



Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Faith Organizations and Religious Leaders Respond to Governor's Executive Order on Mask Use in Public Schools

Center for Faith, Justice and Reconciliation, Clergy Action RVA, Faithful American and over 200 leaders sign open letter to Governor Youngkin

RICHMOND, Va. - Just hours before signing Executive Order Two to “empower” parents to make decisions for their children by lifting mask mandates in public schools, Governor Glenn Youngkin honored frontline workers and emergency responders at his inauguration ceremony. However, the executive order undermines the efforts and sacrifices of frontline workers and has caused division leading to threats of violence against school districts across the Commonwealth of Virginia.

In an open letter addressed to the Governor, the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation, Clergy Action RVA, Faithful America and over 200 religious leaders from across the Commonwealth of Virginia and beyond call on Governor Youngkin to protect our children by recognizing the moral implications of the recent executive orders which can cause harm to the communities we serve.

The letter asks Governor Youngkin to heed the message and moral obligation to love all our neighbors by creating policies that protect every citizen. In addition, the faith leaders urge Governor Youngkin to create public policies that follow the guidance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Virginia Department of Health to ensure public health, safety, and welfare. This is a responsible choice in order to protect the sacredness of every human being during this pandemic.

Dr. Sabrina E. Dent, president of the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation, a national educational organization and theological think tank emphasized the following:

“Governor Youngkin’s call for unity was contradicted when he signed the executive order to lift mask mandates in public schools across the state. Virginia has experienced over 1.5 million reported COVID cases and over 16,000 deaths. Loving one’s neighbor requires that we consider the needs of

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vulnerable populations including unvaccinated infants, toddlers, and immunocompromised people whether elderly or infirmed. Blanket decisions should not be made to appease one group of people at the risk of another's health. We, who are people of faith and parents, have a responsibility to exercise moral courage when the lives and livelihoods of our children and neighbors are threatened. This is not a partisan issue but a matter of public health and safety for all Virginians."

Clergy Action RVA, a grassroots movement representing over 100 clergy in the Richmond area stated the following:

"Protecting the most vulnerable among us is a moral imperative and as people of faith we are called to ensure that all our neighbors are able to thrive. Masks allow our children, our teachers and the immunocompromised among us to learn and grow safely. We must do all we can to protect them and care for our community."

The Rev. Nathan Empsall, executive director of Faithful America, a national Christian organization representing 5,000 Virginia members expressed the following:

"While Governor Youngkin's reminder that we should love our neighbors is certainly appreciated, the governor himself seems to need that same reminder. During a global pandemic, loving our neighbors means doing everything we can to protect the most vulnerable from catching a virus that kills as many Americans as 9/11 every day. If Governor Youngkin truly cares about love, the common good, or protecting Virginia's children, then he will set politics aside, listen to doctors and teachers, and allow schools to require masks until the end of this pandemic."

To read the open letter, visit www.faihandjusticerva.com.

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About the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation

Founded in November 2020 and based on the campus of Union Presbyterian Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, the Center for Faith, Justice, and Reconciliation is an ecumenical think tank and educational resource that carries on the tradition of Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond of gender inclusivity, racial diversity and ecumenical commitment. Baptist in heritage, Christian in tradition, interfaith in outlook, and holistic in vision, the Center is an independent 501(c)(3) educational organization.

For more information, visit www.faihandjusticerva.com.