



Meet board chair of Virginia Museum of History & Culture **B3**



Firsts in Boston **B2**

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Richmond Free Press

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VOL. 30 NO. 13

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

www.richmondfreepress.com

MARCH 25-27, 2021

High cost of defense

Everett L. Bolling Jr. tries to piece his life back together after winning in court but losing everything in a murder case

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Eight months ago, Everett L. Bolling Jr., 37, seemed to have it all. He was running a successful used car dealership near George Wythe High School on South Side.

He was married, owned a home in Chesterfield County and believed he was living the dream.

But his world came crashing down when he suddenly found himself in handcuffs and accused of first-degree murder in Richmond.

The father of five had been having an affair.

When his pregnant 31-year-old girlfriend was found shot to death April 9 in her car in the city's East End, police and the Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney Office targeted him as the only person with the motive and opportunity to commit this crime.

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Regina H. Boone for Richmond Free Press

City students, families, teachers adjust to new styles of learning during a year with pandemic

By Ronald E. Carrington

Tisha Erby has four children attending Richmond Public Schools.

There's 3-year-old Emanuel who is in Summer Hill Elementary's pre-school;

Elijah, 5, a kindergartner at J.L. Francis Elementary; and Lamar, 11, and Christopher, 13, sixth- and seventh-graders, respectively at the new River City Middle School.

They love virtual learning, Ms. Erby said. And they are thriving.

Ms. Erby is home with them every day. It sometimes drives her insane, she said, because she also has a 1-year-old, Tristan, who cries when she pays more attention to the other children.

But even Tristan, enjoys the school activities of the older children, Ms. Erby said, especially physical education, movement or dancing. That's when he tries to imitate his siblings, she said.

Since March 6, 2020, when Richmond schools were shut down because of COVID-19, the family's South Side home has been turned into its own schoolhouse, with Ms. Erby sitting between Emanuel and Elijah to make sure they are not distracted from their schoolwork.

She also says the two elementary children interact online with their classmates and teacher using Chromebooks provided by RPS while doing a lot with hands-on writing, music and dance at home.

"My 3-year-old was typing all of the time until I made sure he learned to print. Now he is always printing verses typing," she said. "I see my daily hard work paying off."

Her middle schoolers, she explained, work independently and don't require the amount of oversight as the younger ones. They have five classes every other day, which they like, she said, and are earning As and Bs.

their creative skills to keep students' interested and engaged for several hours using 21st century technology.

Even as teachers have worked during the months of the pandemic to make virtual learning positive and effective,



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

Tisha Erby keeps things moving and the learning going for her four school-age sons in their family's home. The living room has been turned into a vibrant classroom, with desks and laptops for each of the boys. They are, from left, Emanuel, 3, a pre-schooler at Summer Hill Elementary; Christopher Jr., 13, a seventh-grader at River City Middle School; Elijah, 5, a kindergartner at J.L. Francis Elementary; and Lamar, 11, a sixth-grader at River City Middle. Seated in a high chair in the room, but not pictured, is year-old Tristan, who was working on his own activities given to him by his mom.

While she is happy with all of her children's progress, she is not happy about their ability to wander around the internet exploring websites not associated with their classes, playing games, listening to music and getting into other distractions that take them from their RPS instruction.

The older boys, she said, also prefer being in school and socializing with friends.

The past year under COVID-19 has been an adjustment for the thousands of Richmond students and their families, as well as for hundreds of teachers using

some students are suffering under social isolation, family stress and technology that doesn't always work.

Richmond School Board members, administrators, teachers and parents alike also are worried about education gaps created by the year under COVID-19, and what it may mean for students' future success, particularly once schools reopen for in-person learning in the fall.

At the School Board's March 15 meeting, Tracy Epp, RPS' chief academic officer, presented results from the Pho-

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Free COVID-19 testing

Free community testing for COVID-19 continues. The Richmond and Henrico County health districts are offering testing at the following locations:

- **Thursday, March 25**, 10 a.m. to noon, Diversity Theater, 1407 Sherwood Ave. in North Side.
- **Thursday, April 1**, 1 to 3 p.m., Second Baptist Church of South Richmond, 3300 Broad Rock Blvd. Drive-thru testing.

Appointments are encouraged by calling the Richmond and Henrico COVID-19 Hotline at (804) 205-3501 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, or by registering online at <https://bit.ly/RHHDCOVID>. Testing will be offered while test supplies last. The Virginia Department of Health also has a list of

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New coalition offers blueprint for more affordable housing

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

A coalition of Richmond groups is advancing a policy agenda they hope can be a blueprint for City Hall's efforts to reduce evictions and make affordable apartments and homes more available.

The coalition includes the Partnership for Smarter Growth, Richmond for All and the Virginia Poverty Law Center, and plans to launch its efforts to gain government and public support for the proposals next Monday, March 29.

As outlined in a 17-page plan, key proposals the coalition wants to see enacted include:

- Creation of a program to supplement rents of poor households to prevent evictions and increased homelessness;
- Ensuring individuals and families facing eviction have access to a lawyer by beefing up city support for legal aid;
- Mandating one-for-one replacement of any public housing that is slated for demolition and replacement to prevent a reduction in housing for poor families;
- Upgrading the Richmond 300 master plan and any future zoning laws to include affordable housing; and
- Making it easier for affordable housing developers to purchase public property at a lower cost to boost the number of units they can create.

The coalition is the latest to weigh in on an issue that has continued to gain attention in the city and suburbs.

With home prices and apartment rents soaring, affordable hous-

Please turn to A4

PayPal names new award for Richmond legend Maggie L. Walker

By Jeremy M. Lazarus



Mrs. Walker

Trailblazing businesswoman Maggie L. Walker sought to empower women in her pioneering efforts in business and banking in Richmond at the turn of the 20th century.

Inspired by her story, online payment system giant PayPal is creating an award named for the legendary Richmonder.

The award is designed to honor inspiring minority women — Black, Asian, Latino, Native

American and others — who are leading and advancing economic empowerment as Mrs. Walker did, the company has announced.

The first two winners of the annual award are to be announced in August, also known as National Black Business Month, PayPal stated.

The honorees will include an established leader with an inspiring career who will receive the Maggie Lena Walker Achievement Award and a \$50,000 stipend and an up-and-coming individual who is leading change who will receive the Maggie Lena Walker Emerging Leader Award and a \$20,000 stipend, according to the company.

While the initial winners will be from the United States, the company plans to expand the award to the global community in the future.

PayPal consulted with the family before moving ahead

Please turn to A4

Everett Bolling tries to piece his life back together

Continued from A1

Two months after her running car and body were found, Mr. Bolling was behind bars at the Richmond City Justice Center.

He was charged with the pre-meditated fatal shooting of Francesca Harris-Scarborough and her unborn child on Blakey Street in the city's East End, more than three miles from her South Side residence. DNA testing proved she was carrying his child.

On March 12, though, after a weeklong court battle, a Richmond jury found Mr. Bolling not guilty and he walked out of court a free man.

According to his defense lawyers, Shannon Dillon and Alex Taylor, prosecutors never offered the jury proof that Mr. Bolling owned or had access to the .45-caliber weapon that was used, but never found by police.

A doorbell video showed a male figure who was the apparent killer, but it was too grainy to provide any identification. A small amount of DNA left on the passenger-side door handle of her car was found to exclude him.

Prosecutors also presented evidence tracking a cell phone, but never linked possession of the phone to Mr. Bolling, his lawyers said.

Though Mr. Bolling is celebrating his victory, the church-going Richmond native, like everyone else who goes through the criminal court grinder, is having to deal with the upheaval and loss that the arrest caused.

Winning in court came with a huge price tag, a significant

punishment in itself that he must deal with. Police and prosecutors cannot be sued for bringing a case, even if they get it wrong. That price includes the loss of his home, his business and his savings, along with family togetherness.

"I'm having to start over," he said about dealing with fallout that is just as severe as if he had been convicted.

The only saving grace is that he was found not guilty of the crime and wasn't locked up for years.

Even before trial, Mr. Bolling said he paid a price. An arrest for murder ensured that his face and the charge were broadcast on local news reports and printed in the daily newspaper. The result: "My reputation and character were called into question" by those who knew him, he said, despite his assertion that he had no part in the killing.

And the costs to him from the arrest just kept mounting.

According to Tracy Paner, director of the Richmond Public Defender's Office, people who spend as little as three days in jail can lose their jobs, their possessions and their ability to handle the world.

Mr. Bolling is a prime example of what happens when detention lasts longer.

He spent eight months in the Richmond City Justice Center awaiting trial, which cut off his income. Though his wife worked, she could not afford the mortgage on their home, which then went into foreclosure. She was forced to find a more affordable place for her and their children.

"It's been a great strain on the family," Mr. Bolling said. "They had to get a new place."

His ties to his wife remain strained, though she supported him in court. Since his acquittal, he has been living with a relative as he begins to rebuild.

While incarcerated, his company defaulted on the leased car lot on Midlothian Turnpike which he had operated for nine years.

Mr. Bolling, a slender, bearded man with an infectious laugh and easygoing manner, appeared to check all the boxes for pretrial release, a process that the Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney's Office has long supported to reduce disruption to people's lives before their case goes to court.

A family man, he could demonstrate strong ties to the community along with his self-employment. He also was active in a local church and could point to community activities, including being regularly called on by officials to bring positive messages to inmates at the city's Juvenile Detention Center as well as the Justice Center.

And though he had served time in 2002 on a drug possession conviction, he already had his civil and voting rights restored and had not been charged or convicted of another criminal offense since, a claim supported by online court databases that do not list any misdemeanor or felony charges under his name between 2002 and the 2020 murder charge.

However, a Richmond judge rejected a bail request based on arguments from Katherine Groover, the assistant commonwealth's attorney who prosecuted the case.

Armed with certainty that Mr. Bolling was rightly arrested, Ms. Groover argued that Mr. Bolling should remain locked up because of the seriousness of the crime. She also argued that Mr. Bolling was a flight risk as he had a history of out-of-state business travel and church-related mission trips.

In jail, Mr. Bolling said he passed the time by reading and offering a class on starting and operating a business for inmates on his tier.

Then there was the cost of legal representation from his two attorneys, who teamed up to handle what the Richmond Commonwealth's Attorney's Office described as a complex circumstantial case.

Mr. Bolling said he is grateful for the experience and knowledge his lawyers brought to his case. He praises their ability to counter key commonwealth witnesses and for showing the jury through their arguments and cross-examination that the commonwealth had failed to prove its case.

But private lawyers do not come cheap. The Richmond Public Defender's Office would have taken his case without charge, but Mr. Bolling said he believed he needed the kind of veteran lawyers who need to be paid.

Mr. Bolling said the lawyers' bill tops \$60,000.

"I had to use up my savings," he said. Paying attorneys "was definitely not how I planned to use that money," he said.

He also had to sell the remaining inventory on the car lot to raise the lion's share of the money. Still, he has a debt to them that he needs to pay off.

Now that he is free, his goal is to get back into the used car business as quickly as possible.

"It's going to take time," Mr. Bolling said. "I'm doing everything I can to put this behind me."

City students, families, teachers adjust to new styles of learning during a year with pandemic

Continued from A1

nological Awareness Literacy Screening, or PALS, for elementary students between fall and winter 2020-21.

She said the report showed an average 8 percent drop in kindergarten growth in letter sounds; a 10 percent drop in proficiency in letter sounds; an 8 percent drop in reading proficiency; and a 7.4 percent growth in spelling for first- and second-graders.

Many teachers and families are supported, however, by Stay RVA, a solution-oriented, action-based organization of parents and others who help by delivering equipment to students — computers, instruments, worksheets or textbooks.

For students learning to play music in band and orchestra classes, teachers many times must meet them at their homes or at school to repair instruments.

On the positive side, art instructors said they have a variety of media platforms that help teach and support students on their level of performance. These platforms help teachers and students work together in real time, in large or small groups, in a shared electronic space. They said the technology was not available to them before the coronavirus shutdown.

While many art instructors said they are looking forward to schools reopening for in-person learning this fall, they want to make sure some of the technology and virtual platforms return to school with them to enhance future instruction.

RPS parent Amy Wentz said she listens to her 6-year-old daughter Zoe's virtual classroom interaction every day. The teacher, she said, is bilingual in English and Spanish and proficient in the new teaching technology.

She said she has witnessed the students

— from various ethnic backgrounds and with various skills — having fun learning at J.L. Francis Elementary.

"Their growth has been amazing," Ms. Wentz said.

She said she is amazed to see Zoe's classmates help each by doing little things — letting each other know when to turn the mute button on or off — and how they communicate with their teacher.

"Since September, Zoe's class has gone from knowing only sight words to reading chapter books.

"My Zoe likes virtual learning and doesn't want to go back to the classroom."

However, Ms. Wentz, who works from home, said she is aware that everyone isn't thriving in the virtual school environment. She said she regularly participates in School Board Zoom meetings and keeps up with the daily communications from the RPS administration.

Free COVID-19 testing

Continued from A1

COVID-19 testing locations around the state at www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-sites/.

Want a COVID-19 vaccine?

Seniors ages 65 and older who live in Richmond or Henrico County can call the Richmond and Henrico Health Districts COVID-19 hotline — (804) 205-3501 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday to schedule a vaccine appointment.

Others who want a vaccine should contact the statewide COVID-19 Vaccination Pre-Registration System at vaccinate.virginia.gov or by calling 877-VAX-IN-VA, or (877) 829-4682.

The statewide call center is open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week to help people pre-register by phone or to answer questions about the vaccine. The call center has English- and Spanish-speaking agents and a call-back service to help people in more than 100 other languages.

Additionally, TTY service is available to help people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

With at least 25 percent of Virginia's population having received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccines, Gov. Ralph S. Northam announced Tuesday the loosening of some pandemic safety restrictions in the Commonwealth.

Beginning Thursday, April 1, the cap on social gatherings will be raised to 50 people indoors and 100 people outdoors. The current caps are 10 people indoors and 25 outdoors. The guidelines also encompass weddings, the governor stated.

Additionally, entertainment venues can open up to 30 percent of

capacity, up to 500 people, while outdoor venues can open up to 30 percent without a numerical cap, according to the governor's order.

Recreational sports venues will be capped at 30 percent occupancy both for indoor and outdoor facilities, under the guidelines.

The changes don't apply to restaurants, gyms, salons and bars. And those who attend events or go to the venues must still wear face masks and follow other COVID-19 safety protocols.

State health officials reported Wednesday that more than 3.2 million doses of the vaccine have been administered in the state, with 1.1 million people fully vaccinated, or 13.1 percent of the state's residents.

The Richmond City Health District opened its latest mass vaccination center at Celebration Church in South Side. The site opened on Tuesday, with 861 people receiving vaccines. The center will be open once a week for now, with the goal of vaccinating 800 to 1,000 people with each clinic.

State officials reported 608,704 cases of COVID-19 statewide on Wednesday, along with 26,037 hospitalizations and 10,143 deaths. Virginia's seven-day positivity rate has been holding at 5.6 percent over several days. Last week, it was 5.4 percent.

According to state data, African-Americans comprised 21.9 percent of cases statewide and 24.5 percent of deaths for which ethnic and racial data is available, while Latinos made up 16.7 percent of cases and 6.5 percent of deaths.

Reported COVID data as of Wednesday, March 24, 2021

	Cases	Hospitalizations	Deaths
Richmond	15,453	741	239
Henrico County	22,675	953	566
Chesterfield County	24,999	845	388
Hanover County	7,106	258	147

PayPal names new award for Richmond legend Maggie L. Walker

Continued from A1

with award.

"This is incredibly exciting," said Liza Mickens, a descendant of Mrs. Walker, who remains best known as the first Black woman to found and serve as president of a U.S. bank.

Ms. Mickens serves as the family's spokeswoman and will be part of the selection committee.

"We are ecstatic to see Maggie Walker's legacy so embraced," she said.

A champion of women's rights herself and co-founder of VoteEquality that continues to push to enshrine equal rights for women in the U.S. Constitution, the 23-year-old Ms. Mickens believes such national attention for her great-great-grandmother is long overdue, particularly for the work Mrs. Walker did to empower women as the leader of the Independent Order of St. Luke.

In Richmond, Mrs. Walker is well known. Her Jackson Ward home is a national historic site run by the National Park Service and buildings and streets are named for her, as are a community land bank that develops affordable housing and

a community employment initiative.

The city also has put up a statue to Mrs. Walker at Adams and Broad streets, the entry to the Jackson Ward community where she was a powerhouse before her death in 1934.

But nationally, Mrs. Walker remains little known and underrepresented in the pantheon of American businesswomen, Ms. Mickens said. Her multiple efforts to advance civil rights and women often go unmentioned, she said.

"A lot of people know about her chartering a bank," Ms. Mickens said. "But her contributions to women's rights and her political work are less well known."

That includes Mrs. Walker's efforts to secure voting rights for women or the fact that she was the first Black woman to run for statewide office in 1921, a year after women secured the vote, Ms. Mickens said, noting that Mrs. Walker ran for superintendent of public education on the Lily Black Republican ticket.

As grand secretary of the Order of St. Luke, Mrs. Walker led the fraternal society in opening a department store a few doors from where her statue now stands and in producing a newspaper, along with creating

a bank. She filled a majority of the posts with Black women.

She also helped lead a boycott of the Richmond trolley system after seating was segregated by race. The boycott bankrupted the company.

She also was a founding member of the Richmond Branch NAACP to help fight for civil rights when government-enforced racial segregation was in full flower, Ms. Mickens noted.

Dan Schulman, PayPal's chief executive officer, considers Mrs. Walker a prime example of the impact one person can make and an ideal example for the company in seeking to honor modern heroes.

"At a time when Black people in the United States were denied opportunities for wealth creation, Maggie Lena Walker made it her life's mission to advocate for economic independence in her community," he stated in explaining why the award is named for her.

"Her story is one of perseverance, dedication and bravery," Mr. Schulman continued.

"In this spirit, we are honoring Mrs. Walker and her contributions through this award program that recognizes women who are leading and advancing economic empowerment in underserved communities."

New coalition offers blueprint for more affordable housing

Continued from A1

ing has become a top agenda item for Mayor Levar M. Stoney and the City Council. The mayor has set a goal of having 10,000 new units of affordable housing developed in Richmond by 2030 and has committed to beefing up the city's Affordable Housing Trust Fund to \$10 million a year within five years to support the effort.

Richmonders Involved to Strengthen Our Communities, a faith-based coalition known as RISC, is pressing for City Council to boost the trust fund to \$10 million in a far shorter time to bring more resources to bear.

The new coalition believes its recommendations could put policies in place to support increasing the numbers of affordable units.

"It is essential that the City Council and Planning Commission focus their efforts on the small number of affordable housing tools that have the biggest impact," said Stephen Wade, board vice president of Partnership for Smarter Growth.

That includes the policy of replacing public housing units on a one-for-one basis, he said, using housing dollars to provide rental supplements and putting in place zoning that encourages affordable housing development.

As others have found, the coalition sees evictions and housing affordability reaching a crisis level for a city where one in four households lives below the poverty line and where more than half of all households are earning less than the area's median annual income that tops \$80,000 a year for a family of four.

Evidence of the crisis, according to the coalition, can be found in the eviction notices that yearly go out to nearly one-third of Richmond renters because they are delinquent on rent. While the majority are not evicted, Richmond still ranks among the top cities for its eviction rate.

Prior to COVID-19 and the temporary moratoriums on evictions, up to 17 people a day were being evicted for having an average of \$1,000 in past-due rent.

For such families, finding replacement housing is an increasing challenge. According to the coalition, currently there are only 30 affordable housing units for every 100 households earning less than 30 percent of the area's median income. For families making 50 percent of the area's median income, there are only 63 units for every 100 such residents.

The supply of such units is far below the demand.

The result: More than half of Richmond's households are cost-burdened for housing, meaning they pay more than 30 percent of income for housing, with Black and Latino households impacted to a greater extent than white households.

The coalition is pushing for a more targeted approach from the government to help deal with the issue.

Laura Wright of the Virginia Poverty Law Center noted that "local rent supplement programs provide financial assistance to families earning 30 percent or below of median income.

"Such a program would pay the difference between their rent and what they are able to pay," she continued. "This program, along with funding for housing attorneys to represent such families in court, is essential" to reducing evictions.

Quinton Robbins of Richmond For All noted that any city policy agenda for affordable housing must include protecting the availability of affordable housing in the form of public housing. Such housing continues to be one of the key elements of providing safe and affordable housing for individuals and families at the lowest end of the income scale.



Ms. Mickens



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VOL. 30 NO. 25

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

www.richmondfreepress.com

JUNE 17-19, 2021

Tops in their class



Photos by Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

The valedictorians at Richmond's public high schools celebrate during a group photo last Saturday at Byrd Park. They are, from left, Te'Vonya Jeter of Huguenot; Aissatou Barry of Richmond Community; Airhiez Cabrera of Armstrong; Harold Aquino-Guzman of George Wythe; Terri Lee of Franklin Military Academy; Mary Jane Perkins-Lynch of Thomas Jefferson; and Abena Williams of Open High. Right, A'Nya Davis of John Marshall.

Richmond Public Schools valedictorians take the stage next week to speak at high school commencements

By Ronald E. Carrington

It's graduation time — and time to celebrate.

The Richmond Public Schools Class of 2021 has gotten through a year of virtual learning with the pandemic and has a bevy of top scholars to show for it.



With GPAs ranging from 4.4 to 5.1, RPS valedictorians will have the honor to speak at their respective graduation ceremonies

that take place next week.

In the first return to a more traditional commencement ceremony, members of the Class of 2021 will don their caps and gowns and march proudly across a stage at The Diamond baseball stadium on Arthur

Personality on B3

Ashe Boulevard to receive their diplomas and begin a new chapter in their lives.

The Class of 2021 has many high-achieving students who collectively have garnered millions of dollars in scholarship offers to pursue further studies in the fall at various colleges and universities.

The top students have been recognized and honored by RPS in a Zoom conference with Superintendent Jason Kamras, special video

Please turn to A4

Ambulance Authority struggling to keep up with calls

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

The Richmond Ambulance Authority has long boasted of being a role model in emergency response. The idea that a city-based ambulance—lights flashing and sirens blasting—would quickly race to the scene of an accident, a fire, a shooting, a heart attack or other life-threatening situation has become a common expectation.

But like other elements of Richmond's public safety apparatus, the 30-year-old authority is now struggling to field enough staff to respond in a timely fashion to emergency and non-emergency calls.

That became evident Saturday afternoon when it took about 60 minutes for RAA to send an ambulance to pick up a pregnant woman who was injured in a collision at Bells Road and Richmond Highway.

She had her three young children with her when

her car was struck, authorities reported.

According to confirmed reports, Latanya Thompson lay on the ground while firefighters who had responded quickly treated her. She gave birth prematurely on Tuesday, 22 days before her due date, although from another cause other than the stress of the situation.

At the time, eight ambulances were on the road, RAA reported, and all were occupied handling emergencies or the transport of patients to a hospital.

Based on predicted demand, RAA acknowledged that 12 to 16 fully equipped ambulances should have been providing coverage.

But that is no longer possible.

"Recently, on average, our Advanced Life Support ambulances have been 56 percent staffed during the day and 58 percent during the night compared to what our staffing calls for to more



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

The Richmond Ambulance Authority operates a fleet of ambulances out of its headquarters at 2400 Hermitage Road in North Side.

than meet demand," RAA spokesman Mark Tenia said.

Mr. Tenia said staffing is now a major challenge, resulting in lagging response times on

Please turn to A4

Mayor Stoney turns up the heat, orders RFP for new George Wythe to be issued

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Mayor Levar M. Stoney is moving to hire an architectural firm to design the new George Wythe High School whether the Richmond School Board likes it or not — even as he acknowledged that City Hall would need the board's consent to actually build the school.

With 5th District Councilwoman Stephanie A. Lynch and supporters of a new George Wythe cheering him on, the mayor announced Wednesday

that he has directed Procurement Director Betty J. Burrell to issue a previously prepared request for design services, or RFP, effective Thursday, June 17. Responses would be due within 45 days.

The move is the latest twist in an ongoing battle for control of school construction. Since mid-April, five of the nine members of the School Board have in-



Mayor Stoney

sisted that Richmond Public Schools would resume control of school construction that had been ceded to City Hall more than a decade ago.

For the mayor, the final straw was a timeline that Richmond Public Schools Superintendent Jason Kamras issued last week showing that the school system would take six years to open a replacement for George Wythe, instead of

the three years the city has indicated it would take.

"This timeline is not acceptable — not to me and especially not to the families and children of the Wythe community," Mayor Stoney said.

However, he acknowledged that his directive is actually more for show and is aimed at bringing the School Board back to the table to set up a collaborative process.

The city "can't legally build

Please turn to A4



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

Budding athlete

Tajiya Taper, 2, of Henrico County has fun trying to get the soccer balls into the goal set up last Saturday at Mt. Olivet Church in Church Hill for Operation Homebase. The youngster was attending the event with her grandparents, Nicole and Rodney Gore with the Team Loaded Foundation. Please see more photos, A8.

Free COVID-19 testing, vaccines

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Appointments are not necessary, but can be made by calling the Richmond and Henrico COVID-19 Hotline at (804) 205-3501 from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday, or by registering online at <https://bit.ly/RHHDCOVID>.

Testing will be offered while test supplies last.

COVID-19 testing also is available at various drug stores, clinics and urgent care centers throughout the area for

Please turn to A4

City Council gives greenlight to casino project

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Richmond easily leaped the first hurdle in its quest to become a casino city — City Council approval.

Led by President Cynthia I. Newbille, the city's governing body voted 8-1 Monday to send a private group's plan to create a \$562.5 million resort-casino in South Side to city voters for approval.

The majority, who heard mostly supportive comments at a public hearing, overrode the dissent of 2nd District Councilwoman



Mr. Liggins

councilwoman Reva M. Trammell, who is thrilled about getting a huge project in her district, publicly scolded Ms. Jordan

for her opposition. Ms. Trammell claimed Ms. Jordan had privately promised to support the casino in Ms. Trammell's district. Ms. Trammell said she told Ms. Jordan she would back Ms. Jordan's opposition to a casino in North Side in exchange.

for her opposition.

"I keep my word," Ms. Trammell said.

Along with gaming, the proposed Black-owned development on 100 acres

Please turn to A4

VUU launches new Hezekiah Walker Center for Gospel Music with Juneteenth concert

By Ronald E. Carrington

Grammy Award-winner Hezekiah Walker and Virginia Union University are establishing the Hezekiah Walker Center for Gospel Music, which will host an inaugural event on the campus on Juneteenth, Saturday, June 19.

"Juneteenth: Sounds of Freedom Celebration" will feature the VUU Choir, led

by award-winning producer David Bratton, and nine additional choirs from the area, and will take place 4:30 to 8 p.m.

Related story on B2

at Hovey Field.

There will be a special appearance by Mr. Walker and guests.

The event is free. Lawn chairs are

encouraged, university officials said, but large bags, coolers and umbrellas are not allowed.

Additionally, several Black-owned food vendors will be onsite, along with voter registration information and community volunteer opportunities.

The concert is a joint celebration of the emancipation of enslaved Americans in Texas after the Civil War and two years

after the Emancipation Proclamation and the launch of the new gospel center.

The first of its kind in the United States, the Hezekiah Walker Center for Gospel Music will provide education and resources to help musicians and budding gospel artists learn gospel music, culture and the industry.

Please turn to A4



Mr. Walker

RPS valedictorians will take the stage next week

Continued from A1

profiles on the RPS home page and individual spotlight profiles on RPS Direct as well as the RPS Facebook page.

This is just the beginning.

Here are this year's valedictorians and where they plan to matriculate in the fall, along with information on schools' graduation ceremonies:

Huguenot: Te'Vonya Jeter, 4.6 GPA, Howard University.

Ceremony: 9 a.m. Monday, June 21. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Dwight Baldwin Jr. Watch live on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/gCeKJdzVqbo>

Open High: Abena Williams, 4.9 GPA,

Norfolk State University.

Ceremony: 4 p.m. Monday, June 21. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Esme Munson. Watch live on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/6B76O40096Q>

John Marshall: A'Nya Davis, 4.4 GPA, Longwood University.

Ceremony: 7 p.m., Monday, June 21. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Marna "Maria" Diallo. Watch live on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/ThF1148XQtI>

Armstrong: Airhiez Cabrera, 4.6 GPA, Virginia Tech.

Ceremony: 9 a.m. Tuesday, June 22. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Tamia Harvey. Watch live on YouTube - https://youtu.be/9e5Wo_TPnN4

Richmond Community: Aissatou Barry, 4.8 GPA, University of Virginia.

Ceremony: 1 p.m. Tuesday, June 22. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Aris Ruff. Watch live on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/0bPfwU0hYM>

George Wythe: Harold Aquino-Guzman, 5.1 GPA, Virginia Commonwealth University.

Ceremony: 9 a.m. Wednesday, June 23. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Krystal Spurlock. Watch live on YouTube - https://youtu.be/wgb3eFP_G5M

Franklin Military Academy: Terri Lee, 4.4 GPA, Howard University.

Ceremony: 4 p.m. Wednesday, June 23. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Joyce

Nyakana. Watch live on YouTube - https://youtu.be/sBkDY_LKZX4

Thomas Jefferson: Mary Jane Perkins-Lynch, 4.9 GPA, Hollins College.

Ceremony: 7 p.m. Wednesday, June 23. Speakers, valedictorian and Salutatorian Latisha Jones. Watch live on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/XpSsaCYeCjc>

The Richmond Career Education & Employment Academy (RCEEA) and Amelia Street School will hold their own graduation ceremonies. Details are available at the schools.

Details on the ceremonies at The Diamond, including information on parking, seating and mask requirements: www.rvaschools.net/domain/2017

Ambulance Authority struggling to keep up with calls

Continued from A1

emergency calls and long delays on calls that RAA deems non-life threatening.

"RAA has held itself to a high standard, and for the first time since becoming a self-operating agency, RAA is facing unprecedented challenges in meeting that standard," Mr. Tenia acknowledged.

Ironically, RAA was organized in 1991 to end a failing ambulance system that relied on private companies that had a reputation for slow responses.

RAA is now telling City Hall that "we are nearing a breaking point," Mr. Tenia said. "Our system is set up to be effective and cost-efficient, but both our effectiveness and efficiency are starting to suffer" as staffing declines and response goals become impossible to meet.

He said for the past three years, RAA has been losing

people more quickly than their replacements can be trained. In the first six months of this year, RAA hired 14 people but lost 30, he said. In 2020, RAA hired 50 new field employees, but lost 71.

The result: The shrunken staff of emergency workers "is responding to more calls and experiencing a heavier workload," Mr. Tenia said, while having to wear more protective gear in response to the pandemic.

RAA is not alone in struggling with personnel shortfalls, although it has managed mostly to avoid the spotlight and the interest of 8th District City Councilwoman Reva M. Trammell or the council's Public Safety Committee she chairs.

Most attention from the committee has focused on shortfalls in the Richmond Police and Fire departments, which have gone to mandatory overtime to fill staffing gaps as personnel leave

faster than their replacements can be trained.

Police officers and firefighters unsuccessfully lobbied City Council for an overhaul of their pay scale to try and stem the losses. While Ms. Trammell spoke for them, a majority of the council, instead, opted at the prompting of Mayor Levar M. Stoney's administration for a study of the proposed pay plan created by police and fire's rank-and-file.

One reason for the council's decision to slow-walk this issue was cost: The proposed plan that officers and firefighters advanced could collectively boost the two departments' payroll costs \$12 million a year.

Richmond Sheriff Antonette V. Irving also is struggling to find enough deputies. During her successful campaign for the Democratic nomination for re-election, she confirmed she had 110 vacancies among deputies

working at the Richmond City Justice Center. She also has had to use mandatory overtime to try to keep minimal coverage of the jail. Deputies who work at the jail and others who quit said up to 15 pods or cellblocks often go unmonitored at night because of the staff shortages.

The causes for the shortfalls appear to vary by agency, with the rank-and-file often blaming the management styles of supervisors.

But across the board, pay for city public safety positions trail neighboring localities and private companies. The city's trained and sworn personnel often work extra jobs or jump ship to a neighboring jurisdiction to improve their income.

Mr. Tenia said that pay is a significant RAA issue.

"It has been very difficult for RAA to remain competitive in the job market," he said. He said emergency medical

services like RAA have been impacted by a reluctance of people to apply for this kind of work during a pandemic.

In addition, "fewer students have been enrolling and completing classes to be certified as an emergency medical technician, or EMT," which reduces the pool of people to draw from, Mr. Tenia said.

Increased incentives and improved pay would help, he said.

He said currently, new EMTs start at \$35,828 to \$36,902 per year. Those with more advanced certification and experience start around \$38,000 a year. Paramedics, who have the most medical training, start at nearly \$47,000. That is based on a 48-hour work week, or four days at 12 hours a shift.

Mr. Tenia said RAA is working on a plan to boost pay by reducing the work week to 42 hours, while keeping pay rates

the same.

RAA currently has 126 emergency employees, with 73 being full time and 53 part time, he said. While he could not provide a comparison with full staffing, others have told the Free Press that RAA could use at least 70 more people.

As was the case with other public safety agencies, RAA got shot down when it sought \$6.9 million in subsidy from the city for the 2021-22 fiscal year that will begin July 1, or a \$1.9 million increase from the current fiscal year's \$5 million.

"The request was made in order to offset market changes, keep costs low for our patients and provide increases in employee pay to attract new people and retain current staff," Mr. Tenia said. Instead, the council approved the mayor's proposed \$1 million cut in the city's subsidy, reducing the RAA's ability to reduce hours.

Free COVID-19 testing

Continued from A1

people with and without health insurance. Several offer tests with no out-of-pocket costs.

A list of area COVID-19 testing sites is online at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/richmond-city/richmond-and-henrico-area-covid-19-testing-sites/>

The Virginia Department of Health also has a list of COVID-19 testing locations around the state at www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-sites/.

Want a COVID-19 vaccine?

The Richmond and Henrico health districts are offering walk-up COVID-19 vaccines at the following locations:

• **Thursday, June 17,** 1 to 6 p.m. — Eastern Henrico Recreation Center, 1440 N. Laburnum Ave., Pfizer.

• **Saturday, June 19,** 1 to 5 p.m. — Juneteenth celebration at Dorey Park, 2999 Darbytown Road, Eastern Henrico.

• **Tuesday, June 22,** 2 to 3 p.m. — Hillside Court Recreation Center, 1500 Harwood Ave., Moderna; noon to 5 p.m. — Islamic Center of Henrico and Masjid Al-Falah, 7705 Impala Drive, Western Henrico, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

• **Wednesday, June 23,** 3 to 6 p.m. — George Wythe High School, 4314 Crutchfield St., South Richmond, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson; 9 to 11 a.m. — Diversity Thrift, 1407 Sherwood Ave., North Side, Moderna.

• **Thursday, June 24,** noon to 1:30 p.m. — Metropolitan Church Food Pantry, 2501 Park Ave., Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

Children ages 12 to 15 may only receive the Pfizer vaccine. Appointments are not required, but individuals can schedule an appointment online at vax.rchd.com or by calling (804) 205-3501.

VaccineFinder.org and vaccines.gov also allow people to find nearby pharmacies and clinics that offer the COVID-19 vaccine.

The Chesterfield Health District has opened the Rockwood Vaccination Center, 10161 Hull Street Road in Midlothian, in the former Big Lots store in the Rockwood Shopping Center. The center will offer free COVID-19 vaccines 3 to 7 p.m. on Tuesdays and Thursdays and 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays. The Pfizer vaccine will be available for anyone 12 and older and the Johnson & Johnson vaccine will be available for those ages 18 and older.

From 3 to 7 p.m. on Mondays, the Rockwood Vaccination Center will serve as a free immunization clinic for adolescents, rising seventh graders through 12th grade. In addition to the COVID-19 vaccine, the clinic will offer the Tdap, meningococcal and HPV vaccines. A parent or guardian must accompany the youth. Officials ask that participants bring their immunization records with them to the clinic.

According to state health data, 4.1 million people have been fully vaccinated in Virginia as of Wednesday, or about 48.3 percent of the population, while 57.3 percent of the population has received at least one dose of the vaccine.

State officials reported 678,226 cases of COVID-19 statewide on Wednesday, along with 30,241 hospitalizations and 11,330 deaths. Virginia's seven-day positivity rate is 1.6 percent. Last week, it was 2.1 percent.

According to state data, African-Americans comprised 22.4 percent of cases statewide and 25.1 percent of deaths for which ethnic and racial data is available, while Latinos made up 16.3 percent of cases and 6.5 percent of deaths.

Reported COVID-19 data as of Wednesday, June 16, 2021

	Cases	Hospitalizations	Deaths
Richmond	17,141	825	271
Henrico County	25,652	1,097	626
Chesterfield County	28,220	1,016	448
Hanover County	8,221	289	165

Mayor turns up the heat, orders RFP

Continued from A1

a new George Wythe alone," Mayor Stoney noted in his statement, "but I can get the process started, and that's what we're doing. Richmond needs the School Board to do the right thing and participate in the evaluation of proposals for design services by joining us" before the RFP closes at the end of July.

School Board Vice Chair Jonathan Young, a leader of the board's majority, said he would not support a challenge to the mayor's action and noted he has already offered at least 10 ideas for a collaborative process, none of which have been embraced by the School Board or the city.

Mr. Young has said that the timeline issued by Mr. Kamras "does not deserve a passing grade" because it flies in the

face of the construction reality in Henrico and Chesterfield counties and in other communities.

He also has insisted that George Wythe can be built within three years with the School Board in charge, as was the case with new Henrico high schools.

However, Mr. Young also acknowledges that the School Board has "been remiss in failing to address the real meat-and-potato issues."

That includes deciding whether George Wythe needs to be a 2,000-student school, given that Richmond has several thousand empty high school seats and also is planning to build a career and technical education high school in South Side that will add even more capacity.

He said it is time for the board to engage the public and make crucial decisions about

the size of the building, the programming that should be incorporated, the inclusion or not of a public library and public health clinic and the cost.

The city claims a new building would cost \$140 million, or \$40 million more than Henrico County spent for its two new high schools.

"Maybe, we will only need a school with a capacity for 1,500-students if the board is not willing to close any of the high schools in North Side," Mr. Young said. "That could save tens of millions of dollars that could help us afford to build the new technical high school or build or renovate other schools. Every extra dollar we spend on building the new George Wythe is a dollar that will not go to provide new schools for other students who also need them."

City Council gives greenlight to casino project

Continued from A1

at Walmsley Boulevard and Commerce Road is to include a 250-room hotel, a 3,000-seat entertainment venue, a 50-acre public park, a sound stage for creation of movie, TV, radio and digital content and other amenities.

Planned for opening in December 2023 if voters back it, the development is targeted for a site that is largely isolated from the rest of Richmond. The property sits in front of the Bells Road exchange on Interstate 95 and neighbors Philip Morris' cigarette factory, warehouses and industrial operations.

For most of the council and many in Richmond, the promises the city has extracted from developers are reason enough to be supportive. That includes a no-strings, upfront payment of \$25.5 million if the referendum passes, plus at least \$29 million or more a year in new tax revenue for city coffers.

The promises also include the creation of about 950 full-time jobs with benefits and profit-sharing, along with more than 300 part-time jobs paying at least \$15 an hour; the offering of 200 or more entertainment events on site; and the donation of \$1.6 million a year to charities and educational institutions such as Virginia Union University.

Jack Berry, leader of the Richmond area's tourism operations, told the council the casino would be another big attraction that could lure visitors.

Dr. Monroe Harris, another supporter and financial investor in the project, said

he was impressed by the casino's planned support for VUU, while Greta C. Harris, president and chief executive officer of the Better Housing Coalition, said the community benefits represent a broader reason to support the development.

But Richard Walker, who ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination for a House of Delegates seat, urged rejection. He told City Council the promises will not be realized, citing the example of Atlantic City, N.J., which remains a poor city despite the presence of multiple casinos on the oceanfront.

"Bringing a casino to Richmond is yet another economic development scam," said Quinton Robbins of Richmond for All. He said other cities have found that casinos end up being "a tax on the poor" that fail over time to provide the economic boost everyone wants.

The council vote earned applause from Mayor Levar M. Stoney, who has brushed off complaints that supporters of the winning proposal donated to his re-election campaign last year before the city issued a request for proposals that drew six bidders.

"City Council's vote tonight paves the way for every voting Richmond resident to have their voice heard on this important project," the mayor stated after the council vote.

The entity undertaking the development is officially listed as RVA Entertainment Holdings LLC.

While largely hidden, the owners include Black-owned media giant Urban One and a 50-member investor group led

by Urban One Chairwoman Cathy Hughes and her son, Alfred C. Liggins III, the chief operating officer of Urban One. Peninsula Pacific Entertainment, which owns and operates Colonial Downs and the Rosie's slot machine emporiums in Richmond and elsewhere in the state, is to operate the casino.

Investors are excited about the casino's potential impact on Urban One's earnings. Since One Casino + Resort became a finalist in May and then became Richmond's choice, the Class A voting stock in Urban One has quadrupled in value, from \$5 a share in April to about \$20 a share today.

In the wake of the council vote and before seeking a referendum from Richmond's Circuit Court, the city plans to quickly submit documents on the proposal to the Virginia Lottery, the state's casino regulatory body. The state agency will have 45 days to make a preliminary review.

If the project gets an initial green light from the Lottery, the city then would ask the court to put the casino issue on the Nov. 2 ballot.

Similar referendums passed last year in each of the four other Virginia cities that the General Assembly in 2020 approved to have casinos.

If Richmond voters give a thumbs up, the development could start within several months, according to the city, although RVA Entertainment would be taking a risk. The company must pay \$15 million to the Lottery, which would have a year to take a deep dive into RVA Entertainment's financials and its plans before issuing the required casino license.

VUU launches new Hezekiah Walker Center for Gospel Music with Juneteenth concert

Continued from A1

VUU officials said the curriculum will "revolve around the study of sacred arts and their relation to African heritage. Furthermore, the center will explore music and worship traditions that promote the comprehension of biblical texts."

The curriculum is being shaped by a task force of "educational, religious and musical minds," according to the university.

Mr. Walker, a second-year student at VUU's Samuel DeWitt Proctor School of Theology, stated in a video posted on the university's website that the theological training he has received

at VUU "has helped to shape my ministry."

"My goal is to give back to the school that has poured so much into me, by helping emerging gospel artists learn the business, as well as the theological aspects of the gospel music industry," he said.

"Gospel music is an important

part of our culture and VUU is honored to partner with Mr. Walker to create a central hub for the study, writing and preservation of gospel music," said VUU President Hakim J. Lucas.

"VUU is growing to meet the changing career interests of our students by creating academic programs where the

workforce demand is high or where students can explore opportunities in STEM, history or the arts," Dr. Lucas said.

According to the university, students also will participate in several planned live recordings to be produced under the direction of Mr. Walker and Mr. Bratton.



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Richmond Free Press

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VOL. 30 NO. 32

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

www.richmondfreepress.com

AUGUST 5-7, 2021



Mayor Stoney

No wrongdoing

Mayor Levar M. Stoney cleared in special prosecutor's probe of the city's awarding of \$1.8 million contract to remove Confederate statues

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

No bribes.
No kickbacks.
No evidence of corruption in the use of taxpayers' dollars.

That's the conclusion of a six-month probe to determine if Mayor Levar M. Stoney engaged in any wrongdoing in the award of a \$1.8 million contract to a contractor to take down the city's Confederate statues in July 2020.

The contractor, Devon Henry, had contributed to Mayor Stoney's 2016 campaign and his One Richmond political action committee.

Special Prosecutor Timothy A. Martin made the determination after reviewing an "exceptionally thorough, impartial and professional" report from the State Police Bureau of Criminal Investigation into the contract and the mayor's role.

Mr. Martin, who is the commonwealth's attorney for Augusta County, issued the finding on July 28, saying the investigation found "no evidence of (an) improper benefit to the mayor as a result of awarding the removal contract to a political donor of his."

The conclusion was not unexpected as the suspicions that were vented at the time were not supported by any evidence.

Mayor Stoney welcomed and encouraged

the probe that was instigated by one of his rivals in last November's mayoral contest, former City Councilwoman Kim B. Gray. The mayor never wavered in insisting that any probe would find that he and his administration acted properly and within the scope of their authority.

Mayor Stoney, who was not interviewed during the probe, did not comment directly on what is now a closed matter, leaving that to his personal attorney, Jeffrey Breit.

"We are pleased with the outcome," Mr. Breit stated. He noted that Mr. Martin verified what the mayor and he had said all along.

"Mayor Stoney had nothing to do with the selection of the contractor," Mr. Breit continued. "This was just an attempt to throw a political bullet in the middle of the campaign without a shred of evidence to support it."

Ms. Gray pushed for the probe during her unsuccessful effort to unseat the mayor during last fall's campaign. She could not be reached for comment on the results of the probe.

In issuing his determination, Mr. Martin sought to make it clear that his decision was based solely on the information he received from the State Police.

"I am an elected Republican from a conservative jurisdiction, and Mayor Stoney is

Please turn to A4



Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

A crane hauls away the massive, 100-year-old statue of Confederate Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson from its pedestal at Monument Avenue and Arthur Ashe Boulevard during a downpour on July 1, 2020.

State still has \$788M available to help families facing eviction

By Jeremy M. Lazarus

Confronted by the prospect of a flood of evictions, President Biden's administration acted Tuesday to offer temporary relief that will impact struggling renters facing ouster for overdue payments, including those in Richmond and most of Central Virginia.



Mr. Wegbreit

whose finances have been upended by the pandemic or resulted in major medical bills.

The new moratorium is to last to Sunday, Oct. 3, unless the courts strike it down, and is only good in areas where data show rates of infection from COVID-19 are high and surging.

Just days after a federal eviction moratorium expired on July 31, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention installed a more targeted eviction ban designed to aid renters

challenge the new CDC declaration, based on their previous success in getting the U.S. Supreme Court to

Please turn to A4

For Missouri Congresswoman Cori Bush, eviction fight is personal

Free Press wire report

WASHINGTON
Roughly two decades before she was elected to Congress, U.S. Rep. Cori Bush of Missouri lived in a Ford Explorer with her then-husband and two young children after the family had been evicted from their rental home.

So for Rep. Bush, a freshman Democrat from St. Louis,



Bill Clark/CQ Roll Call via AP Images

Rep. Cori Bush of Missouri speaks Tuesday to supporters who joined her on the steps of the U.S. Capitol in demanding a federal eviction moratorium to help the millions of Americans in danger of losing their homes during the pandemic. President Biden and the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced a short-term fix on Tuesday after pressure from Rep. Bush and the public.

the debate over whether to revive the moratorium on evictions during the pandemic is deeply personal. To dramatize her point, she started to sleep outside the U.S. Capitol last Friday to call attention to the issue as part of the effort to pressure President Biden and Congress to act.

On Tuesday, she won. After coming under intense pressure, the Biden administration issued a new eviction moratorium that will last until Oct. 3, temporarily halting evictions in

counties with "substantial and high levels" of virus transmissions, which covers areas where 90 percent of the U.S. population lives.

Rep. Bush's experience sets her apart from the more

conventional partisan sniping and grandstanding in the capital because of her direct connection to an urgent problem affecting millions of Americans.

Please turn to A4

Mandate: All city employees must be fully vaccinated by Oct. 1

By George Copeland Jr.



Sandra Sellars/Richmond Free Press

A nurse prepares a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine for injection during a mass vaccination event in late January at Richmond Raceway.

Richmond city employees are now required to be vaccinated against COVID-19, in a move announced Wednesday amid nationwide efforts to stem the rising surge in cases.

Those currently unvaccinated are required to get a first dose by Wednesday, Aug. 18, and full vaccination by Oct. 1.

Related story on A3

Those already vaccinated are required to submit documentation of their vaccination status by Aug. 18 through the Virginia Department of Health.

The policy applies to about 3,600 city employees, including those in Richmond police, fire and social services departments, regardless of whether they're working in person or remotely.

The city Department of

Please turn to A4

Free COVID-19 testing and vaccines

COVID-19 testing is available at various drug stores, clinics and urgent care centers throughout the area for people with and without health insurance. Several offer free tests.

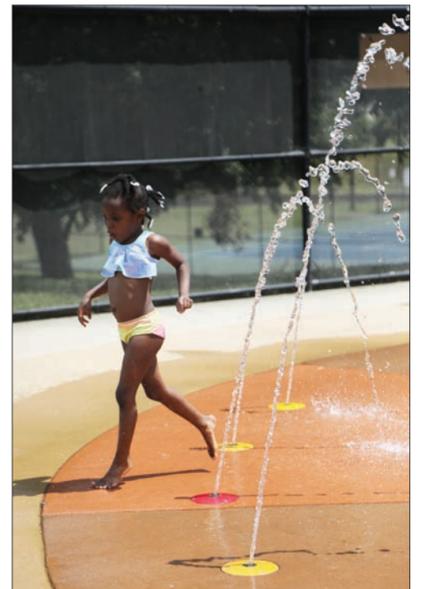
A list of area COVID-19 testing sites is online at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/richmond-city/richmond-and-henrico-area-covid-19-testing-sites/>

The Virginia Department of Health also has a list of COVID-19 testing locations around the state at www.vdh.virginia.gov/coronavirus/covid-19-testing/covid-19-testing-sites/.

Want a COVID-19 vaccine?

The Richmond and Henrico health districts are offering free walk-up COVID-19 vaccines at the following locations:

Please turn to A4



Regina H. Boone/Richmond Free Press

A real splash

Marlei Wyatt-Bey, 5, gingerly enjoys the splash pad Wednesday at Battery Park Pool on Dupont Circle in North Side. The youngster was visiting the pool with her camp group on a day when temperatures reached the 80s in Richmond. Temperatures are expected to hit the 90s again next week when a dip in one of the city-owned pools may bring some fun and relief. The Battery Park Pool is open until 8 p.m. weekdays, with open family swim from 5 to 7 p.m. and adult swim from 7 to 8 p.m. Weekend hours are noon to 5 p.m. Saturdays and 1 to 5 p.m. Sundays.



Tony Dejak/Associated Press

Cleveland baseball team owner Paul Dolan speaks to the media July 23 as the new Cleveland Guardians logo is displayed.

Cleveland MLB team changes name in move toward enlightenment

Free Press wire report

CLEVELAND
After more than 100 years, Cleveland's Major League Baseball team is getting a new name — the Guardians.

The name Indians is soon to be gone. The ballclub announced July 30 that at the end of the 2021 season, the Indians will transition from the name they've been known as since 1915 and replace it with Guardians, one they hope inspires a new generation of fans.

The name change, which has its supporters and critics among Cleveland's fan base, ends

months of internal discussions triggered by a national reckoning for institutions and teams to drop logos and names considered racist.

"We do feel like we're doing the right thing and that's what's driving this," team owner Paul Dolan said following a news conference at the ballpark. "I know some people disagree, but if anything, I've gotten more and more comfortable that we're headed in the right direction."

"And actually, the selection of the name solidifies that feeling because of the values that

Please turn to A4

Mayor cleared in probe of city's awarding of \$1.8M contract to remove statues

Continued from A1

not," Mr. Martin stated. "I have no bias in favor of him based on some shared ideology or membership in the same political party. I have no personal relationship with him, as the two of us have never met."

The \$1.8 million contract was awarded to Mr. Henry, a Black contractor who owns and operates Team Henry, which also is part of the construction team that is to build the proposed ONE Casino + Resort if it wins support from Richmond voters in November and approval for a state license.

Mr. Martin stated that there was "an appearance of impropriety" that led to the probe. That included the fact that Mr. Henry had contributed a total of \$4,000 to Mayor Stoney's first campaign for mayor in 2016 and his One Richmond PAC; that Mr. Henry formed a separate business entity to conceal his identity; and that the large contract for the statues' removal raised suspicions as to whether the award was handled within the bounds of the law.

Mr. Martin stated that the investigation supports Mayor

Stoney's claims that he did not suggest or insist that Team Henry get the job but left it to other members of his administration to find a contractor.

The probe also supported statements from Robert Steidel, the city's deputy chief administrative officer, and others involved that most contractors who were contacted did not want anything to do with such a controversial project as removing the Confederate statues, Mr. Martin stated.

The investigation confirmed that every other business that was contacted rejected participation, either because they objected to taking down the statues or felt that the risk to their businesses was too great, Mr. Martin stated.

State Police investigators, he noted, also found that Mr. Henry understood the risks and created a new entity to hide his identity and that of his company to avoid protests, vandalism or other potential harms from those opposed to the statues' removal. That "is not a crime," Mr. Martin stated.

He also noted members of the public who contacted him were most upset that Mr. Henry received a \$1.8 million sole-source contract award that was claimed to be three to six times what it should have cost. However, "taking a profit, even a very substantial one, in a transaction with the government entity is not, however, criminal," Mr. Martin stated.

Mr. Martin also stated that he did not look into whether Mayor Stoney was entitled to use his authority as Richmond's director of emergency management to take down the statues.

At the time the statues were removed, state and city declarations of emergency were still in force regarding the racial justice demonstrations that were taking place almost daily, and the mayor was empowered as director of emergency management to take whatever steps he believed were needed to deal with the situation.

Mr. Martin stated that such issues were outside the scope of his investigation.

"I was appointed to investigate this matter to find out whether the contract award was a matter of public corruption, which is incredibly serious," he wrote. "The goal was to find out if Mr. Stoney had used public money to pay off a campaign contributor and to receive a personal or political benefit from it.

"We have uncovered no evidence of public corruption," he summed up. "It is clear that once Richmond gained control over the monuments, especially following last year's protests, the city was going to remove them. Therefore, the question of removal was a matter of timing. It is my decision that it would be a misuse of resources to seek charges against the mayor for what was, at worst, a removal that happened some weeks earlier than it would have."

Mandate: City employees must be fully vaccinated

Continued from A1

Human Resources will be handling disciplinary action for those employees who do not adhere to the new requirement.

"We think that the best tool to ensure the safety of our residents and the safety of our employees is to ensure that everyone gets vaccinated if you can," Mayor Levar M. Stoney said during a news conference Wednesday announcing the new mandate. "This is the right and proper step in a critical moment."

Medical and religious exemptions for employees will be granted where appropriate, the mayor said, with signed medical exemption requests from a licensed medical provider and notarized religious exemption requests required.

The city's vaccination mandate doesn't apply to public school employees. That decision falls to the Richmond School Board and schools Superintendent Jason Kamras.

The mandate also does not apply to people working for independent agencies such as the Richmond Ambulance Authority, the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority and the Richmond Behavioral Health Authority. It also does not apply to state-paid employees in the offices of the Richmond Circuit Court clerk, the commonwealth's attorney, the treasurer, the sheriff and the voter registrar.

All city employees, regardless of vaccination status, will be required to follow safety guidelines and measures, including wearing masks indoors, based on guidance from the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, employees cannot opt out of the requirement just by wearing masks and getting frequent COVID-19 tests, the mayor's office noted.

It's unclear how many city employees already are fully vaccinated, with anecdotal information supplied by various agency leaders suggesting that roughly 40 percent to 50 percent of the city's workforce is vaccinated.

Mayor Stoney cited the steps taken both on the national level and by localities in Northern Virginia and Fairfax County as a major factor in this choice for city operations. The move comes as cases continue to rise statewide, with Virginia crossing 700,000 total COVID-19 cases on Wednesday and with the positivity rate continuing to climb.

Continued from A1

preme Court to terminate the last CDC moratorium.

The new CDC declaration appears to cover about 80 percent of the country and was issued at a time when U.S. Census and other data have projected that 3 million to 7 million rental households are behind on rent and at risk of eviction. That's up to 16 percent of the nation's 43 million households that live in rentals.

In Richmond alone, projections indicate that 5,000 to 9,300 households are at risk of losing their residences for nonpayment.

According to Martin Wegbreit, director of litigation at the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society whose legal staff represents low-income clients on housing issues, the city of Richmond, the counties of Chesterfield, Hanover and Henrico and much of the rest of Central Virginia are included in the CDC's eviction protection areas based on COVID-19 caseloads.

The CDC declaration covers couples making less than \$200,000 a year and individuals making less than \$99,000 a year or anyone who received a stimulus check and is at risk of becoming homeless if an eviction proceeds.

Still, Mr. Wegbreit noted that the CDC action can only do so much.

"This is not a moratorium on evictions," he said. "It is a CDC eviction protection for tenants behind on rent due to lost income who give their landlords the CDC declaration."

He noted that evictions can and are still going forward for "those who do not know about or use the CDC declaration,

because the lease was not renewed" or for other reasons unrelated to household finances.

In Richmond this week, court dockets showed landlords were seeking orders to evict 129 families. Mr. Wegbreit said before the pandemic, the court docket might list 350 cases a week.

The current list of cases, though, is up from the same week last year when the pandemic was in full flower, he said.

"In short, eviction filings are significantly increasing above what they were during 2020, but remain substantially below pre-pandemic levels."

Mr. Wegbreit said that tenants, as well as landlords, need to focus on the solution as much as the problem.

"The solution is Virginia's Rent Relief Program, which is the best in the nation," he said. It is operated by the state Department of Housing and Community Development, which takes application for rental aid online at www.dhcd.virginia.gov/rfp.

According to the agency, the program has distributed about \$312 million to 48,154 tenants, or an average of nearly \$6,500 per household to pay off rent arrearages dating back 18 months.

Mr. Wegbreit noted that the state agency still has about \$788 million left to spend that would go into landlords' pockets and leave more renters in a more stable situation.

The Virginia funding is part of the \$46 billion the federal government has distributed to states through the federal CARES Act and American Rescue Plan to reduce eviction prospects for millions of people here and across the country.

Mr. Wegbreit said the program is avail-

able to households whose income is at or below 80 percent of the area median income, around \$58,000 for a family of four, and who live in apartments with rents that are no more than 150 percent of fair market rate, now above \$1,100 a month for a single bedroom unit in Richmond.

The program can pay up to 18 months of arrearage once the rent and income are verified, he said. Landlords should cooperate and help tenants file to mitigate their losses, including the cost they face to evict, he said.

Patrick McCloud, chief executive officer of the Virginia Apartment Management Association, said landlords have faced their own challenges in dealing with the pandemic, including paying loans on their properties.

The idea that most landlords would rush to evict when there is a program that could enable them to secure back rent is a misconception, he said.

He said most landlords understand that the eviction process is far more arduous than working with a tenant applying for relief.

While the state has dropped any ban on evictions, he and others noted landlords also can face substantial delays.

For example, at least through September, the state is requiring courts to grant a 60-day continuance for an eviction proceeding when a tenant can demonstrate that their failure to pay was due to the effects of COVID-19.

And pushing eviction is not financially rewarding, Mr. McCloud said.

"If I evict the resident, I'm never going to see that money."

Free COVID-19 vaccines

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• **Thursday, Aug. 5,** 10 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. — John Marshall High School Health Fair, 4225 Old Brook Road, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

• **Friday, Aug. 6,** 9 a.m. to noon — Henrico West Health Department Clinic, 8600 Dixon Powers Drive, Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson.

• **Saturday, Aug. 7,** Antioch Baptist Church, 1384 New Market Road, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson

• **Tuesday, Aug. 10,** 1 to 3 p.m. — Chippenham Place Apartments, 5845 Orcutt Lane, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson; 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. — Sacred Heart Center Food Pantry, 1400 Perry St., Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

• **Wednesday, Aug. 11,** 3 to 6 p.m. — George Wythe High School, 4314 Crutchfield St., Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

• **Thursday, Aug. 12,** 2 to 4 p.m. — Meriel Salon, 505 Hull St., Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson.

Children ages 12 to 15 may only receive the Pfizer vaccine.

Appointments are not required, but individuals can schedule an appointment online at vax.rchd.com or by calling (804) 205-3501.

VaccineFinder.org and vaccines.gov also allow people to find nearby pharmacies and clinics that offer the COVID-19 vaccine.

Virginia health officials and elected officials are warning that the dangers of the pandemic are far from over, with the number of COVID-19 cases in Virginia continuing to rise.

The state Department of Health reported Wednesday that Virginia reached a total of 701,059 COVID-19 cases statewide, with 31,546 hospitalizations and 11,541 deaths.

Virginia's seven-day positivity rate also is rising at 6.5 percent. Last week, it was 4.7 percent.

Officials continue to stress the importance of all Virginians age 12 and older to get vaccinated and to adhere to safety guidelines calling for masking while indoors to protect against infection.

According to state health department data, 54.2 percent of the population has been fully vaccinated, while 60.6 percent of the population has received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

State data also show that African-Americans comprised 22.5 percent of cases statewide and 25.1 percent of deaths for which ethnic and racial data is available, while Latinos made up 15.9 percent of cases and 6.4 percent of deaths.

Reported COVID-19 data as of Wednesday, Aug. 4, 2021

	Cases	Hospitalizations	Deaths
Richmond	17,823	821	281
Henrico County	26,850	1,112	642
Chesterfield County	29,307	1,060	456
Hanover County	8,722	329	168

For Congresswoman Cori Bush, eviction fight is personal

Continued from A1

"I know what it's like to be evicted and have to live out of my car with my two babies," the congresswoman said in an interview Saturday. "As long as I am a sitting U.S. congressperson, I will not keep my mouth shut about it."

Rep. Bush was a prominent part of a larger push among progressives to stop evictions, and the Biden administration moved quickly to provide a policy response. It thrust her swiftly into meetings with top congressional leaders and administration officials and she was sought after for interviews.

She met Monday with Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, and had a brief chat with Vice President Kamala Harris — attention that punctuates a political rise that took Rep. Bush from leading protests against police brutality in Ferguson, Mo., to the halls of Congress in little more than five years.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on Tuesday gave a salute to Rep. Bush "for her powerful action to keep people in their homes."

Before reversing course, the Biden administration initially argued it didn't have legal authority to extend the moratorium again, pointing to a U.S. Supreme Court opinion in June that suggested Congress should pass legislation to do so.

A last-minute attempt to pass a bill through the U.S. House of Representatives also came up short last Friday. Then the chamber adjourned and lawmakers left town for an extended August recess — a response Rep. Bush says "failed to meet this moment."

On Tuesday, before the administration's announcement, Rep. Bush said: "Am I supposed to just go home? No, I'm an organizer. I am an activist. So I fell back

into what I know how to do."

It is activism borne of personal experience.

In 2001, Rep. Bush became ill while pregnant with her second child and had to quit her job at a preschool. The lost income led to their eviction.

For about three months, the couple lived out of their Ford Explorer with two playpens in the back. She said that, at the time, she was working in a low-wage job. Eventually, her family, already struggling themselves, was able to help her find a home.

"I don't want anyone else to have to go through what I went through, ever," Rep. Bush said while wiping away tears.

The couple later divorced and Rep. Bush went back to school, earning a nursing degree. She also became a pastor.

Her life changed in 2014 when a white police officer fatally shot Michael Brown, a Black and unarmed 18-year-old, in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, Mo.

Rep. Bush joined the thousands of activists in the protests that followed the shooting and quickly became a leader of the movement that sought police and criminal justice reform in Ferguson and throughout the St. Louis region. She was back on the streets again three years later after a white St. Louis police officer was acquitted in the shooting death of a Black suspect.

Her activism fueled an interest in politics. She ran unsuccessfully in the Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate in 2016, followed by another losing primary race for a St. Louis' congressional seat in 2018, in which she was defeated by roughly 20 percentage points.

Two years later, her supporters sensed a change in the political landscape in the aftermath of George Floyd's death at the hands of Minneapolis Police in May 2020. With backing from the progressive group

Justice Democrats, she sought a rematch against longtime Democratic Rep. William Lacy Clay — and won.

"They counted us out," Rep. Bush said after her primary win. "They called me — I'm just the protester, I'm just the activist with no name, no title and no real money. That's all they said that I was. But St. Louis showed up today."

She won easily in heavily Democratic St. Louis in November.

The Rev. Darryl Gray, a political adviser to Rep. Bush, said her tenacity was apparent early in her failed 2016 bid for Senate, when she was willing to campaign in rural and very conservative corners of the state.

"She wasn't afraid to show up and speak for justice in places where people would warn us about going, some of these 'sunset towns,'" Rev. Gray said. "She knew she wouldn't get support, but people respected the fact she showed up."

Still, there are some who questioned the decision to pick a fight with congressional leadership and the president from her own party. Administration and congressional officials also noted that much of the money Congress had allocated to provide housing assistance has not been distributed by states.

House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn of South Carolina said he was "sensitive" to Rep. Bush's aim, but suggested she may be waging the wrong battle.

"It's not the federal government that's doing it," Rep. Clyburn said. "If you've appropriated \$46 billion for the country, and only \$3 billion has been used, then that's not Congress. ... It's on whoever has got the money tied up."

Tuesday evening, after the administration made its announcement, Rep. Bush tweeted out a photo of her and others sitting on the U.S. Capitol steps with a one-word caption: Grateful.

Cleveland MLB team changes name in move toward enlightenment

Continued from A1

the name represents."

The organization spent most of the past year whittling down a list of potential names that was at nearly 1,200. It was a tedious process, which included 140 hours of interviews with fans, community leaders, front office personnel and a survey of 40,000 fans.

Cleveland's new name was inspired by the large landmark stone edifices — referred to as traffic guardians — that flank both ends of the Hope Memorial Bridge, which connects down-

town to Ohio City.

As the team moved closer to making a final decision on the name, Mr. Dolan said he found himself looking closely at the huge art deco sculptures.

"Frankly, I hadn't studied them that closely until we started talking about them and I should emphasize, we're not named after the bridge, but there's no question that it's a strong nod to those and what they mean to the community," he said.

The team did not reveal the names of any of the other finalists, but Brian Barren, Cleveland's president of business operations, said

trademarking issues eliminated several potential candidates.

In the end, the team felt Guardians was a perfect fit.

"We think Guardians is unique and authentic to Cleveland," Mr. Barren said. "It's less about the Guardians of Traffic and more about what the Guardians represent and that idea of protection. For us and our research, Cleveland folks are very protective of one another. They're protective of our city. They're protective of the land and everything about it. That's one key component, the resiliency of people here in Cleveland and Northeast Ohio and the loyalty."