



## Vigil for Housing Justice January 2023

**Leader:** Welcome, and thank you for joining us here as we take action in support of those who struggle with housing. On these cold winter days, many of us are grateful for the warmth and security of our homes. However, around Virginia, thousands of families struggle to afford a place to live. Three out of ten households pay too much on housing, and the costs to both rent and buy a home has gone up exponentially in recent years.

**Religious leader:** Let us take a moment in silence, holding in gratitude the bounty of our community, and remembering those that our systems leave out in the cold. *[Period of quiet]*

**Prayer by religious leader.** *Be sure to make the prayer inclusive of various faith traditions as well as those without a particular faith.*

**Leader:** Thank you for grounding us in our values. As we meet here today, Virginia's General Assembly is in the process of considering legislation and budget amendments for the coming year. Lawmakers from all over the commonwealth and both sides of the aisle have talked about the urgent need for housing. However, the Governor's budget amendments do not include important allocations to build more housing, help people stay in housing, or increase access to housing. We want to see our legislators address these needs, and we are taking a stand today to let them know our priorities. Together, we can reflect on the struggles that brought us here, and work toward a better tomorrow.

### Values

**Leader:** Let us honor the Indigenous People of this land... whose right of existence was stolen from them through genocide, who were forcefully expelled from their ancestral homes in what is now called Virginia.

**All:** Let us acknowledge and honor the Original Inhabitants of this land.

**Leader:** Let us open our hearts to those who are experiencing the housing crisis firsthand. Let us stand with those who are unhoused, who live in tents or cars, who share single-family homes between multiple households, or who are one paycheck away from being unhoused.

**All:** Let us stand with those who are facing eviction or are behind on rent or mortgage payments.

**Leader:** Let us stand with those who want to achieve the American dream of home ownership, but find the housing costs out of reach.

**All:** Let us stand with those who have been discriminated against in housing.

**Leader:** Let us stand with those who make impossible choices, between food and medicine, child care and transportation, in order to keep their families housed.

**All:** Let us remember how our commonwealth and our communities have fallen short in taking care of our neighbors.

**Leader:** Let us take action to increase access to affordable and accessible housing for everyone in Virginia.

**All:** We seek justice and housing for all.

**Leader:** Virginia has a shortage of at least 200,000 affordable homes, and yet has no budget increases for housing construction this year.

**All:** We want to see \$75 million designated for Virginia's Housing Trust Fund.

**Leader:** Families who qualify for federal housing vouchers wait years to receive them, and Virginia still doesn't have money in the budget for a state housing voucher program.

**All:** We want to see \$90 million designated for Virginia's Housing Stability Fund.

**Leader:** Virginia has one of the highest rates of eviction filing in the country, and yet there is no money in the budget for the Eviction Reduction Program.

**All:** We want to see \$12.5 million designated for Virginia's Eviction Reduction Program.

**Leader:** Knowing that more than 400,000 Virginia households spend more than half their income on housing costs, we stand together and look to our legislators to do more.

**All:** We seek justice and housing for all.

**Leader:** Pursuing justice and housing, we move forward together.

**All:** We believe that all people deserve safe and affordable housing, and we commit to working toward this goal together. We will urge our leaders to prioritize the poor, the forgotten, and the beloved of God. Together, we can make housing for all a reality in Virginia.

### Testimonies

**Leader:** Let's now hear from anyone in our group who would like to share their story of struggle with affordable housing, or how they see the need manifest in the community.

*[People in the group are invited to share their testimonies.]*

**Leader:** Thank you for sharing your stories. We show our love for our neighbors by pushing for real improvements in their lives. As Rev Dr. Cornell West says,

**All:** "Justice is what love looks like in public."

### Action

**Leader:** Now, let's put that love into action. Take out your cell phone. *(Pause for folks to find their phones)*. Scan the QR code at the bottom of the page. Has everyone gotten to a petition about affordable housing? If not, help your neighbor find it. Now, put in your home address and the names of your Senator and Delegate should pop up. Check the two boxes and send the pre-crafted emails to them or edit as you'd like.

*[Give people a bit of time to do this.]*

**Leader:** Now that we have shared our thoughts with legislators, it's time for us to amplify our message. Stay around for a few minutes and take pictures of yourself and tag [@vainterfaith](https://www.instagram.com/vainterfaith) on social media. Share why you participated in this action today. Link to the petition, and invite others in your network to send emails to their legislators. Thank you for your advocacy.

**All:** Advocacy is a group endeavor. We work together to make Virginia a place of justice.

**Leader:** Thank you for your belief, your love put into action, and your commitment to advocacy. We can make a difference by working together. Thank you for joining us today.

**Prayer by religious leader:** *Focus on themes of housing and action. Again, take care to make the prayer inclusive of all faith journeys.*



←QR code for petition

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