

April 27, 2010

Robert McDonnell  
Governor  
Patrick Henry Building, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor  
Richmond, VA 23219

Dear Governor McDonnell,

The statewide Jewish community is deeply concerned about a divisive effort to revisit sectarian public prayer at state police events. For the past two years, our community has been strongly united in opposing legislation that would have inappropriately opened government events to sectarian prayer. At a fundamental level, this effort contradicts the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment and several landmark rulings in recent decades on prayer in government settings. By doing so, it continues to divert our attention away from the very critical issues facing our state government. Instead it leads us toward unnecessary religious clashes, demeans our Commonwealth's Jeffersonian principles, and creates an unwelcoming environment for the Commonwealth's Jewish citizens and other religious minorities. A final concern is the likelihood that revisiting this guidance would ultimately lead to litigation costly to our Commonwealth.

Supreme Court rulings are clear: individuals offering prayers or invocations at government sponsored events are acting in a governmental capacity and must remain religiously neutral. The Supreme Court has clearly articulated that the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from endorsing or showing preference for one religion over another. Individuals acting in a government capacity cannot exclude or disparage members of another religion. They must be inclusive of all members of the community and cannot proselytize. As a Fredericksburg rabbi from our community succinctly commented on this issue, "*When you are asked to speak in public for a group of people with different religious practices you need to think not of who you are praying to but who you are praying for.*" (Rabbi Devorah Lynn, Fredericksburg)

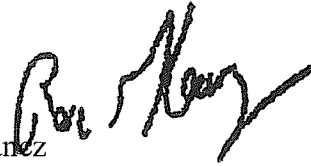
Reverend Clark Lobenstein representing the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, which also includes several congregations in the Northern Virginia region also opined to maintain the current proper police guidelines stating "*...we can think of no better way to live together peacefully and respectfully in our pluralistic society than to ensure that all religious faiths have the right to flourish without government-sponsored interference or preferential treatment. Perhaps the greatest gift of the Bill of Rights is that religious liberty is not subject to a majority vote. Rather we avoid the tyranny of majority rule by practicing and preserving this simple First Amendment principle*"

The Jewish Federation communities of the Commonwealth join together to of (Tidewater, Peninsula, Richmond and Greater Washington) respectfully request that you to take these views of these religious leaders and the statewide community into consideration.

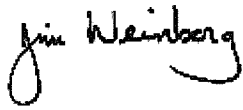
Sincerely,



Ron Haber  
Executive Director  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
Of Greater Washington



Ron Glantz  
President  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
Of Greater Washington



Jim Weinberg  
President  
Jewish Community Federation of Richmond



Catherine Plotkin  
Chair  
Jewish Community Relations Council  
of Richmond



Harry Graber  
Executive Director  
United Jewish Communities Tidewater



Richard Gordon  
Chairman  
Community Relations Council  
of the UJCVP