



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 & Justice
 Palestinian Christian Alliance for Peace
 Plowshares Peace & 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 unfavorable 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/>.