Thank you to the many generous individuals and organizations who gave to recognize our honorees and support this event.
The Excellence in Virginia Government Awards are presented by Virginia Commonwealth University’s L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs to celebrate the accomplishments of Virginians who have made contributions to the practice of government and to the well-being of our communities and citizens.

MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Welcome to the 2020-21 Excellence in Virginia Government Awards hosted by the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. This is the 14th year the Wilder School is recognizing outstanding work in all levels of Virginia governance and honoring innovative approaches to service delivery in communities throughout the Commonwealth. This year’s honorees represent non-profit organizations, local government, public-private partnerships and extraordinary individuals.

Today’s event supports Wilder School student scholarships and our efforts to train the next generation of public servants. In the 2020-21 academic year, several Wilder School faculty and students received highly competitive national awards and new rankings published last month by U.S. News and World Report place the Wilder School within the top 15th percentile of schools of its kind. The school also ranks No. 19 in the nation for Social Policy and No. 28 in Urban Policy.

The rankings from U.S. News caps an extraordinary year for the Wilder School, which boasted a CNN-approved state presidential poll in 2020 and earned multiple distinctions for exemplary commitment to research training and teaching in Civic Engagement, Inclusion, Sustainability and Globalization from the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs & Administration (NASPAA). Additionally, the 2020-21 academic year included the launch of our Research Institute for Social Equity (RISE). The institute builds upon the expertise of Wilder School faculty and serves as a vehicle to advance racial equity and social justice through multidisciplinary scholarship, research, training and engagement. You can read more about RISE and Wilder School programs and services at wilder.vcu.edu.

Thank you to our generous sponsors and to each of you for being a part of the Excellence in Virginia Government Awards ceremony. Congratulations to our 2020-21 honorees!

Sincerely,
Susan T. Gooden, Dean
The Community Enhancement Award recognizes outstanding commitment to improving the quality of community life in Virginia through an established reputation for exceptional community service. Formerly known as the Fan Free Clinic, Health Brigade is celebrating 50 years of providing exceptional health services to those least served in a caring and non-judgmental environment. Health Brigade is open to the people of Richmond and 22 surrounding counties, serving not only those with limited resources, but also those often stigmatized or experiencing systemic oppression. Today they serve close to 11,000 individuals annually through primary medical care, mental health and wellness services, HIV/STI testing, and outreach and education.

The Wilder School rose to No. 38 in the U.S. News and World Report’s 2022 Best Graduate Schools of Public Affairs rankings issued last month marking a rise of 7 places from the 2021 survey. It is the school’s highest ranking since its creation in 2004 and places it within the top 15th percentile of schools of public affairs.

In addition to overall rankings, U.S. News evaluates public affairs programs in several specialties. The school made its debut in the specialty rankings in the area of Public Management and Leadership last year and rose 5 places in this area to No. 34 in the 2022 rankings. The Wilder School is now ranked highly in two, new specialty areas: No.19 in Social Policy and No. 28 in Urban Policy.

Within Virginia, the Wilder School at Virginia Commonwealth University is the only university ranked in the areas of Social Policy and Urban Policy and among the highest ranked institutions within any specialty area.

Within Virginia, the Wilder School is the only public affairs school ranked in the areas of Social Policy and Urban Policy and among the highest ranked institutions within any specialty area. The school is No. 25 among public schools of public affairs. Learn more at wilder.vcu.edu.
INNOVATION IN GOVERNMENT
Department of Juvenile Justice
Valerie Boykin, Director

This award recognizes the recipient’s innovative work that has resulted in increased efficiency, effectiveness, or other improvements that affect how a government entity performs in delivery of service to its constituents. The Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) has 5,000 youth under some kind of supervision with more than 90 percent of those youth being supervised in their communities through diversion, probation or parole. Beginning in 2014, the Department underwent a rigorous self-analysis to examine whether they were using taxpayer resources effectively, and getting the outcomes they want for the youth, families and communities they serve. The resulting Transformation Plan touched virtually every aspect of the agency’s operations and has yielded dramatic gains that have resulted in positive outcomes for the youth and families served by DJJ including a reduction in the number of youth incarcerated in state correctional centers and education and treatment gains for youth in secure custody and high school graduation.

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP
Virginia Housing
Susan Dewey, Chief Executive Officer

This award recognizes the recipient’s inventive creation or maintenance of a successful public-private partnership which has delivered a measurable improvement in public service resulting in lower cost, improved quality, or greater efficiency for citizens. Virginia Housing is a public-private organization established by Virginia’s General Assembly in 1972 to help all Virginians attain quality, affordable housing. Virginia Housing fulfills its mission by partnering with the greater housing community to offer programs, products, services and expertise that address the evolving spectrum of homeownership, rental and supportive housing needs. Virginia Housing is unique as a housing authority—relative to peers that serve the same constituencies—as it is fully self-funded through revenues generated by its programs, rather than state appropriations. This novel funding structure enables Virginia Housing to maintain the agility necessary to align its programs with state priorities, effectively respond to threats like the 2008 Financial Crisis, reinvest in its mission, and innovate.
UNSUNG HERO
Cristina Dominguez Ramirez (M.P.A. ‘10/GPA)
Library Manager, Henrico County

The Unsung Heroes Award recognizes an individual Virginian who has provided distinguished and exceptional service as a career government employee in the commonwealth, with local or state government. For more than a decade Cristina Ramirez has worked to bring awareness, visibility and promote services to the Latino/Hispanic/Spanish speaking communities in central Virginia. Ramirez has presented at conferences, published academic books and served as a consultant on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion issues. As a librarian in Henrico County, she works to provide inclusive services and programs and to promote literacy and writing amongst Latino youth. Varina Library Manager Kareemah Hamdan describes Cristina as being very energetic and 120% dedicated to her goal of connecting underserved communities to the library and all of its resources.

HILL-ROBINSON EXPANSION OF FREEDOM
A. E. Dick Howard
Distinguished Professor of International Law
University of Virginia

Named for two champions of civil rights, attorney Oliver Hill and Judge Spottswood Robinson, the Hill-Robinson Expansion of Freedom Award recognizes a sustained commitment to securing equal rights and justice for all people by empowering citizens. Fifty years ago, Virginia voters resoundingly endorsed a new state Constitution, one that enshrined hard won civil rights protections and voting rights, constitutionally committed the state to educational equality, and included stewardship of natural resources as a constitutional obligation. The principal drafter of the new Virginia Constitution was a young law professor at the University of Virginia, A.E. Dick Howard. In the ensuing years since the ratification of Virginia’s Constitution, Professor Howard has consulted with constitution-makers around the world, including Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Albania, South Africa, Malawi, Brazil, and the Philippines.
The Grace E. Harris Leadership Award recognizes an individual Virginian whose career represents the highest values of public service and citizenship and who has made a substantial contribution to the good of the commonwealth and the community. John C. Purnell, Jr. came to the Friends Association for Children in April 1970. As its executive director for over 40 years, John skillfully helped at-risk children and families overcome prejudice, economic disparity, nutritional shortcomings, and other challenges for those growing up in Richmond, Henrico and Chesterfield’s most difficult neighborhoods. He opened four innovative before and after school educational centers. These centers teach children educational, life and survival skills, as well as art and music. The centers also provide opportunities for parents to gain skills for better employment opportunities. Purnell’s goal was to ensure that at-risk children and families, primarily African American, could nurture their talents and realize their dreams.

The Lifetime Achievement Award recognizes an individual Virginian whose career represents the highest values of public service and citizenship and who has made a substantial contribution to the good of the commonwealth. As the first African-American elected to Congress from the Commonwealth since Reconstruction, Congressman Robert C. “Bobby” Scott has spent more than four decades in public service. Before being elected to Congress in 1992 to represent the 3rd District, Scott served for 15 years in Virginia’s General Assembly in both the House of Delegates and State Senate. Congressman Scott currently serves as the Chairman of the Committee on Education and Labor. In this capacity, he is advancing an agenda that improves equity in education, frees students from the burdens of crippling debt, protects and expands access to affordable health care, ensures workers have a safe workplace where they can earn a living wage free from discrimination, and guarantees seniors have a secure and dignified retirement. Congressman Scott also serves on the Committee on the Budget.
You have a dream to build a vibrant community. We have resources to make it happen.

For nearly 50 years, we’ve worked with local governments and their partners, providing grants, loans and more to help their communities thrive.
2020 EVGA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

NADYA SYAZSA, UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT

Between work, a double major and a minor, Nadya Syazsa had a demanding senior year at the Wilder School. The native of Indonesia is double majoring in urban and regional studies and homeland security and emergency preparedness while minoring in Spanish. After graduation, she is passionate about working in an international NGO with a focus on global socioeconomic development. “I want to be able to apply my emergency response/preparedness and urban planning skills,” Syazsa said. “The EVGA Scholarship helped reduce the financial burden I had my final year at VCU, especially with the challenges of the pandemic.”

SUMMER MORRIS, GRADUATE STUDENT

While finishing her Master of Public Administration at the Wilder School, Summer Morris has worked full time as the council liaison for Richmond City Council member Michael Jones. In that role, she researches and analyzes policy solutions related to affordable housing, public safety reform, minority business enterprises and equitable budgeting practices. Prior to working for Jones, Morris worked in the Virginia House of Delegates’ Clerk’s Office. Her career and academics are focused on gaining more understanding of the historical context of policy issues and using public policy to address systemic inequities. “I was honored to receive the Excellence in Virginia Government Award Scholarship,” Morris said. “My experience in the MPA program has helped me solidify my values and inspired me to be an effective public servant.” Morris will graduate in May 2021.

VIRGINIA CAPITOL SEMESTER

The Virginia Capitol Semester gives bright, enthusiastic VCU students the opportunity to live and learn alongside decision-makers in the state legislature while continuing their studies on a full-time basis. Interns are talented, passionate young people who come from a range of academic disciplines and share diverse interests from tackling criminal justice reform to developing renewable energy sources and technology. Placements occur during the spring and provide interns with meaningful assistance—researching bills, drafting speeches and meeting with constituents—throughout the legislative session. No matter where an intern’s interest may lie, the Virginia Capitol Semester equips students with the firsthand skills, knowledge and experience to make a difference. For additional information about the Virginia Capitol Semester, please contact Wilder School Assistant Dean of Student Success, Shajuana Isom-Payne, at sipayne@vcu.edu.
The Excellence in Virginia Government Awards celebrates people and organizations who have made significant contributions to the practice of government and the well-being of our communities and citizens.

The program also supports scholarships each academic year for two deserving students who exhibit a commitment to community service and a deep interest in the practice of government and public affairs. All donations, regardless of size, make a positive impact.

There are many ways to give back while supporting tomorrow’s leaders. Learn how you can help by contacting James Wasilewski, Director of Development, at wasilewskijr@vcu.edu, or visit us at support.vcu.edu/give/wilder for more information.

Do you know an outstanding individual or organization that is making a difference in Virginia?

Look for nomination information in October 2021.