

Blanding Campaign Statement and Policy on Vaccine Mandates:

The Princess Blanding campaign and the Liberation Party strongly encourage you to get vaccinated, wear a mask, and physically distance yourself in public, regardless of vaccination status. Deadly anti-vaccination misinformation campaigns are intrinsically classist and racist, and only serve to increase the risk of infection in more vulnerable lower income communities. The Democrats and the Republicans have vastly missed their marks and risk community health by pitting the people against each other as belonging to either the “party of science” or the “party of mistrust.” This has only worsened political division, when, in fact, scientific evidence should be valued and believed, but the human factor must be considered. We must carefully acknowledge and understand from where historical government mistrust stems. To combat misinformation and prioritize protection of our neighbors across the Commonwealth, we must enact community-based harm reduction initiatives that engage people, strengthen communities, and encourage public health. To move forward, trust must be built here in Virginia.

Enforce Mask Mandates and Encourage Vaccination

As the world struggles to weather the COVID-19 pandemic, communities, families, and individuals are faced with tough decisions to make regarding their health and safety. There is a nationwide push for 100% vaccination as the death rate continues to soar, claiming countless lives while our most vulnerable communities are being affected at the highest rates and with the greatest intensity.

There are proactive steps we can all take to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and the Delta variant such as wearing masks in public spaces, and social distancing. COVID-19 is evolving, and the components that make up an effective response to this virus will necessarily evolve as well. Although we had hoped that the widespread availability of several vaccines to combat COVID-19 would allow for the easing of mask restrictions, the landscape has changed. The highly contagious Delta variant is rapidly spreading, and the percentage of folks who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 is still not high enough to ease the incredible burden that this virus is placing on our strained healthcare systems. While we are hopeful for a future where COVID-19 is contained, we must face our current reality. We must enforce a mask mandate in all indoor public spaces.

We must also acknowledge the immense strain COVID-19 is putting on medical professionals and vulnerable patients who are having to delay life-saving procedures because hospitals and staff are overwhelmed with patients, many unvaccinated. Decisions regarding vaccinations are far reaching and impact many. I strongly encourage Virginians who are able to get vaccinated, to do so.

Listen to and Address Concerns of the Vaccine Hesitant and Vulnerable Community Members

There are many variables contributing to the number of unvaccinated Virginians, including a lack of accessibility, historic mistrust, misinformation, and exercising one's right to make personal medical decisions. For many underserved and often ignored community members, there have been many questions, yet so few answers that speak to them. There was and is a push to do what the government says is best, while simultaneously muting voices, concerns and fears, especially in the Black community. Although death has arrived at so many of our doorsteps due to COVID-19, the fear and distrust has proven to be even stronger, stalling efforts to get everyone vaccinated.

As governor, I am committed to addressing the concerns, the “why” variables of our unvaccinated community members. I am committed to staying boots on the ground and going into communities across the Commonwealth to not only educate our hesitant community members about the COVID-19 vaccine, but to listen, empathize and build trusting relationships, provide honest and transparent answers and data, and address the misinformation out there through a harm reduction model. Right now, we are failing to reach the unvaccinated due to our one-size-fits-all approach which does not acknowledge past traumas or speak to certain communities appropriately. We must meet our community members where they are and ensure pre- and post-vaccination resources and support. By learning from the successes of harm reduction organizations and the Navajo Nation, we can adapt to the community holistically and address concerns about individual and family health, income, livelihoods and their childrens' education. Vaccine accessibility should be improved through initiatives like pop-up clinics in underserved neighborhoods and ad campaigns humanizing the pandemic that are tailored specifically to the community. Further, these initiatives should have ancillary services specific to the community receiving the services in order to build a trusting relationship. By building a community based public health team, we can divert the conversation on vaccines from a threat to one's liberty, to a service to one's community and self.

Provide Options for In-Person vs. Virtual Schools and Universities

While our students have lost a year due to virtual learning, the people in power are not making decisions to put the health and safety of all stakeholders first. Currently, schools and universities in the Commonwealth are seeing a rise in COVID-19 cases, yet there is no real plan in place for instructors and students. We are putting an undue burden on parents, families and instructors to literally make life and death decisions. For students, faculty, and staff who fully understand and accept the risk and feel safe and comfortable attending in-person, we should allow them to do so. However, the same choice should be allowed for those who do not, in which case they should have the option to teach and learn virtually without deadlines and restrictions on making this choice. Those who can't afford child care

or to lose an income source to accommodate at-home learning are forced into risk, making this a class issue that must be addressed swiftly. The pandemic has no timeline and we should not restrict options to choose the safest learning options for our students and children.

Support for Businesses and Medical Professionals

As governor, I am committed to enacting laws to ensure full time workers receive three weeks yearly paid time off, and two-weeks minimum sick leave. As we are dealing with unprecedented times, it is imperative that we provide tax credits to reimburse businesses for the costs of providing paid family and medical leave to employees unable to work because of COVID-19. Paid sick leave must be treated as a human right, not a privilege. Workers' rights and protections will be prioritized and protected. Pharmaceutical companies have made it their business to become rich from vaccines and other life-saving medications which should be free, while working class people on the frontlines are struggling to safely work and pay their bills. While we will take further safety measures to protect the working class, we cannot expect anyone to risk their lives, especially not for \$7.25 an hour, therefore fair compensation and hazard pay must be enacted.

The issue with employer-based vaccine mandates is that people who can afford to leave their job or find a new job can essentially “buy” their body autonomy, while low-income workers are forced to comply with mandates. Opposed to possible termination of an employee that refuses a vaccine, employers should implement regular one-on-one counseling with trustworthy public health professionals to discuss and address the root cause of the individual’s reluctance. The employer should be responsible for other health based services that build community and encourage solidarity between colleagues.

Although we may not agree or understand all of the reasons people have for refusing vaccines, they do deserve protection from government interference with their bodily autonomy. However, as we all live in society together and, in the case of a potentially deadly disease like COVID-19, the decisions you make for your body will impact others, which is why we encourage vaccinated and unvaccinated alike to protect themselves by wearing masks in public spaces.