



Dear {{FirstName or 'Friend'}},

Happy Hispanic Heritage Month! This week I filed my first new bill for the 2025 Session, SB 738, addressing cell phone policy in Virginia public schools. I also had the opportunity to recognize 20 years of dedicated community work by the Assistance League of Northern Virginia, celebrate 50 years of the Friends of Fairfax Station, celebrate the talents of the The Fairfax Beekeepers Club, and commend Asha-Jyothi for their support of Fairfax Public Schools.

September is also Virginia Rail Safety Month. In August, three people were killed and a fourth was seriously injured when a train struck a van in Stuarts Draft in Augusta County. **Every three hours in the United States, a person or vehicle is hit by a train.** Please take the time read about how to be safe around our railroads.

I hope you will read further for important community updates.

Today starts the beginning of Early Voting, I hope you join me in voting on or before November 5th!



Legislation on Cell Policy in Public Schools



Senate Majority Leader Scott Surovell announced that the members of the Senate Democratic Workgroup on School Mobile Phone Policy have introduced legislation to enhance distraction-free learning environments for Virginia students. Senate Democrats have a strong commitment to prioritizing student success in Virginia and share the Governor’s aspiration to limit distractions in the classroom. **This is best and actually accomplished through bipartisan collaboration within the legislative process, through which Senate Democrats aim to give elected school boards the ability to craft the best cell**

phone policies for their districts consistent with state and federal law and existing educational governance process which is not governed by Executive Orders.

In contrast to the Governor's policy, this legislation includes the following:

- Specifically prioritizes SPED students, IEP, or 504 plans and includes protections for students who use their devices for accommodations for which cell phone usage is necessary.
- Clarifies that no violation of these policies alone shall constitute suspension or expulsion of a student, and ensures enforcement does not result in expulsion that leads to a loss of academic time that would defeat the purpose of cell phone free classroom learning.
- Ensures the responsibility of enforcement is on the administration, not teachers who are already overburdened in the classroom.

I am proud to continue working with my colleagues to advocate for our students, teachers, and families. 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. Giving school boards, localities, and communities the tools to implement these policies to ensure their needs are met is the common sense way to accomplish distraction free education for all.

The summary and text of [Senate Bill 738](#), patroned by Senator Pekarsky and Senator Hashmi and co-patroned by Senator VanValkenburg [has been posted online](#). You can read more about the cell phone policy and listen to Sen. Pekarsky's interview with [WTKR CBS Channel 3](#).

Early Voting Begins



FAIRFAX VOTES!

Election Calendar

- Sep 20 - First Day of Early Voting
- Sep 21 - First Saturday of Early Voting
(Sep 21, Oct 19, Oct 26, Nov 2)
- Oct 25 - Deadline to request an Absentee Ballot
- Nov 2 - Last Day of Early Voting
- Nov 5 - Election Day

Voting Info

General Information: iwillvote.com
 Fairfax County: FairfaxVotes.org

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Early voting for this year’s election begins today, Friday, September 20.

In the 36th District, you can vote in Room 251 at the Fairfax County Government Center (12000 Government Center Parkway, Fairfax), Monday - Friday from 8:00 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. and on select Saturdays (including September 21) from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. Additional Early Voting locations will open on starting on October 17.

View a full list of early voting locations with available hours [on the County's website](#).

Curbside voting is available at early voting and election day polling locations for people 65 or older or with a disability. When

you arrive, look for the "Curbside Voting" sign near the accessible parking area. Call the phone number on the sign to contact an election officer. [Learn more about curbside voting and accessible voting.](#)

You can also [view sample ballots for precincts in the Braddock District.](#)

If you haven't registered to vote yet, there's still time. You can register or update your existing registration [on Virginia's Voter Portal.](#) The deadline to register to vote is October 15. If you register between October 16 through Election Day, you can vote using a provisional ballot which will be counted upon confirming voter eligibility.

If you plan on voting by mail, you must [request a mail-in ballot](#) by October 25. The ballots will be mailed out beginning September 20. After receiving your ballot, it must be postmarked and sent by Election Day, Tuesday, November 5.



WHAT'S ON YOUR BALLOT

Offices

President & Vice President
 U.S. Senate
 U.S. Congress

Initiatives

Virginia Constitutional Amendment
Changes the Virginia property tax exemption for veterans and surviving spouses to say killed in the line of duty rather than killed in action
 Transportation Bonds
 Public Safety Bonds

Paid for and authorized by Friends of Stella G Pekarsky

Project Learning Garden at Centre Ridge Elementary School



A group of 6th grade students at Centre Ridge Elementary School installed a Captain Planet Foundation Project Learning Garden. **The students built five raised garden beds, filling**

them with organic soil and planting a variety of vegetables and herbs. CRES received literacy and science learning supplies and tools to take learning into the garden. Educators are given thematic activities centered in standards and learning outcomes. A library of garden guides and tips for growing, harvesting, composting, cooking with kids, and more is also part of the garden program. **Schools with learning gardens report that students benefit from learning about nutrition and science, along with social studies, math, and language arts.** They can expand their palates, taste-test healthy foods and learn about the origins of what they grow.

The Learning Garden was donated by Cox Enterprises, parent company of Cox Communications. The event was attended by Superintendent of Schools Dr. Michelle Reid, Virginia State Senator Stella Pekarsky, Virginia State Delegate Dan Helmer, Fairfax County School Board members Kyle McDaniel and Seema Dixit



Presenting Resolutions

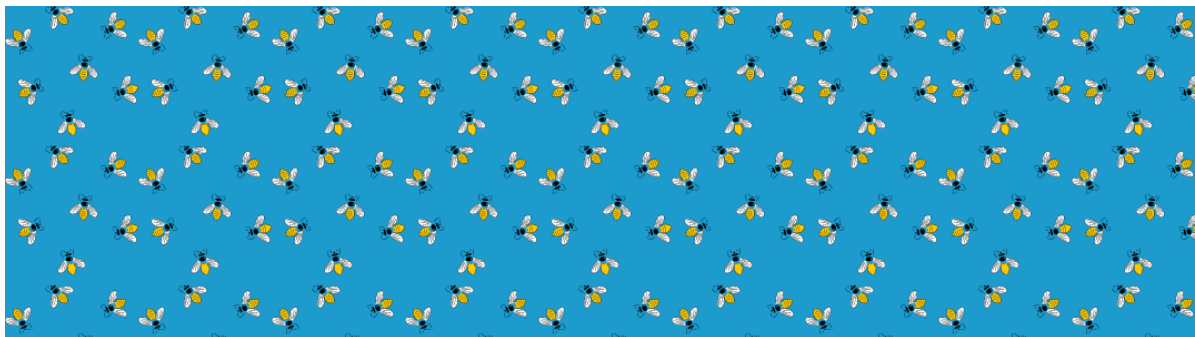


Honoring 20 Years of the Assistance League of Northern Virginia

The Assistance League of Northern Virginia, a chapter of the National Assistance League, celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2024. The Assistance League of Northern Virginia began as a guild in 1999 and formally chartered as a chapter of the National Assistance League in 2004. ALNV implements service programs and other initiatives that best address the unique needs of the our community with programs like the Weekend Food for Kids and Hugs Pillows programs.

Senator Pekarsky and Delegate Irene Shin presented resolutions from the Senate of Virginia and the House of Delegates honoring their great impact to our community. **Sen. Pekarsky and her staff helped assemble 1,850 bags of nonperishable food items for students at six Title 1 elementary schools in Fairfax and Prince William Counties and the city of Alexandria.** The Weekend Food for Kids program provides supplemental food to children over the weekend when school meals are not available.

[Read the full resolution text.](#)



Honoring The Fairfax Beekeepers Club

The Fairfax Beekeepers Club was founded in 2017 and promotes responsible honey production and beekeeping in urban and suburban communities in northern and western Fairfax County; and the Fairfax Beekeepers Club has more than 70 members with approximately 300 domestic hives producing thousands of pounds of honey throughout the spring and summer months each year.

In 2023, four members of the Fairfax Beekeepers Club won awards in the Open Honey Competition at the Virginia State Fair: Tagg A. Timm, Nathaniel Muller, Karla Eissen, and Zubair Vaid.

Tagg A. Timm earned first place in the dark extracted honey category, sixth place in beeswax single mold, ninth place in light amber extracted honey, and 15th place in amber extracted honey.

Nathaniel Muller earned first place in the display of amber/dark chunk honey in glass jar category, second place in dark extracted honey, second place in amber extracted honey, fourth place in beeswax single mold, and fifth place in beeswax pair candles dipped or poured.

Karla Eissen earned third place in the display of light/light amber cut comb honey in plastic boxes category, 10th place in light amber extracted honey, 11th place in beeswax single mold, and 12th place in amber extracted honey.

Zubair Vaid earned seventh place in the amber extracted honey category and eighth place in beeswax single mold.

[Read the full resolution text.](#)



Asha-Jyothi
Every Ray of Light Brings a New Hope

Commending Asha-Jyothi

Asha-Jyothi is a volunteer-based global nonprofit organization based in Chantilly that is dedicated to supporting the community through health care and education initiatives. The organization has greatly supported the Fairfax County community by donating more than \$250,000 to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) through its Educate-Innovate program, which provides grants for schools to enhance their technology education, particularly by building innovation labs and makerspaces.

In 2018, Asha-Jyothi's Educate-Innovate program gave \$106,000 to build the innovation lab at Chantilly High School, offering students access to state-of-the-art 3D printing, audiovisual technology and recording equipment, and more. A year later, Rocky Run Middle School received \$60,000 to build a makerspace that features a LEGO wall, a podcasting and recording studio, and a modular workspace with dry erase tabletops and flexible seating. In 2021, Asha-Jyothi donated a total of \$18,000 to FCPS, including individual grants to Katherine Johnson Middle School and Little Run Elementary School.

[Read the full resolution text.](#)



Celebrating 50 Years of the Friends of Fairfax Station

The Friends of Fairfax Station has served the community by maintaining and operating the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum, which preserves and interprets the region's rich history. When the Fairfax Station Railroad Depot closed in 1973, it was the last operating railroad depot in Fairfax County. A group of local citizens worked to preserve the site for use as a museum led by Lena Wyckoff, a former educator who grew up in a railroading family, and the Clifton Community Woman's Club. The Friends of Fairfax Station was founded later that year and was supported by Southern Railway, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, the Fairfax County Vocational Education Foundation, and members of the Fried and Moore

families. The Friends of Fairfax Station successfully remodeled and reopened the property at the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum in 1987.

The Fairfax Station area is rich in history related to the Civil War and the railroad industry, and the Friends of Fairfax Station and the Fairfax Station Railroad Museum have fostered a greater appreciation and understanding of that history through engaging programs, displays, and special exhibits.

[Read the full resolution text.](#)

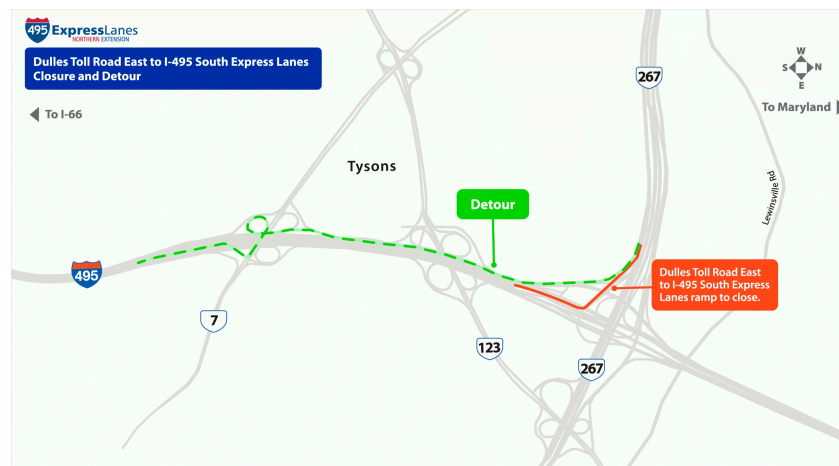
Apply for the Senate Page Program



The Senate Page Program is a dynamic, engaging and educational experience that honors and preserves the tradition of service to the legislature. Senate Pages have served the upper chamber of the legislature since at least 1850.

Applicants should discuss the program requirements and demands as a family prior to starting the application. In addition, the applicant must also discuss the program with the appropriate school personnel such as principals, school counselors and teachers. **Applicants seeking admission must be 13 or 14** years of age on the first day of session (second Wednesday in January) and a resident of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Families can learn more about the Senate Page program at the [Prospective Senate Page Portal](#).

Transportation Updates



Overnight Ramp Closures at Eastbound Dulles Toll Road to Southbound 495 Express Lanes Beginning Monday, Sept. 16 Through Mid-October

The exit ramp from the eastbound Dulles Toll Road to the southbound 495 Express Lanes will be closed weeknights starting Monday, Sept. 16, through Friday, Oct. 18, for overhead sign work. The ramp closure will take place Mondays through Fridays, nightly from 11 p.m. to 4 a.m. the following morning. This work is part of the I-495 Express Lanes Northern Extension (495 NEXT) project.

Motorists traveling on eastbound Dulles Toll Road who wish to access southbound I-495 Express Lanes will be detoured as follows:

Proceed to Exit 18A, staying right for I-495 South general

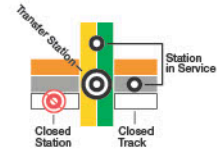
purpose lanes. Take Exit 47B for Route 7 East. At the traffic light, turn left to exit onto the I-495 South Express Lanes.



Information: 202-637-7000 | TTY: 202-962-2033
Metro Transit Police: 202-962-2121 | Text: MYMPD (696873)

- Legend**
- RD Red Line • Glenmont / Shady Grove
 - OR Orange Line • New Carrollton / Vienna
 - BL Blue Line • Franconia-Springfield / Foggy Bottom-GWU
 - GR Green Line • Branch Ave / Greenbelt
 - YL Yellow Line • Huntington / Mt Vernon Sq
 - SV Silver Line • Ashburn / Downtown Largo

- Station Features**
- P Parking
 - H Hospital
 - A Airport
- Connecting Rail Systems**
- AMBC



System Map for Dec. 20-26, 2024



Metro is accessible.



Metro to close some Downtown Blue, Orange, and Silver Line stations for maintenance from Dec. 20-30

Beginning Dec. 20, Metro is altering train service and closing some Downtown Blue, Orange, and Silver stations as part of a major construction project to improve tracks, signaling, and make a smoother ride for customers.

Free shuttle buses will replace trains during the 11-day project. Work will be completed in two phases.

From Dec. 20-26, Farragut West, McPherson Square, and the lower level (Blue, Orange, Silver service) at Metro Center will be closed.

From Dec. 27-30, Farragut West, McPherson Square, lower level (Blue, Orange, Silver service) at Metro Center, Federal Triangle, Smithsonian, and lower level (Blue, Orange, Silver service) at L'Enfant Plaza will be closed.

Stations will reopen Dec. 31.

Construction includes replacing grout pads, replacing fasteners and studs, welding open joints, upgrading platform edge lighting, and more.

Community Resources



September is Virginia Rail Safety Month

In partnership with Amtrak, VRE, DPRT, the freight railroads, and Operation Lifesaver, the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority and Gov. Youngkin have declared September Virginia Rail Safety Month. Every three hours in the United States, a person or vehicle is hit by a train. While passenger rail provides a safe,

reliable, and important transportation option, it's vital to know what to do to stay safe near railroad tracks.

- Freight trains don't travel at fixed times, and schedules for passenger trains often change. **Always expect a train at each highway-rail intersection at any time.** All train tracks are private property.
- **Never walk on tracks; it's illegal to trespass and highly dangerous.** It takes the average freight train traveling at 55 mph more than a mile—the length of 18 football fields—to stop. **Trains cannot stop quickly enough to avoid a collision.**
- Today's trains are quieter than ever, producing no telltale "clackety-clack." **Any approaching train is always closer, moving faster, than you think.**
- Remember to cross train tracks only at designated pedestrian or roadway crossings and **obey all warning signs and signals posted there.**
- **Stay alert around railroad tracks.** Refrain from texting, headphones or other distractions that would prevent you from hearing an approaching train; never mix rails and recreation.

For more information on train safety, visit [Operation Lifesaver](#), a non-profit organization and nationally-recognized leader of rail safety education.

**Do you know what to do if you're stuck
on the railroad tracks?**

**GET OUT! GET AWAY!
FIND THE BLUE AND WHITE
ENS SIGN!**

**REPORT EMERGENCY
OR PROBLEM
TO 1-800-555-5555
CROSSING 836 597 H**

If your vehicle gets stuck or stalls at a crossing, get everyone out and far away immediately, even if you do not see a train. Call the number on the Blue and White Emergency Notification System (ENS) sign and share the crossing ID number with the dispatcher. No sign? Dial 911.



Nominations Open for 2024 Martha Glennan Disability Inclusion and Equality Awards

Fairfax Area Disability Services Board's 2024 Martha Glennan Disability Inclusion and Equality Awards is accepting nominations now through 5 p.m. on Friday, October 18.

The completed nomination form must be emailed to disabilityrights@fairfaxcounty.gov with the subject line, "Martha Glennan 2024".

The Awards honor those who demonstrate a commitment to promoting equal rights and community inclusion for people with disabilities in Fairfax County, the City of Fairfax, or Falls Church. They will be presented at the ceremony on Monday, December 9 at the Fairfax County Pennino Building (12011 Government Center Pkwy). There are three possible award categories:

Individual: Individual whose work has benefited the lives of persons with disabilities in the Fairfax area.

Group: A business, non-profit, or organization that has worked to benefit the lives of persons with disabilities in the Fairfax area.

Self-Advocate: Individual who has been a strong self-advocate or worked to better the lives of persons with disabilities in the Fairfax area.

Nominees may self-nominate or be nominated by another individual or organization. Awards may or may not be awarded for each category, depending on nominations received.



Introducing RetirePath Virginia

RetirePath Virginia is revolutionizing retirement savings for thousands of Virginians, offering a brighter and more secure future. Established by state legislation, Virginia's automatic-enrollment, state-facilitated retirement savings program opened in 2023. It's a game-changer for private-sector workers in every corner of the Commonwealth.

RetirePath participation is mandatory for certain Virginia employers. Fortunately, the program is designed with simplicity in mind. There are no employer fees, fiduciary responsibilities, or complex administrative burdens. It's an easy way for eligible businesses to help their employees save for the future. Employers can learn about eligibility and registration deadlines at RetirePathVA.com/employers.

Employee participation is voluntary and flexible. RetirePath is available to Virginians whose employers don't offer a retirement plan, self-employed individuals, and others who want to save extra. Set up your account at RetirePathVA.com/savers.

Virginians now have a powerful tool to help them invest in their future. With RetirePath, a brighter, more secure retirement is within reach for all. Learn more at RetirePathVA.com.

RetirePath VA is mandatory for certain Virginia employers. Newly Eligible Businesses: RetirePath sends a series of notifications to eligible employers when it's time to register. **For**

businesses eligible in 2024, the registration deadline is October 30, 2024. Previously Notified Businesses: For businesses eligible in 2023, the registration deadline has passed. Non-compliant employers are subject to enforcement action, which may include financial penalties. Check eligibility at RetirePathVA.com.

Contact My Office



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

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Cheers,
Stella Pekarsky
Senator, District 36

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