



 LEGAL AID
JUSTICE CENTER

PRESS CONFERENCE TODAY 1PM!

Virginians need enforceable health & safety standards, not CDC “suggestions”
PRESS CONFERENCE Monday, July 13, 1 pm ([LINK TO REGISTER](#))

RICHMOND – **TODAY, July 13, at 1pm** join an online press conference hosted by the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, the Virginia AFL-CIO, and the Legal Aid Justice Center to learn why the Virginia Safety and Health Codes Board must adopt clear standards and not allow employers to follow CDC guidelines if they feel like it.

More than 1,100 poultry workers in Virginia have contracted COVID-19 and 10 have died. This is proof that Virginia needs health and safety standards to protect workers and the public from the spread of the virus, as the Commonwealth has seen a [substantial spike in positive cases](#) – the highest in two months.

Governor Northam directed the Department of Labor and Industries to draft strong enforceable OSHA requirements to protect workers against COVID-19. The proposed standard was presented to the Virginia Health and Safety Codes Board, whose responsibility is to adopt, (alter, amend, or repeal) rules and regulations to further protect and promote the safety and health of employees in places of employment over which it has jurisdiction. For the past few weeks, the Board has been debating amendments to an Emergency Temporary Standard for protecting workers against COVID-19. At a July 7 meeting, the Board essentially gutted the standard by allowing employers to follow CDC guidelines instead of the Virginia OSHA standard.

The Board will meet again on July 15, 2020. Worker advocates and health and safety experts are calling on Governor Northam and the Board to enact standards that restore an equivalency provision to the current standard. The equivalency provision says that the CDC guidelines can be followed only if they provide equal or greater protection than the VA COVID Emergency Temporary Standard.

“We must act now to protect workers,” said Doris Crouse-Mays, President of the Virginia AFL-CIO. “The spread of COVID-19 in poultry plants is proof that the CDC guidelines have failed to protect workers. Voluntary standards are not a substitute for enforceable standards.”

At the press conference, speakers will explain why the Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines are woefully inadequate to protect workers in Virginia, and a strong Virginia OSHA Standard is essential.

MODERATOR: Kim Bobo, Executive Director, Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy

- **Joyce Barnes**, home health aide ([link to RTD story about Joyce](#))
- **Doris Crouse-Mays**, President, Virginia AFL-CIO

- **Jason Yarashes**, Attorney, Legal Aid Justice Center
- **Deborah Berkowitz**, Worker Health & Safety Program Director, National Employment Law Project
- **Delegate Jeion Ward** (D-92)

Unfortunately, at the Virginia Safety and Health Codes Board meeting on July 7, the Administration offered language to undermine the standard by allowing employers to follow CDC voluntary guidelines. These voluntary guidelines are suggestions. They include lots of "if possible" and "if feasible" language. Essentially, employers could simply say it is too hard to do social distancing or require masks, and then there would be no enforceable requirement. This is not what workers in Virginia need to be assured that they are safe at work.

Jason Yarashes, Lead Attorney at the Legal Aid Justice Center said, "With enforceable standards, workers will feel more empowered to speak out for their safety in the workplace, particularly during the pandemic when essential workers are risking their lives to keep the economy alive and feed their families. We urge the Board to do the right thing and vote in favor of these common-sense standards to protect the workers and the public health of the Commonwealth."

The Virginia Interfaith Center, the Virginia AFL-CIO and the Legal Aid Justice Center want a standard that would require different levels of protection depending on the risk level at each workplace. For example, healthcare facilities, poultry plants, and other places that are known to be dangerous would have higher standards than others.

"This proposed Emergency Temporary Standard would protect all workers as well as the families and consumers who interact with workers. Nothing is more significant in the fight against COVID-19 than passage of this proposed standard," said Kim Bobo, executive director of the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy. Bobo added, "The Hebrew Scriptures calls on all of us to, *'Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy'* (Proverbs 31:8-9)."

[LINK TO Register in advance for this meeting:](#) After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.

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