



## Participating Organizations

Alexandria for Palestine

Alliance of Baptists

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee

American Muslims for Palestine

Appalachian Peace Education Center

Arab American Association of Central Virginia

Central Atlantic Conference (UCC) Palestine/Israel Network

Defenders for Freedom, Justice, and Equality

Episcopal Peace Fellowship—National Capital Regional Chapter

Hampton Roads For Palestine Here4TheKids

Israel Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church—USA

Jewish Voice for Peace

Muslims for Just Futures

National Arab American Women's Association

New Dominion PAC

Northern Virginians for Peace &amp; Justice

Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace

Plowshares Peace &amp; Justice Center

Richmonders for Peace in Palestine

Unitarian Universalists for Justice in the Middle East—Northern Virginia Chapter

United Methodists for Kairos Response

US Campaign for Palestinian Rights

Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace

## VCHR Urges the General Assembly to Pass HB1473

The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights (VCHR) calls on the Virginia General Assembly to pass [HB1473 – “Public institutions of higher education; students and campus; restrictions on student speech; limitations,”](#) which will further enshrine the constitutional rights to free speech and freedom of assembly for students, faculty, and staff on college campuses.

Students have, both historically and contemporarily, been one of the leading forces for social change using first amendment rights. Protests such as those against the Vietnam War and apartheid, and rallies advocating for civil rights and for divestment, have shaped the national conversation paving the way for positive political and social change. Over the past two years, student protests have been met with a repressive response from university administrators and the state's Attorney General's office.

During the Spring of 2024, the Virginia public university response to non-violent, anti-genocide demonstrations exposed students to excessive police violence. Over 125 Virginia students, faculty, and staff were arrested across four universities and at least three students had their diplomas withheld in retaliation for participating in pro-Palestine anti-genocide protests.

This crackdown on first amendment speech has been justified by university executives under the guise of “time, place, and manner” restrictions. While the provision exists to give universities discretion in protecting free speech and simultaneously preserving the core functions of academic institutions, its ambiguity has allowed it to be weaponized to crack down on disfavorable speech.

This bill amends the “time, place, and manner” exemption to be less ambiguous. It would do so by amending § 23.1-401 of the Code of Virginia so universities may only apply “time, place, and manner” restrictions to prevent “a material and substantial disruption... to a safe educational environment”, while also requiring the University to report such justifications to the General Assembly.

HB1473 limits the ability of governments and university officials to suppress or punish free speech in public colleges and universities across the Commonwealth. It protects the vital role of higher education to enable truth-seeking, intellectual growth, democratic participation, scientific progress, and protection of minority viewpoints.

### VCHR urges all General Assembly members to vote YES on HB1473!

*The Virginia Coalition for Human Rights (VCHR) is a broadly based grass-roots coalition that advocates for Palestinian human rights. We support and defend universal human rights, equity, free speech (including the right to boycott), and academic freedom. We believe that the attainment of human rights, equal rights, and civil rights, requires an open and free debate, and we oppose any effort to curtail or forestall such debate by placing limits on free speech or academic freedom. We oppose all types of racism, oppression, and violations of international law wherever they occur; and we oppose hate speech, and any type of discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, or national origin, wherever it may occur, domestically or abroad. We celebrate our diversity and strongly oppose any manifestation of racism against anyone. <https://vchr.org/>.*