** to establish early, no-excuse, in-person, voting, and **Support HB 19** to repeal photo identification requirements.*

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**RISE for Youth** is a nonpartisan campaign committed to dismantling the youth prison model by promoting the creation of community-based alternatives to youth incarceration. Our work centers the voices of impacted youth and communities and challenges racial injustice in Virginia.

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