



## PRESS RELEASE

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## VIRGINIA NOW LAUNCHES STATE LAW REVIEW

*Project will Analyze All State Laws for Discrimination*

**RICHMOND, VA, JAN. 19, 2023** — The Virginia Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) will announce the launch of the **Virginia Law Audit Project (VLAP)**, a nonpartisan, statewide law review designed to uncover and cure discrimination and eliminate archaic language.

This ambitious, precedent-setting, and multi-year effort aims to conduct a modernization review of state statutes, administrative code, and the Virginia Constitution to identify all forms of discrimination (including race, age, gender, employment, harassment, retaliation, pregnancy, disability, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation, religious, etc.), periodically report findings, and make recommendations for change to legislators.

“Our intent is to ensure the Commonwealth is a more just and fair place to live, work, play, and do business,” said Virginia NOW President, Lisa Sales, who will introduce supporting organizations and stakeholders on Tuesday. “Words matter and connect people, and our children need to see themselves not just in the books they read and the shows they watch, but in the laws that govern them. They can’t be what they can’t see. We look to inspire other states to move out similarly, examining and updating their statutes.”

The first step of the VLAP audit is to tease out language conveying unfair deference to one person versus another, for example, where a statute may reflect terms that are not gender- or religion-neutral; this is being accomplished by global law firm, Winston & Strawn, using a software application called *Relativity*. “We are honored to partner with Virginia NOW in this endeavor to revise code, so it more fairly applies to all residents,” said Greg A. McConnell, Senior Pro Bono Counsel at Winston & Strawn.

The second step is for VLAP committees to identify disparate impact and/or treatment in the letter or spirit of the law. Initial areas of analysis include family law, education, health, employment law, judiciary, criminal justice reform, housing, economic and consumer justice. “We invite people with lived experiences who believe they were adversely impacted to share their stories with us so we can expose gaps in law and advocate for and recommend fixes to our representatives. We don’t know what we don’t know until folks step forward and we learn more, and they may do so confidentially if they wish,” Sales offered.



Later this year, Hollins University will hold an overnight student Hack-A-Thon in the campus library to review and debate Virginia statutes.

Additional expertise is provided by legal scholars, nonprofit and advocacy organizations, including:

- University of Virginia, School of Law
- George Mason University, Schar School of Policy & Government, Gender & Policy Center (GAP)
- Hollins University
- The Purple Campaign
- Stop Child Abuse Now (SCAN)
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) for Children
- SafeSpot Children’s Advocacy Center
- The League of Women Voters (LWV) – Virginia
- The American Association of University Women (AAUW) – Virginia
- National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) – Virginia
- Planned Parenthood Advocates of Virginia
- Women Lawyers On Guard Action Network
- National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Virginia Chapters
- National Women’s Political Caucus (NWPC) - Virginia
- Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities
- Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance
- Zonta Club of Fairfax

Virginia NOW and supporting organizations will host a press conference next week to provide more details about VLAP and take questions about the mission and goals.

**When:** January 24, 2023, 10:00 a.m.

**Where:** Virginia House of Delegates Briefing Room - Pocahontas Building

**Address:** 1000 Bank St., Richmond, VA 23219

***The Virginia National Organization for Women (NOW)*** is an all-volunteer state chapter of National NOW which was founded in 1966 to take action through intersectional advocacy, promoting awareness of issues which lead to societal change. We work to eliminate all forms of discrimination and to achieve and protect the equal rights of women and girls in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. As the cornerstone of the grassroots arm of the women’s movement, NOW is dedicated to its multi-issue and multi-strategy approach to women’s rights and is the largest organization of feminist advocates in the United States. NOW has hundreds of chapters and hundreds of thousands of members and advocates in all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Contact us, learn more, or donate to support the Virginia Law Audit Project (VLAP) at: [www.vanow.org](http://www.vanow.org). You can follow us on Instagram and Twitter @VANOWChapter.

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