



## **2018 GENERAL ASSEMBLY RECAP**

### **Medicaid Expansion**

The Virginia Interfaith Center's top priority issue for 2018 (and the last four years) was Medicaid expansion and it passed the General Assembly. This will enable 300,000 to 400,000 Virginians to get life-saving healthcare. The House of Delegates passed a budget during the regular session, that included Medicaid expansion, passing with 49 Democrats and 19 Republicans supporting it. The Senate finally passed its budget in a special session on May 30 with 19 Democrats and 4 Republicans voting for it. VICPP was a major player on this issue. VICPP has:

- Organized letter-writing drives in congregations all over the state.
- Conducted prayer vigils.
- Recruited speakers for budget forums.
- Organized town halls and forums, especially in key districts.
- Written and placed op-eds and letters to the editor in numerous newspapers.
- Placed full-page ads in eight newspapers around the state with a list of more than 700 Virginia clergy, including almost all the judicatory leaders calling upon the General Assembly to pass Medicaid expansion.
- Organized a religious leaders' press conference.
- Sustained a strong social media presence on the issue.
- Helped faith leaders submit op-eds and letters to the editor.

### **Wage Theft**

VICPP drafted legislation to strengthen enforcement against wage theft and got two strong champions to introduce the bills – Senator Wagner, Chair of the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, and Delegate Habeeb, who chairs the House Courts of Justice Civil Sub-Committee. The Wage Theft reform bill got out of the Civil Sub-Committee and the full Courts of Justice and was then killed in the House Appropriations Committee. The Senate bill did not make it out of Committee because one expected supporter abstained. Sen. Wagner has agreed to reintroduce the bill next year and to work with VICPP on getting a budget amendment or a better financial analysis.

VICPP also supported Delegate Krizek's bill to create a private cause of action (allow workers to take cases to court), but this bill did not make it out of the House Courts of Justice Committee. We are hopeful that we can get these reform efforts passed in the 2019 General Assembly. We need to do more education with members of the Senate and House Commerce and Labor Committees and the House Courts of Justice Committee.

### **Criminal Justice – Raising the Felony Threshold**

VICPP has long supported increasing the felony threshold from the national low of \$200, and there were at least a half-a-dozen bills to do so. Governor Northam worked with the leadership of both chambers to reach a compromise on the issue and the felony threshold was raised from \$200 to \$500, the first change since 1980. Although VICPP believes it should be higher, this is a good first step.

## **Welcoming All**

VICPP worked primarily on two bills that were the priority bills for the immigrant community – in-state tuition for all students, so that DACA students and others could receive in-state tuition, and driver's privilege cards so immigrants can legally drive in Virginia without risking arrest and possible deportation. Neither bill was even given a hearing in the House of Delegates, something that shocked and angered advocates.

Del. Ben Cline's mean-spirited anti-sanctuary bill was narrowly approved by both the House and Senate, but was vetoed by Gov. Northam. VICPP actively opposes this kind of anti-sanctuary legislation, believing that it sends a message to immigrants that they are not welcome in Virginia and undermines local law enforcement efforts.

## **Weapons in Worship**

When a proposal to lift a statewide ban on weapons in worship was introduced and quickly passed in the Senate, VICPP sprung into action to actively oppose the bill. Although scheduled for a House of Delegates floor vote, the bill was pulled at the last minute and never was rescheduled, which means the House leadership did not have the votes to pass it and so it died in committee.

## **No School Lunch Shaming**

Sen. Favola introduced a bill to prohibit school districts from shaming children whose parents are behind on paying lunch fees. This bill passed both chambers.

## **Suspension of Driver's Licenses**

Sen. Stanley's bill to repeal the requirement that the driver's license of a person convicted of any violation of the law who fails or refuses to provide for immediate payment of fines or costs be suspended passed the Senate by a wide margin, but did not get out of the House Appropriations Committee. This bill was a follow-up to our 2017 successful fight for legislation to provide alternatives to the state's suspension of driver's licenses for nonpayment of court fees.