

VAAPI CAUCUS

Virginia Asian American & Pacific Islander Caucus

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Virginia Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus condemns vandalism at the West End Islamic Center in Henrico County

Richmond, VA — Virginia Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus (VAAPIC), which represents the policy interests of the fastest growing ethnic community in the Commonwealth, is shocked by the vandalism that targeted a house of worship last weekend. VAAPIC condemns this hateful act, stands in support of the West End Islamic Center (WEIC), and urges law enforcement authorities to act with speed and diligence to identify the perpetrators and to bring them to justice.

During the holy month of Ramadan, a time when Muslims devote themselves to prayer and charitable activities while fasting from sunrise to sunset, WEIC experienced its second incident of vandalism in the past six months. Prayer rugs were damaged, a window was shattered, holes were kicked in walls, trash was thrown around the prayer hall, and graffiti was displayed.

"The congregants of the WEIC have worked for years to raise funds in order to establish this faith center that now serves a diverse population of Muslims from throughout Henrico County and the broader Richmond region." **VAAPIC Second Vice Chair Sen. Ghazala Hashmi stated.** "These targeted acts of vandalism send a chilling message of bigotry and intimidation, mainly signaling that the WEIC and its congregants are not welcome in the community. However, I've heard from numerous individuals representing other faith communities who have asked me to share a counter message: such acts of bigotry are not reflective of our values as Virginians, and we stand in solidarity with WEIC in denouncing these acts."

"It is tragic but necessary to acknowledge the continuing bigotry by some in our community against those who practice faiths that may be different than their own. The Commonwealth of Virginia is the birthplace of religious freedom in America, but some Virginians do not seem to

appreciate this long-held and valuable tradition.” **said VAAPIC Chair Del. Mark Keam.** “That is why VAAPIC included in our legislative agenda efforts to prevent religious discrimination, and we will continue to promote diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our lives.”

During the 2022 regular session of the General Assembly, **VAAPIC Member Delegate Irene Shin** introduced [House Bill 1063](#) to strengthen the prohibition against discrimination on the basis of religion, including outward expression of religious faith. Despite passing with unanimous bipartisan support, Governor Glenn Youngkin has proposed last minute amendments to change the purpose of HB1063. We hope that Governor Youngkin recognizes the importance of protecting religious minorities throughout Virginia, and approves the original intent of the bill as it passed the legislature.

“We are not cowed by these hateful acts and bigoted individuals who want to intimidate the Muslim community members who worship at WEIC and in mosques throughout Virginia,” **said VAAPIC First Vice Chair Del. Kathy Tran.** “Our diversity is our strength, and I am proud that our Caucus stands with the Muslim community and allies to build a Virginia where each person is safe and comfortable to practice their religious beliefs.”

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The Virginia Asian American and Pacific Islander Caucus (VAAPIC) is a legislative organization recognized by the General Assembly to serve as a collaborative voice for Virginia's Asian American and Pacific Islander communities by identifying public issues of interest and to develop formal positions, facilitate discussions, and advocate for policy outcomes.