



Dear {{FirstName or 'Friend'}},

We are already halfway through July! Yesterday, the General Assembly passed HB 6004 to repeal changes made to the Virginia Military Survivors and Dependents Education Program (VMSDEP) and provide additional funds to the program. I was appointed to a newly formed workgroup to develop policy guidance on mobile phones in schools. This is an issue I have been working on for the past few months and am committed to tackling head-on to ensure our children's success.

Read on for more community updates and news from Richmond.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Stella", is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Special Session



I am proud to have voted to support a full repeal of the VMSDEP changes. Not only did we achieve a clean repeal, Senate Democrats ensured that additional, much needed funding was secured for the remainder of this year. I realize the legislative process regarding the VMSDEP changes has been very difficult for many families and it has created anxiety and uncertainty. Please know that during this process, I have stayed engaged with my colleagues to advocate for the needs of our veterans and their families so that they can continue to benefit from this program.

[Follow the link to read the full bill.](#)

Workgroup on School Mobile Policy

Happy to be part of this newly formed workgroup with Sen. Surovell, Sen. Hashmi, and Sen. VanValkenburg to work with the House and Governor’s office to develop policy guidance on mobile phones in schools. [We must work together to balance the needs of students](#)

[having mobile phones during emergencies and ensuring that we have productive classrooms.](#) More information can be found in the press release below:



July 10, 2024

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Carter Hutchinson, senatorsurovell@senate.virginia.gov, 571.249.4484

Majority Leader Surovell Announces Creation of Senate Democratic Workgroup on School Mobile Phone Policy

RICHMOND, VA—Yesterday, Governor Youngkin issued an executive order requiring the issuance of guidance for school divisions to adopt policies that establish “cell-phone free education” in our public schools.

The Governor’s intentions are appreciated, and student use of mobile phones in schools is a critical issue that must be addressed, but this issue requires a General Assembly input and a consensus solution. The Constitution of Virginia and Code of Virginia vests statewide education policy decisions with the Board of Education subject to restrictions in the Code of Virginia subject to the ultimate authority of the General Assembly and ultimately to be implemented by Virginia’s local school boards.

Therefore, today Majority Leader Surovell asked three Senate Democratic education policy leaders to develop legislation addressing mobile phone use in Virginia’s public schools. The members of this workgroup will be:

- Senator Ghazala Hashmi, the Chair of the Senate Committee on Education and Health, and a former university and community college professor;
- Senator Stella Pekarsky, a former teacher and school board member and Chair of the largest school system in the Commonwealth - the Fairfax County Public Schools; and
- Senator Schuyler VanValkenburg, a full-time teacher in the Henrico County Public Schools.

We look forward to working with the Governor and his administration to craft consensus bipartisan mobile phone legislation.

Majority Leader Scott Surovell said: “I am confident that this workgroup—made up of senators who have dedicated their careers to education and improving the lives of Virginia’s students—will work to come up with a long-term policy on mobile phone use to help ensure that students remain focused on learning while in school and also preserve access to lines of

communication with parents in the case of emergencies or other situations. We look forward to working with the Governor and House of Delegates to develop a consensus policy on guidance to our local school boards for mobile phone policy.”

“As a former educator myself, I fully understand how devices such as cell phones can be immensely distracting, even at the collegiate level. While technology can be an asset, it also interferes with focus, engagement, and active learning. As members of the General Assembly, we are committed to developing effective solutions that address this pervasive issue, ensuring our students achieve and succeed,” said **Senator Ghazala Hashmi**.

“As a public school teacher, I see firsthand how cell phones disrupt the classroom and hinder learning. Our priority should be fostering an environment conducive to academic achievement and student growth, and I look forward to collaborating with the workgroup to develop a comprehensive legislative solution,” said **Senator Schuyler VanValkenburg**.

“As a former teacher, I know firsthand how cell phones can be a major distraction in the classroom. However, as a parent, I understand the need for children to have their phones for emergencies or when they provide accommodations for different learning needs. As the former School Board chair of the largest school division in the Commonwealth, I understand it is imperative that we strike the right balance through legislative action to enhance learning outcomes for all students. This is an issue I have been working on the last few months and am committed to tackling head-on to ensure our children’s success,” said **Senator Stella Pekarsky**.

###

District Highlights



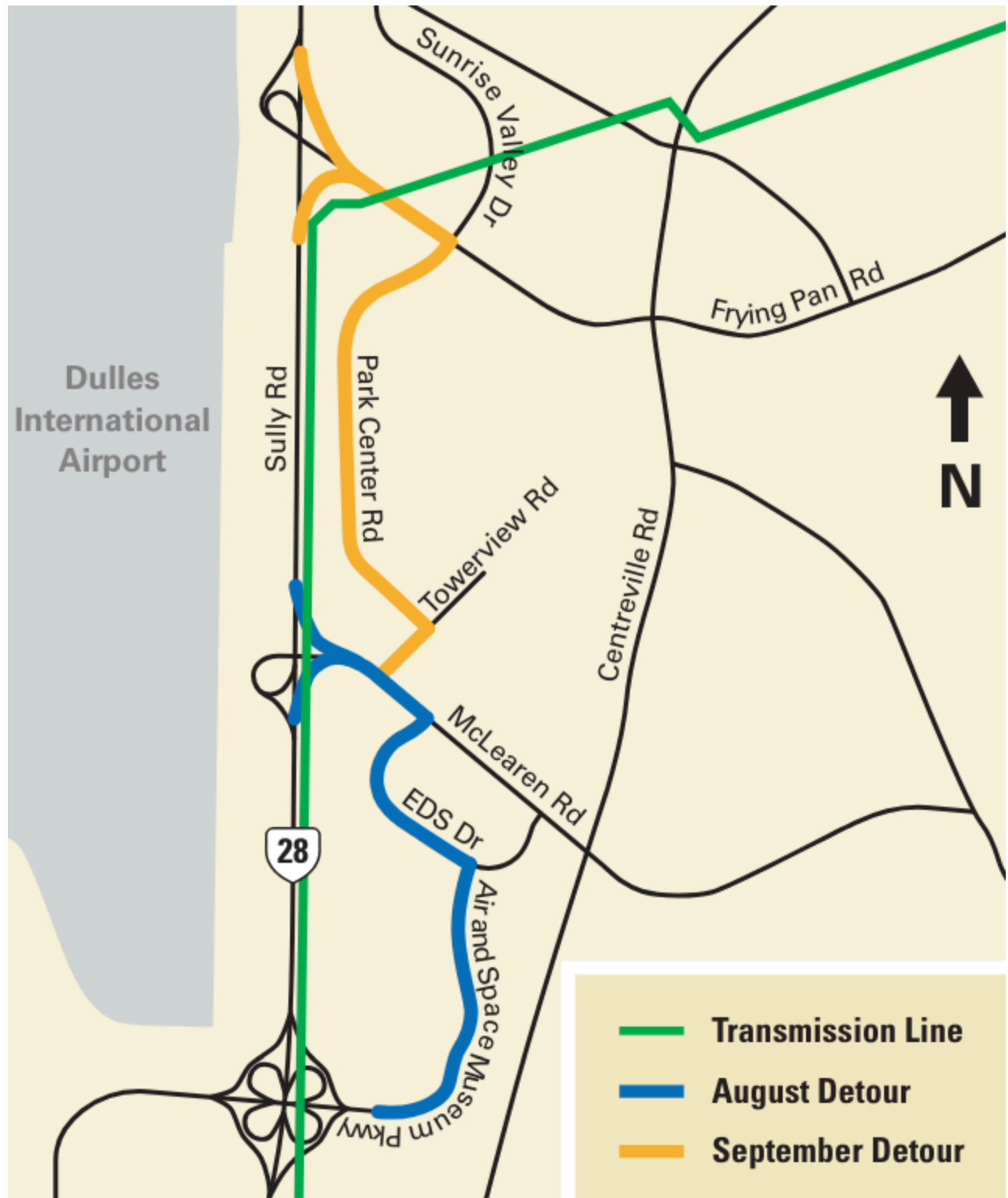
It was an honor to present a resolution commending TJHSST Senior Archi Marrapu on winning the 2023 Congressional App Challenge in the 8th District. For the Challenge, Ms. Marrapu developed VOYCE, a mobile

application designed to help individuals overcome their fear of public speaking. The application provides valuable feedback, analytics, and training courses to help users improve their public speaking abilities. She has also developed an automated pill-tracking device and accompanying app that reminds patients to take their medications. She received the IEEE Technical Excellence Award at the 2023 IEEE Integrated STEM Education Conference at Johns Hopkins University's Applied Physics Laboratory.

Ms. Marrapu is the Co-founder and President of STEMifyGirls, a nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the gender gap and empowering minority cultures into STEM fields and careers.

[Follow the link to read the full resolution.](#)

Transportation Updates



Loudoun Junction – Dulles Reconductor Project

There will be temporary traffic disruptions along Route 28 starting this month through September due to Dominion Energy's Loudoun Junction-Dulles Reconductor Project. From July through September, Dominion will reconductor a portion of this line close to Route 28 (Sully Road). To ensure everyone's safety while they work on the line over the roadways, traffic will be paused or rerouted to an approved detour. Temporary

traffic disruptions will only occur on Saturday and Sunday mornings from sunrise to 9:00 a.m.

July 13 – July 28, 2024

- Disruptions near Route 28 and Route 50 ([see map](#))

August 3 - August 25, 2024

- Detours of Route 28 / Air and Space Museum Parkway on and off ramps ([see map](#))

September 7 - September 22, 2024

- Detours of Route 28 / McLearen Road on and off ramps ([see map](#))

Signs and flaggers will be in place to direct travelers during these times. Please call 888-291-0190, email powerline@dominionenergy.com, or visit the [project webpage](#) for more information.

Community Events



Northern Virginia Family Service 2024 Back2School Drive

Northern Virginia Family Service (NVFS) is holding a school supplies drive. A backpack of new school supplies can give a child the level up they need to begin the school year right and help ease the financial burden for the family.

Purchase & Drop off Information:

[Shopping List](#)

Drop-off dates:

Wednesday, July 24th – 9:00am-1:00pm

Thursday, July 25th – 1:00pm-6:00pm

12955 Fair Lakes Parkway, Fairfax, VA 22033

[For more information, please visit NVFS' site.](#)

Community Resources

Cooling Assistance is a program designed to help keep vulnerable Fairfax County residents cool during the summer months. To be eligible, at least one household member must be: 60 or older, 5 or younger, or disabled according to Social Security, Medicaid or 100% Veteran's Administration.

[Applications for Cooling Assistance will be accepted from June 17–August 1](#)



Contact My Office



Resolution Nominations

**Do you know a business,
organization who has served our
community well? Do you want
to honor a community member
or loved one who has passed?**

**Submit their information to be
considered for a commending or
memorial resolution**

SenatorPekarsky@Senate.Virginia.Gov

Hiring!



[Subscribe to my Newsletter!](#)

[Stay informed about what is happening in Richmond and around the 36th District.](#)



It is a pleasure to serve you in the 36th District

Email: senatorpekarsky@senate.virginia.gov
Phone: (804) 698-7536

Richmond Office
201 North 9th Street Room, 621
Richmond, VA 23219

Richmond Direct Mail
P.O. Box 396
Richmond, VA 23218

Cheers,
Stella Pekarsky
Senator, District 36

2/18/25, 10:59 AM

Preview - 7/19 Newsletter #13

*Paid and Authorized by Friends of Stella G Pekarsky
Copyright © 2024, Stella Pekarsky, All rights reserved.*

*Friends of Stella G Pekarsky
PO BOX 231191 CENTREVILLE, VA 20120*

If you believe you received this message in error or wish to no longer receive email from us, please (Unsubscribing is not supported in previews).