



BETTER COMMUNITIES THROUGH SOUND GOVERNMENT

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Winners of 2025 “If I Were Mayor” state essay contest announced

Richmond: The Virginia Municipal League (VML) announced today the statewide winner and seven regional winners of the league’s “If I Were Mayor” Essay Contest for 7th and 8th graders. As in years past, the students were asked to write a short essay in which they identified an issue in their locality, talked to others about possible solutions, and then presented the solution that they believe will best address the issue.

The 2025 winners are:

- Statewide winner: **Jelena Ly** of Edward W. Wyatt Middle School in Emporia
- Region 1: **John Sawyer** of Gate City Christian School in Gate City
- Region 3: **Foster Pickett** of Lylburn Downing Middle School in Lexington
- Region 4: **Adrienne Eagle** of Cornerstone Christian Academy in Appomattox
- Region 5: **Caroline Le** of Harper Park Middle School in Leesburg
- Region 7: **Noelle Harris** of E.W. Wyatt Middle School in Emporia
- Region 8: **Ellie Stevens** of Poquoson Middle School in Poquoson

**Note – VML did not receive any entries from regions 2 and 6 this year.*

[Read the winning essays here >](#)

Of this year’s winners, VML President and Mayor of the Town of Ashland Steve Trivett said: “All did a good job of seeking citizen or public article input and suggested solutions with multiple targets across multiple actions of implementation. I think they will be great mayors one day!”

VML Executive Director Michelle Gowdy said: “Virginia is in good hands with these young people waiting in the wings to become tomorrow’s local government leaders. My heartfelt congratulations to all the winners and thanks to all the students and their teachers who participated this year!”

Of statewide winner Jelena Ly, Mayor Trivett noted: “She went beyond describing the challenge that required multiple actions, she also took the wise road of tracking and measuring the success of her action items with an eye on all the neighborhoods. She also displayed wisdom using her heart and her head: compassion for meeting emergency needs and the practicality of empowering people to take ownership and personally choosing healthier diets. Congratulations Jelena and to all this year’s winners!”

In addition to a certificate, each regional winner will receive a gift card for \$150. The statewide winner will receive a plaque and a gift card for \$250. Plans for presentation of the plaques and gift cards are forthcoming.

All winning essays will be featured in the May/June issue of VML's magazine *Virginia Town & City* and will be posted at www.vml.org/Opportunities/Essay-Contest

About VML's "If I Were Mayor" Essay Contest

The annual "If I were Mayor Contest" invites 7th and 8th graders from throughout Virginia to submit essays describing what they would do if they were mayor of their hometown. The essay contest is a key component of VML's civic education programming, which seeks to teach school children and adults how local government works and how they can become involved in making their communities better places to live, work and play.

About VML

The Virginia Municipal League is a statewide, nonprofit, nonpartisan association of local governments established in 1905 to improve and assist local governments through legislative advocacy, research, education, and other services. For more information visit www.vml.org/.

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