



REPORT | JUNE 2023

Roadmap to Recovery

In the Aftermath of COVID-19

From the Office of Senator Tim Kaine



Intro

The last few years have been tough for America. We've faced a global pandemic that has taken a toll on every aspect of American life. COVID exacerbated economic uncertainty, health care access, the ongoing substance abuse epidemic, worker shortages, tragic gun violence, and many other challenges.

But we've been through tough times before. As they say, tough times don't last – tough people do.

In the aftermath of any disaster, we focus on recovery. We help communities that lost so much get back on their feet. In the wake of COVID, this is what I'm focused on in the Senate. With American innovation, we can help communities recover and build back better and more resilient. We've already taken steps towards making our communities stronger and safer with the [American Rescue Plan Act](#), [Inflation Reduction Act](#), [Bipartisan Infrastructure Law](#), [CHIPS and Science Act](#), and [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#). These bills are helping to lower costs, create jobs, improve public safety, and bring manufacturing back to America.

Now, I'm working to build on that progress by expanding access to affordable health care, housing, job training to equip Virginians with the skills to fill good-paying jobs, and child care so that parents can get back to work. I'm also working on ways to improve community safety, including with commonsense gun reforms that the vast majority of Americans support.

These are challenging times. But I believe that we are up to the task of recovering and will come out the other side stronger.



SENATOR TIM KAINE

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Jobs and the Economy

The last three years after the COVID pandemic began shutting down businesses in the U.S. have been a tumultuous and traumatic economic period for Virginians. The COVID recession that began in March 2020 was the sharpest and deepest economic crisis our country has faced in modern history, with the unemployment rate reaching 15 percent. Congress stepped up in a bipartisan way to provide relief to workers and small businesses struggling with the economic effects of the pandemic, and then President Biden led efforts to pass the [American Rescue Plan Act](#) to ensure our economic recovery in 2021. Just as the economy was getting back to its pre-COVID state, though, global supply disruptions and Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine sent prices soaring, putting pressure on families trying to pay their grocery and utility bills.

I'm proud to have helped make substantial progress to recover from these historic challenges, by passing the [CARES Act](#), the [2021 budget bill](#), and the [American Rescue Plan](#), all of which helped get our job market back on track. In President Biden's first two years in office, the economy created 12 million jobs and the unemployment rate hit a 50-year low. I helped pass the [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) and [CHIPS and Science Act](#) last Congress to continue to boost American manufacturing and the resiliency of our supply chains. Inflation has started coming down as supply chain disruptions have eased. And the [Inflation Reduction Act](#) we passed will also lead to lower prescription drug prices and energy costs, further helping ease cost pressures on households in the years to come.

Alleviating Household Financial Pressures

To build on this progress, I'm pushing for further action to help mitigate Virginians' household finance challenges. This includes improving access to safe and affordable housing through passing my [Fair Housing Improvement Act](#) to protect veterans and low-income families from housing discrimination, making investments to build more affordable housing units, and helping [first generation homebuyers](#) achieve the American dream of homeownership. I will continue to push for raising the [federal minimum wage](#), which has not changed since 2009, and

lowering the tax burden on the middle class, including by reinstating the expanded [Child Tax Credit](#) and expanded [Earned Income Tax Credit](#) for childless workers.

While unemployment is low, we still need to help people who want to work enter the labor force and access the many jobs being created. Wherever I go in Virginia, I hear from businesses struggling to fill jobs and from Virginians facing barriers to the job training programs they need to enter or reenter the workforce. That's why I have pushed to enhance workforce training as a member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee.

Expanding Financial Aid to Short-Term Workforce Programs



Virginia Stories

From 2021-2022, the U.S. economy added nearly 11 million jobs, but workforce participation remains below pre-pandemic levels, in part because Americans lack access to the job training needed to fill vacant jobs. Julia from Norfolk said, “I tried to go back to school to advance my career, but a career certification program was going to cost me upwards of \$20,000. With these barriers to education, I cannot secure a job that adequately provides for my family or prepares for our future.”

One way to make sure our workforce can meet the demands of today's economy and provide for their families is by lowering the costs of short-term job training programs like the Virginia Community College system's FastForward program, which trains Virginians to get into high-demand industries. In the last five years, over 33,000 certificates and credentials have been earned from Virginia's community colleges through the program.

In January 2023, I reintroduced the [Jumpstart Our Businesses by Supporting Students \(JOBS\) Act](#) with Senator Braun (R-IN), which would extend Pell Grant

eligibility to education and training programs like FastForward. This would help Virginians like Julia afford the job training they need to get good-paying jobs.

Addressing Health Care Workforce Shortages

We are facing a critical health care workforce shortage that threatens access to health care across the Commonwealth. This crisis has only worsened during the pandemic, with nearly [1 out of every 5](#) health care workers having quit their jobs in the first 18 months of the pandemic. Although a recent analysis by George Mason University states that health care-related careers represent the [3rd fastest growing occupation](#) group in Virginia, current projections on the growth of health care professions show that [supply will not meet demand](#) over the next 10 years for many health care occupations including dental, primary care, mental health, and nursing and allied health. The health care workforce shortage is even more dire in rural communities across Virginia.

I support our health care leaders and want to ensure that our communities have the tools they need to address both recruitment and retention in the health care workforce. That's why I'm championing a series of reforms to boost access to job training for health care workers and boost the health care workforce, including the [Expanding Medical Education Act](#) to establish medical schools in underserved areas and at Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other minority-serving institutions and the [Supporting Our Direct Care Workforce and Family Caregivers Act](#) to support the recruitment, training, and retention of direct care workers.

Health Care

The pandemic introduced new demands on our health care system and fundamentally changed the way we manage our health. I believe that health care is a right and remain committed to working in a bipartisan fashion to protect the health and well-being of communities across the Commonwealth.

Ensuring Access to Quality, Affordable Health Care

COVID underscored the need to ensure that all Virginians have access to high-quality, affordable health care. Thanks to our efforts to expand Affordable Care Act health care subsidies and continuous Medicaid enrollment, the nation's uninsured rate hit an all-time low of [8 percent](#) in 2022. As of the end of 2021, Virginia's uninsured rate stood at [6.8 percent](#). While we have made great strides in coverage over the last three years, more must be done to offer Virginia families, individuals, and small businesses low-cost health insurance and to control the cost of health care. That's why I introduced the [Medicare-X Choice Act](#), which would build on the Medicare framework by creating a low-cost public option for health care that would allow Virginians to choose between existing private insurance plans or a public one. A [report](#) by the Urban Institute estimated that my bill would reduce the U.S. uninsured population by over a million Americans and save households, employers, and the government billions of dollars.

Accelerating Research and Resources to Address Long COVID



Virginia Stories

In [Virginia](#), nearly 55% of adults report ever having had COVID, with nearly one third of those adults who had COVID experiencing some form of Long COVID. Currently, 4.9 percent of Virginians are experiencing Long COVID, with about one in five of those experiencing significant limitations due to their symptoms. For example, in January, I [heard from a woman named Rachel](#) from Franklin, Virginia who loved her career and was devastated to have to separate from her job due to Long COVID.

Virginians of all ages with Long COVID require resources to navigate workplaces and schools, including support in accessing disability benefits if needed. That's why I am pushing to pass my [CARE for Long COVID Act](#), which would accelerate research and

education on Long COVID and ensure that Virginians have the support systems they need while dealing with this difficult disease.

Investing in the Well-Being of our Healers

The last few years of COVID have exacerbated the high levels of stress and burnout experienced by our healers. These challenging work conditions put over [20 million U.S. health workers](#) at risk of mental health issues, with an October 2022 report finding that [93 percent](#) of health care workers experienced workplace stress. According to the [National Academy of Medicine](#), up to 54 percent of nurses and physicians report symptoms of burnout. I am proud that my bipartisan bill, the [Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act](#), was signed into law in March 2022, and has brought \$103 million in grants nationally to reduce burnout and promote mental health among the health workforce, including more than [\\$5.6 million](#) to Virginia. The *Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act* is a critical step to address mental health concerns facing our health care workers. As we move forward, I am committed to continuing this important work to ensure that we care for those that care for us.

Protecting Reproductive Freedoms

The *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health* decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* goes directly against the will of the majority of Americans, [more than sixty percent](#) of whom believe abortion should be legal in all or most cases. The Virginia General Assembly has recently defeated legislation aiming to restrict abortion rights, including a 15-week ban. If the Supreme Court is going to turn back the clock on women's rights, then it's up to [Congress to act](#). That's why I introduced the [Reproductive Freedom For All Act](#), legislation that would codify the essential holdings of *Roe v. Wade* and related cases protecting women's rights to access abortion and contraception. This would enshrine in federal law the fundamental right to reproductive freedom. I am not giving up on protecting women's access to reproductive care in Virginia and their autonomy to make their own health care decisions.

Fighting the Substance Use Epidemic

Substance use disorder and fatal overdoses have devastated too many communities across the Commonwealth and the country. In 2021, there were over 107,000 fatal overdoses in the United States, primarily caused by synthetic opioids like fentanyl.



Virginia Stories

Rick, a treatment provider in Abingdon, Virginia, said,
“There have been strides made in developing services, yet the system of care is still incomplete and behind the curve given rapid increases in addiction severity. Many services are insurance dependent; therefore, many people are either uninsured or underinsured, and treatment is frequently ended prior to a person’s readiness. Adequate length of treatment may be unavailable or inadequate to fully break these cycles that are often generational. Severe gaps in the continuum still exist in adequate supportive housing, transportation, and telehealth availability. Many who have the greatest needs or have legal problems face the greatest barriers as they attempt to find safe and sustainable recovery-oriented environments. Most people seeking recovery are ready for the supports being offered and simply need more healthy options as they move forward.”

We must do more at a federal level to support the prevention, treatment, and recovery of substance use disorders. Research shows that the most effective treatments touch on all aspects of one’s life: physical and mental health, housing, supported employment, and social relationships. That’s why I am working on legislation to ensure that there is an adequate workforce and infrastructure to support Virginia’s substance use epidemic recovery efforts.

Education

COVID significantly disrupted our education system and underscored the need for investments. That’s why we provided significant support for K-12 schools to address learning loss as part of COVID relief packages like the *American Rescue Plan*. Going forward, I’m committed to improving access to quality education so we can prepare students and workers for success in the modern economy. I support smart investments in education—from early childhood education to college and workforce training—and have learned through years of experience in Virginia that no one path is right for everyone. Two big areas of focus for me include strengthening our child care system and providing resources to address teacher shortages in K-12 schools.

Providing Accessible and Affordable Child Care

Families and providers across the U.S. and the Commonwealth are experiencing a child care accessibility crisis. COVID exacerbated the existing issues within the child care industry, namely, the lack of affordable child care. The current cost of center-based infant care in Virginia is over \$15,000 per year, which is 13 percent of the median income of a married couple and more than the average cost of college tuition. Child care providers also struggle to recruit and retain qualified staff. The national average pay for a child care teacher is \$12.40 per hour. While other industries are starting to recover, as of January 2023, child care employment was still 5.5 percent below what it had been in February 2020.



Virginia Stories

Silke, a child care provider from Chantilly, said,
“As Virginia families return to the workforce post-COVID, they need and deserve access to affordable, high quality early learning environments for their children. Without adequate funding to compensate our talented workforce, we can’t recruit and retain enough teachers to keep classrooms open and serve working families.”

In April 2023, I reintroduced the [*Child Care for Working Families Act*](#) with Senator Patty Murray (D-WA), which will ensure that all children have access to high-quality and affordable early care and education, and that child care workers earn a living wage. I will continue to push for the passage of this legislation.

Addressing Teacher Shortages

Prior to the pandemic, Virginia had roughly 800 open teaching positions. In August 2022, that number increased to more than 3,300 teacher vacancies. Before the 2022-2023 academic year, nearly 11,000 Virginia teachers left the workforce and only roughly 7,200 teachers were hired.

Persisting factors that contribute to teacher shortages include a lack of qualified applicants and not enough support for advanced training. Teacher shortages are even greater in special education and in subject areas like mathematics, science, world languages, and Career and Technical Education—fields that are vital for our economic success. Research shows that better prepared teachers stay in the profession longer and are more effective at improving student achievement. Research also shows that a racially diverse mix of teachers and school leaders can have a strong positive effect on closing the achievement gap for students of color.



Virginia Stories

Thomas, a superintendent from Stafford said,
“With low compensation relative to training that has only gotten proportionally worse over time, long hours, and an often-unfriendly political landscape, many teacher preparation programs are under-enrolled or dry. Virginia is a teacher deficit state where there are more leaving the profession each year than preparation programs can produce. The supply and demand economics for the teaching profession are unfriendly because that convention would suggest that pay would increase, except it hasn’t. And this has made the challenge of recruiting a diverse workforce all the more challenging. Consequently, the average age of teachers has dropped sharply, meaning that our existing teacher workforce is less skilled and less prepared to meet the growing challenges in dealing with complexities of today’s youth.”

This is why I plan to reintroduce the [*Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals \(PREP\) Act*](#). This bill would address teacher and principal shortages, particularly in rural communities, and increase teacher diversity.

Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform

The last few years have seen major public safety challenges in the form of gun violence, crime, and domestic threats from extremist organizations. I believe that there are commonsense policy steps we can take to address all of these issues and make America a safer and stronger country.

Preventing Gun Violence

Recent years have seen a scourge of preventable gun violence tragedies, including a shooting after a graduation ceremony in Richmond, in Walmart in Chesapeake, an elementary school in Newport News and at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. It is painfully clear that existing federal policies are not sufficient to address the national epidemic of gun violence.

Congress can and must pass commonsense gun safety reforms that will reduce these tragedies. We passed the [Bipartisan Safer Communities Act](#) in 2022, and we can build on that success. Virginia has led the way by taking essential steps like expanding background checks, establishing extreme risk protection orders, and preventing minors from accessing firearms, which is why Senator Mark Warner and I have pushed for our [Virginia Plan to Reduce Gun Violence Act](#), which would implement many of these measures at the federal level. If we can implement these policies in Virginia, the state where the NRA is headquartered, then we can implement them in the U.S. Senate.

Another critical component of preventing gun violence is reauthorizing an assault weapons ban. After the 1994 federal assault weapons ban expired in 2004, gun massacres [increased](#) by 183 percent and gun massacre deaths increased by 239 percent. We have the facts: the assault weapons ban worked. We must reauthorize the ban to take a critical step to reduce mass shootings and save lives.

Combatting Fentanyl Trafficking

My heart goes out to every Virginian who has lost a loved one to fentanyl. Fentanyl is the [leading cause of death for Americans aged 18-49](#). In 2021, an estimated [195 Americans](#) died every single day due to the drug. In 2012, there were [50 fentanyl overdose deaths in Virginia](#) according to the Virginia Department of Health. In 2022, that number skyrocketed, with nearly [2,000 Virginians](#) losing their lives to a fentanyl overdose.

That's why I'm working with Senator Joni Ernst, who serves with me on the Senate Armed Services Committee, in leading the bipartisan [Disrupt Fentanyl Trafficking Act](#). This legislation would help develop a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to addressing this crisis by classifying fentanyl trafficking as a national security threat, directing the Pentagon to create a fentanyl-specific counter-drug strategy, and increasing security coordination with the Mexican military to help curb drug cartels' ability to move fentanyl into the United States.

Police reform

The first summer of COVID saw mass protests against police misconduct after the death of George Floyd in May 2020. But George Floyd was just one of a long list of

Black Americans who have been victims of horrific police brutality. That's why I have been proud to cosponsor the [Justice in Policing Act](#), which would eliminate unnecessary practices like chokeholds and no-knock warrants, end racial profiling, and ensure that police are held accountable for reckless behavior. To address the issue of police misconduct, we also need to look at its scope. Police misconduct has [cost](#) taxpayers more than \$3 billion since 2010, with more than \$1.5 billion of that paid to settle claims against officers who had more than one claim against them. My [Cost of Police Misconduct Act](#) would create a source of comprehensive data on the size and nature of such payments to help policymakers, stakeholders, and the public understand the scope of the problem and the need for reform.

Criminal Justice

Preventing crime is not only about dedicating resources, but about dedicating those resources wisely. That's why it's critical that we pass my bipartisan [Smarter Sentencing Act](#), which would make sentences more proportional to the offense, allowing more resources to be focused on those who present the greatest threat to public safety. I know that local law enforcement officers have the greatest insight into crime prevention issues on the ground, so in addition to supporting the public safety funding in the American Rescue Plan, I've also advocated for greater funding for the Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program and Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) program. The COPS program provides funding for local public safety agencies to expand crisis intervention teams and strengthen community crime prevention efforts, and the Byrne JAG program provides funding for state and local governments to target their most pressing needs and innovate across the justice system, including in law enforcement, prevention, corrections, and crime victims' services.

Stamping Out Hate

We also must acknowledge the threat posed by domestic terrorism in the wake of the horrific events in Charleston, Charlottesville, and Buffalo. There were [231](#) domestic terrorism incidents between 2010 and 2021, so it's important that

the government has the information it needs to prosecute cases of domestic terrorism and that Congress can understand the state of domestic terrorism threats. I know that the Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act would be a good step towards doing so, and it would build on the critical work of the [*Khalid Jabara-Heather Heyer NO HATE Act*](#), legislation I championed and helped pass last Congress to improve hate crimes reporting and expand assistance and resources for victims of hate crimes.

