

# HALA AYALA

## DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATE FOR LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

### **Tell us briefly why you believe that your candidacy would be compelling particularly to NAKASEC Action Fund members:**

In our 400 year history, Virginia has never elected a woman of color to statewide office. This year, we have a chance to make history together by electing me as Lieutenant Governor. I also know the struggles that most Virginians face. As a single working mother, I worked a minimum wage job to support my son and survived thanks to Medicaid and other government programs. That is why I have fought and will continue to fight justice and equity as Lieutenant Governor.

#### **1. Economic Justice**

While Virginia has a graduated personal income tax structure, the top rate starts at \$17,000. In other words, someone who earns \$17,001 pays the same effective tax rate as someone who earns \$250K. Those at the top received huge federal tax cuts under the Trump administration, at the same time that hundreds of thousands of Virginians lost their jobs and livelihoods. Recovering from COVID-19 will require additional funding. According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, Virginia has the 33rd most unfair state and local tax system in the country, meaning that lower-income households pay a higher share of their family income in state and local taxes than the top 20%.

#### **Do you support adding income tax brackets above \$17,000?**

Yes

No

#### **Do you support a millionaire's tax?**

Yes

No

#### **Comments:**

Virginia's tax system is broken and regressive. Our Commonwealth needs to restructure our tax code to ensure that every Virginian is contributing their fair share. This is why I support adding income tax brackets above \$17,000, including a special bracket for millionaires.

#### **2. Language Access**

Virginia is an increasingly linguistically diverse state. 20% of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) households identify as limited-English proficient (LEP). The LEP rate is higher depending on the specific ethnicity and/or language population. This issue is one that touches many people, including Black, Middle Eastern, and Central American immigrant, refugee, and indigenous communities as well. Yet multiple Virginia state agencies continue to use machine translation, such as Google Translate, solely without appropriate human review which

often results in serious inaccuracies and offer phone menu options only for English and Spanish speakers. With the creation of the Office of New Americans, it is time that the state expand meaningful language access beyond English and Spanish.

**Do you support the following:**

**Increasing state funding for interpretation and translation services for programs funded and/or administered by the state, including hiring more bilingual/multilingual staff?**

Yes       No

**Hiring a state-level language access director?**

Yes       No

**Developing a coordinated and comprehensive plan that incorporates best practices, including the provision of real-time oral interpretation in any requested language, requiring ongoing staff training on policies and protocols, and ensuring accurate data analysis and collection?**

Yes       No

**Comments:**

During the COVID pandemic, we heard too often about state agencies relying on Google translate to provide translation services. As delegate, our office inquired and advocated for state agencies to hire interpreters to ensure that essential information is available to all Virginians. As Lieutenant Governor, I will continue to advocate for these services.

### **3. Data Disaggregation**

The Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) community is extremely diverse, composed of more than 50 ethnic groups with varying immigration histories, languages, and socioeconomic statuses. However, the "Asian" and "Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander" groupings present a homogenous picture and obscures socioeconomic, social, physical, mental health, and civic participation disparities between ethnic groups, at substantial risk of those communities being underserved. In order to reveal the true state of AANHPI communities, disaggregated data should be collected on AANHPI ethnic groups, analyzed, and made publicly available.

**Do you support data disaggregation for the AANHPI communities, starting with the Department of Health and Department of Education?**

Yes

No

**How would you implement it? Comments:**

As Lieutenant Governor, I would advocate for the disaggregation of data to show the existing inequities that our AANHPI community faces throughout different areas of the Commonwealth. Access to this data is essential to

ensure equitable outcomes for Virginians, especially our students. I would work closely with the Governor and his administration to ensure that Virginia begins to disaggregate the collected data.

#### 4. **Healthcare**

Undocumented residents typically seek care at emergency rooms, or through a patchwork of resources and organizations making exceptions to find creative solutions for patients, or not at all. All people should have access to health care services and should not suffer financial hardship when obtaining these services. In Virginia, 25% of undocumented immigrants come from Asian countries.

**Do you support the expansion of healthcare for all undocumented residents across all age groups?**

Yes

No

#### **Comments:**

Yes, and I have voted to expand FAMIS healthcare coverage to undocumented residents as delegate.

#### 5. **Public Education**

The debate surrounding admissions reform to governor's schools has highlighted the disparities faced by Black and Latinx students, and lower-income students, including Asian Americans. Reforming admission policy is a step in the right direction for education equity. However, the vast majority of students do not attend publicly funded Governor's schools. In order to better support low-income students and students of color, it is crucial to ensure funding is distributed to schools that need the resources the most. Public education is not a brand, like Governor's schools have become. Adequate funding for the public K-12 public education system is important in closing gaps in remote learning, providing students with mental, physical, and academic support, and creating a safe school environment for educators and students should schools reopen. Additionally, distribution of resources should prioritize the schools and students who need them most, and provide additional assistance to students who need specialized services and were at particular risk while schools were shut down, including students experiencing homelessness, students in foster care, English language learners, students with disabilities, Indigenous students, and students residing in juvenile justice facilities.

**Do you support the following:**

**100% lottery admissions to Governor's school to increase access for Black, Latinx, and low-income students (including Asian Americans)**

Yes       No

**Race and class conscious admission policies to increase access for Black, Latinx, and low-income students (including Asian Americans)**

Yes       No

**Gradual closing of Governor's schools and re-distribution of those resources to the most high-need high schools in each region**

Yes  No

**Continuing efforts to make curriculum and school environments more inclusive and reflective of Virginia's history and current demographics**

Yes  No

**Comments:**

Yes, I support immediate reform to the Governor's schools admissions process. I prefer a focus on race and class conscious admissions over random lottery, which is why I supported HB 2305; however, I would be amenable to lottery determination if it increased equitable admissions. I believe that Governor's schools do help overall school systems, and as Lieutenant Governor, I will advocate for increased spending to ensure equity in the admissions process.

**6. Marriage Equality**

The Supreme Court has ruled that the U.S. Constitution guarantees same-sex couples the right to marry, but Virginia's constitution still defines marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Replacing the ban on marriage equality with an affirmation of rights will better reflect Virginia's values and would reaffirm that all Virginians are entitled to equality in every aspect of their lives and in their state's laws.

**Do you support amending Virginia's constitution to affirm marriage equality for all adults, regardless of their gender identity?**

Yes

No

**Comments:**

Yes, and I have supported marriage equality legislation as delegate.

**7. Paid Sick and Paid Family Leave**

In Virginia, unpaid leave under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act is inaccessible for 55 percent of working people, with evidence showing that many eligible employees do not take leave when they need it because they cannot afford it. As the COVID-19 pandemic made clear, the lack of paid sick and paid family leave has had devastating costs to Virginians and their families, public health and the economy.

Starting July 1, 2021, Virginia will mandate paid sick leave for home health workers, but it is crucial to extend paid sick leave and paid family medical leave to all employees in Virginia so no Virginian needs to pick between having a job and taking care of their family. The long-term consequences of the pandemic have emphasized the importance of ensuring a robust, equitable recovery for Virginians' health, caregiving needs and economic stability.

**Do you support expanding paid sick leave and paid family medical leave to all employees in Virginia?**

Yes

No

**Comments:**

Yes, and I carried the paid family and medical leave legislation during this past session

**8. Reproductive Rights**

Since 2008, anti-choice politicians have introduced or passed more than 170 restrictions that limit access to abortion and reproductive health services in Virginia. AAPI women face various health disparities often due to immigration status, language barriers, and income level. AAPI women experience some of the highest rates of cervical cancer, and high rates of uninsurance. Additionally, there is evidence that AAPI women use hormonal birth control at lower rates and have high rates of unintended pregnancies. As a result, access to comprehensive health services is a key issue for AAPI women and the community as a whole. The Reproductive Health Equity Act (RHEA) would ensure that regardless of what happens to the federal Affordable Care Act, reproductive care will be fully covered and respected in Virginia. The RHEA would establish comprehensive coverage for the full spectrum of reproductive health services, including family planning, abortion, and postpartum care for all Virginians, regardless of gender identity, immigration status, employer, income, or type of insurance.

**Do you support the Reproductive Health Equity Act?**

Yes

No

**Comments:**

Yes, and I am proud to have 100% pro-choice voting record.

**9. Climate Change**

There are many ways global warming as well as polluting industries and institutional policies' lax regulation of these industries disproportionately harm communities of color, from lack of access to clean drinking water to higher exposure to pollutant emissions from transportation, power generation, and other industrial and agricultural emissions. These environmental factors result in communities of color suffering greater rates of health problems. Virginia has taken steps to reduce emissions, such as passing the Clean Cars Act, but these commitments and actions still fall short of what is needed to limit the rise of global temperatures and avoid the worst effects of climate change. With global climate impacts that are already unfolding under today's warming, from devastating heat waves and more intense storms, it is becoming increasingly urgent and crucial to work toward net-zero emissions.

**Do you acknowledge that human actions are a major contributor to climate change?**

Yes

No

**Will you support measures to transition Virginia to a net-zero carbon footprint by 2045, including the transportation and building sectors?**

Yes

No

**Comments:**

Yes, and I was proud to co-patron the Virginia Clean Economy Act as delegate.

**What is one measure you would take to address environmental racism?**

We know that climate change disproportionately hurts Black and brown communities, who are currently being affected by blue-lining. The oldest Black community in Virginia, Seatack in Virginia Beach, is at the center of residential flooding, and Church Hill, a historically Black community in Richmond, has an average temperature of 2-3 degrees higher. Combating climate change is part of the movement for racial justice, and as we transition out of COVID-19, we must expedite the transition to a cleaner, greener Virginian, and we must reinvest in communities who have been disproportionately hurt by climate change through clean energy grants and job programs.