

Winners of 2024 “If I Were Mayor” state essay contest announced

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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. In years past, the contest was limited to seventh graders but for 2024 it was expanded to include eighth graders. As such, there was even more competition from a wider variety of localities this year. The challenge to the students, however, remained the same: Identify an issue in their locality, talk to others about possible solutions, and then identify what solution would best address the issue.

The 2024 winners are:

- Statewide winner: **Piper Dellinger** of Signal Knob Middle School in Strasburg
- Region 1: **Maya Morrison** of Marion Middle School in Marion
- Region 2: **Avery Gallimore** of Christian Heritage Academy in Rocky Mount
- Region 3: **Aiswarya Vinu** of Shelburne Middle School in Staunton
- Region 5: **Madeline Sherwood** of Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School in Falls Church
- Region 6: **Leia Hatem** of J.L. Simpson Middle School in Leesburg
- Region 7: **Eli Henry Smith** of E.W. Wyatt Middle School
- Region 8: **Jay Reese** of Grafton Middle School in Yorktown

**Note – VML did not receive any entries from region 4 this year.*

All the winners identified an issue affecting their community and proposed actionable solutions that demonstrated a grasp of what could be accomplished given available resources and public sentiment. In every case, the essayists came to the problem from the perspective of an individual who genuinely wished to make their locality a better place for all.

Of the statewide winning entry, VML’s Executive Director Michelle Gowdy said: “Ms. Dellinger did a fantastic job of identifying a bedrock issue that affects not only her own community but those across the Commonwealth: the lack of citizen engagement and understanding of their local government. I appreciate that her solutions included both things that citizens could do to become more involved as well as things that local governments could do to raise awareness of their work. An outstanding essay by someone who I’m sure has a future making a difference in her community and beyond. Congratulations Piper and to all this year’s winners!”

In addition to a plaque, 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 checks are forthcoming.

All winning essays will be featured in the May 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 seventh 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/.