

Statewide Winner Preston Lieu

**Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School
Falls Church, VA**



If I Were Mayor

By Preston Lieu

Falls Church City is a charming city with incredible schools, friendly people, and inviting spaces. Even though my community is exceptional, one glaring problem is the lack of bike lanes. I frequently bike around Falls Church City, as it is a fulfilling activity that brings me joy. Recently, I've noticed that it's hard to bike around the city; rushing cars and narrow roads make danger imminent. For my safety, I often have to bike on sidewalks, which is unsafe for pedestrians. This is a major problem, due to the fact that there are many people who care about their health, who want to commute to work, and who cycle with their families as a pastime. Worse, the few bike lanes that do exist always have cars clogging the path and preventing safe access.

I asked my mother about this issue and she told me that as a driver, it is not ideal for bikers to be on the road because of the amount of traffic they can cause. She let me know that drivers like her tend to get nervous when these bikers are on the road. Next, I asked my teacher, Ms. Phillips, about this issue. She said that though we have a great nature bike trail, there are too few bike lanes on our city streets. She says that more bike lanes would greatly improve safety and efficiency on the road. Lastly, a local community member named Soula says that more bike lanes would be a positive idea. She thinks that cars need to grow accustomed to bike lanes and that there should be a small fine if drivers disregard them. According to this information, it is clear that many residents of Falls Church City agree with me that more bike lanes are needed.

As Mayor, I would implement multiple solutions to resolve this problem. First, we must create additional bike lanes to the major roadways in town. Though there are some bike lanes, there still aren't enough, especially near the busy roads. Funding for new bike lanes would come from vehicle traffic violations in town. Moreover, I would propose a city raffle, where community members could win new bikes and safety gear. I would leverage my Mayor position to require all residents of Falls Church City to review an online biker safety presentation. Citizens would be expected to follow city biker rules, or there would be consequences. If a car is found clogging the bike lane, the car would be ticketed and a small fine would be given. Also, if a biker or pedestrian finds a car violating the lane, there would be an anonymous hotline available for reporting. With all these solutions, it is clear that our city can and should take action to add bike lanes for public health and safety.



Region 1 Winner Josiah Krumtum

Virginia Middle School
Bristol, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Josiah Krumtum

Bristol Virginia, it truly is a great place to live. However, everything can be improved. If I were mayor, I would try to make Bristol a better place to live one step at a time. Ending the majority of crime in our city is a key step. Our unruly crime rates are higher than 95% of Virginia's cities and towns of all sizes. This statistic can ward off travelers and potential residents, it can even possibly play a role in convincing current residents to move. This lowers the revenue our city needs, and damages it's wellbeing. Clearly this threat needs to be solved, but how?

My mother told me that the crime is not so much crime related, but instead more-so drug related. To hit this drug epidemic in the head we could offer affordable to free addict rehabilitation. Lisa agreed, stating Bristol's crime rate is consumed with many addicts, and that more affordable and easily accessible substance abuse counseling is a way to improve that. The third person I asked, my grandmother, said the police officers are very helpful. To reduce crime, she suggests more parenting classes and domestic abuse classes She finished by saying "You have to start with the children."

Now, to solve this problem I will look over all the information and conclude. Some things became more apparent throughout hearing their replies. In reality our crime is solely composed of drug-based offenses and only a small portion actually violent. So, in order to solve crime, we must go to its root, drugs. All the responses I received are very insightful; with that being said I would like to focus on the key parts of how they responded. To reduce crime in Bristol, both my mother and Lisa Sizemore suggested some form of affordable to free substance abuse counseling; they agreed this would be a step forward. My grandmother added her input, saying that domestic abuse prevention classes along with parenting classes would achieve that. She ended with a wonderful quote "You have to start with the children." Also, we could ask the state to fund drug preventing projects. These tactics are great, and If I were mayor, I would implement all of them in my effort to solve our crime problem.

If Bristol VA city becomes crime free, then more people will consider living here. In order to make Bristol VA crime free we have to defeat drug and substance abuse. If I were mayor, I would offer substance abuse counseling and get federal or state grants to fund drug/crime fighting projects. If I were mayor not only would I tackle the drug epidemic, but I would also make sure our children grow up to be model citizens by having parenting and domestic abuse classes; this would solve domestic abuse crimes and give Bristol a better, brighter future. I say that if we can improve our city one step at a time then we should, and these are some pretty big steps to make.



Region 2 Winner

Ava Grant

Martinsville Middle School
Martinsville, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Ava Grant

Martinsville, I never heard of it until I went to see my grandparents for the first time. All I knew was that Martinsville was a small town in Virginia right above the North Carolina border. When I go places, I always think what would make this area better? I wondered what I could do to improve Martinsville. If I were mayor what could I do to help?

Martinsville has pulchritudinous hills and mountains you can see from the distance. I love the environment and would like to help improve it in Martinsville. Your environment affects how you live, it can affect you positively and negatively. If you have a good environment it can help lift your mood. Enchanting meadows, trails and parks can bring out your true you. The environment can help with air quality, mental and physical issues.

I interviewed 3 people from Martinsville and asked them "How do you feel about the environment and how would you improve it?" I interviewed Dr. Holyfield a local physician. He said, "Its generally good." "For the future I think walking and bike riding trails should be expanding towards Danville and NC." I also interviewed Abby, a close friend, who thought a little differently than Dr. Holyfield. She gave Martinsville a 5 out of 10. To fix this issue she said to use cleaner energy. The final person I interviewed was Nora, a contributor to rooster walk and the Sam Smith river complex. She said "Martinsville is at the foothills of the mountains; it really has true beauty. Just keep our town clean and recycle."

Let's get to the question, If I were mayor? I would provide more dazzling parks, trails and meadows. I would make sure they are protected from building infrastructure. I would switch most of the use of our energy to hydropower instead of coal. If you donate a tree you get tax credits.

I never heard of Martinsville until I went to see my grandparents for the first time. It's just a small town in VA right above the NC border. If I were mayor of any town, I would look at the environment and make sure I was doing my best to restore the environment. Climate change has affected our world. The smallest things can make a big difference.



Region 3 Winner Catherine Campbell

**Shelburne Middle School
Staunton, VA**



If I Were Mayor

By Catherine Campbell

If I were mayor I would try to stop poverty. This can affect entire communities. Amanda Campbell, a professor at Bridgewater College, says “There are a lot of layers to poverty, it’s complicated.” She says that it can’t be solved by one person, one group of people, or even with one approach. Everyone in the community has to care about the situation before we can even begin to solve it.

Poverty is often inherited, meaning that children who grow up in poverty, will most likely have kids that grow up in poverty, and so on. It’s extremely hard to break this cycle. She says that a way we could solve it is by having food pantries, and welfare. Employers need to pay their workers a living wage, not just minimum wage. Health care should be more accessible, and people need to be willing to support people outside of their inner circle. People in poverty are normally isolated from people who are wealthy. If we could have a more mixed community, people who aren’t living in poverty could see more of how big of a problem it is, and people who have the means could help people who don’t. Laura Lawson, who has experience with working at schools with kids living in poverty, says that kids living in poverty had lower test scores than people who don’t. She explains that the best way to bring people out of poverty is to give them money, even though some people are against this because they think they would use it irresponsibly. She also talks about raising minimum wages, just like Amanda Campbell. She says that wealthier people should pay additional taxes that would go to people who don’t have enough money. She says that it’s unfair that professional athletes make as much money as they do, when there’s people who don’t even have enough money to live on. We should put extra tax on things we don’t need and things we do need should be more accessible with less tax.

I also interviewed Kimberly Love, who lives in Pennsylvania, and she also said that a solution to poverty is to raise the minimum wage. She thinks that we should provide job training and job placement programs. She explains that we should have affordable or free after school programs, ELL services, and we need to provide share-ride. We should provide access to healthier food through local farm share programs. Law enforcement to improve safety is also important, and we need community members to provide support programs such as professional clothing donations, shelters, and soup kitchens. Everyone had one answer in common: Raising minimum wages. I think that this is the best way to at least start to approach poverty. We may not be able to beat poverty yet, but we are able to take a stand as a community, and help each other. So, if I were mayor, I would do as much as I can to try to end poverty.



Region 4 Winner Katelyn Prue

Central Middle School
Charlotte Court House, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Katelyn Prue

There may be many problems that Charlotte County citizens might want to change, but there might be one just bigger: The building of the huge and brand-new courthouse.

I talked to two of Charlotte County's residents. They all agree that the money could have been used in a better way that would support and help the county more. The first young woman said this, and I quote "I think it was not the best move the county could have made. The money could have helped with maybe a food bank or food drive."

The second lady I talked to was very willing to share her opinion. She started by saying this "I disagree over the fact that this was a big need for this. The judge who even wanted there to be a bigger courthouse left to another county. He's probably not even caring about how much time and money it took to build the gigantic thing. We could have been using it to help our schools, school sports team, food banks, boys' and girls' homes, or even help small churches stay open."

The last person who I talked to is very special to me, my great grandmother. She joined the American Red Cross and helped many soldiers in the battles they faced, which is why she thought the money would have gone to a better purpose if it went to schools so the nurses could get the medical equipment they need to keep students healthy.

I thought the money could have gone better to all these which is why I think the next time something like this is going to be made we should stand up. There could be many opinions on this topic, but this is mine. If you have something going on in your community you should talk to your community leaders or adults.



Region 5 Winner Samantha Grooms

Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School
Falls Church, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Samantha Grooms

I live in Falls Church City. An issue that I noticed in my community is that our school buses do not have enough seats to fit every student safely. This year the number of sixth graders increased because of this growing city. Sometimes students have to sit three people to a seat. Another thing that I noticed about our school bus system is that the majority of our buses do not have seat belts. These problems both seem like safety issues that we should address.

I talked to three people about our school bus system. The first person that I talked to was Letty Hardi, a member of the city council. She has a son in sixth grade who she said agrees that there are a lot of people all crammed into the school buses. In my conversation with Letty Hardi she mentioned that a possible solution to the overcrowded school buses is making it easier to use different types of transportation, like biking or walking. Falls Church City is a smaller city, around 2 square miles, which means it should be easier to just bike to school. However, currently there are not enough crosswalks or bike paths, and the roads are always very busy. This makes it harder for students to walk to school every day. If we add more crosswalks and bike paths, we can make it easier to walk and bike.

I also talked to a couple of seventh graders at Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School. One seventh grader I talked to was Bethany Micheal. She agreed that when she used to ride the bus it was always crowded. She even said that sometimes she had to sit three to a seat.

After hearing all of these ideas about how to improve the Falls Church City school bus system, I have a solution of my own. Falls Church City should buy more school buses to make up for the increasing number of students. While I understand that this would cost money, it would be a good chance to modernize our school buses. We could buy school buses with seat belts. Letty Hardi explained that another way to modernize the buses is to buy electric buses, so they are more environmentally friendly. If Falls Church City does buy new buses so that there are enough for all of the students, modernizing would be a huge improvement.



Region 6 Winner Eleanor Crosley

**Culpeper Middle School
Culpeper, VA**



If I Were Mayor

By Eleanor Crosley

In Culpeper, as with any community, there are a lot of drug addicts, people who are mentally unstable and want to commit suicide or hurt others, homeless people, and a lot of very abusive and violent people. Others have more controllable and common problems, like not being able to organize their homes or having too much clutter. There are those with anxiety or stress, depression, school-related problems like bullies or grades, and low confidence. These problems don't just affect that one individual, but also the community around them. My plan would impact nearly everyone in the community, either directly or indirectly and the people in the community will be a lot safer and happier.

I talked to my aunt, who lives in Culpeper. She thought counseling or therapy would help some of the problems in our area. She agreed that if everybody had a counselor, things would improve greatly. I discussed the subject with my grandmother who lives in Culpeper County too. She thought counseling would help some of her older friends who don't have family close by and no one to share their problems with. I talked to my good friend, Emma, about it and she said that there should be more access to counselors in the school. She agreed with the idea of making counselors more easily available to everybody. Emma thought it would be a good tool for a lot of people.

If I were mayor I would want to help with a range of different things to improve the mental stability of the citizens in our community. My plan is to offer multiple types of free counseling to anyone who needs it. Each person would get a certain number of tokens they could use toward the counseling of their choice. They could use these tokens at any of the current local counseling facilities, and we would also add more counselors provided by the county that would have better hours for those who work during the day.

Overall, I think that therapy and counseling could drastically help those in our homeless population, those with addiction issues, issues with violence, or those with depression. Not only people who have glaring issues, but those of us who don't take the time to realize and address our own issues. It will help decrease crime in our community and help everyone to have a more positive outlook on life.



Region 7 Winner Amya Seaborne

Saint Joseph Catholic School
Petersburg, VA



If I Were Mayor

By Amya Seaborne

My name is Amya Seaborne and if I were mayor of the beautiful city of Petersburg, I would consider it an honor and a privilege. When I started working on my essay, I asked some of my family members, friends, church members, and teachers: "What did they feel like the biggest problem facing our city is and how would they fix it?" Wow! I received some very interesting and insightful thoughts on this topic.

One of my teachers, Mr. McMichael, said that our city has a high level of crime and poor schools. He thought, to help fix these problems we need to increase the overall tax base of the city by seeking out businesses and cutting the tax rate. My Aunt Bartina feels like the lack of jobs and the amount of crime negatively affect the image many have of our city. She said that to solve this problem, we need to bring more business to the city and all citizens need to take a more active role in the governing of the city. My Uncle Raymond feels that a lack of strong leadership has had a negative impact and that to solve the problem, we need to have officials that have the best interest of all of the residents of Petersburg in charge and running the city. He also believed that poverty is a big problem for the city and to fix this, we have to improve education and jobs in the city. I also had the opportunity to ask our current mayor: The Honorable Samuel Parham his thoughts on the question and he said: Poverty is the biggest problem in the city of Petersburg. The city's current poverty rate is 28%. He said that this problem is very complicated to solve, and it will take a mix of workforce development, gentrification and new industry with huge support from state and federal government.

These were just a few of the responses I gathered but I believe that they all are linked. Petersburg, like other cities in the great Commonwealth of Virginia, has problems big and small. My city has some very serious issues but there is also hope — there are young people just like myself that want the city we live in to be better for all of its citizens. I do not think, though, that there is just one solution that can fix all the problems the city faces. I believe that it will take time, a lot of work from individuals that have the city's best interest in mind and new fresh ideas.



Region 8 Winner David Davenport

**John Yeates Middle School
Suffolk, VA**



If I Were Mayor

By David Davenport

If I were mayor, I would make sure that everyone in my community has a fun activity to participate in. My hometown, Suffolk, VA is a nice suburban area with great people, schools and jobs, but one common problem that Suffolk faces is no fun activities for kids and adults to participate in their spare time. The city of Suffolk has the largest land mass in the state of Virginia so that means all the fun things are very spread out across the city, and they are too far away for most people to drive to in their free time. For example, the closest YMCA near most people is far away from everyone and plus it's an older facility. Also, children do not have many things to do so they do not get in trouble in the city.

I have asked around and most people agree that we don't have many fun or enjoyable activities to participate in. In fact, the only main source of entertainment that we have in the area is our libraries, parks, and a movie theater located in the northern part of town that is about thirty minutes away from the southern part of town. When I asked my friends for ideas they unanimously agreed for a local arcade that all kids could go to that would be closer to home. The adults I spoke to all agreed on a mall for shopping since it would have the biggest benefit on their lives.

My plan as the mayor would be to provide a convenient source of entertainment for everyone. I would begin with an arcade of some kind for the children. Then proceed to build a mall for parents so they could go shopping closer to home; instead of having to travel to Chesapeake Mall, we would have a Suffolk Mall. By making these changes to the Suffolk community we would have a somewhat more balanced place to live. I believe that both ideas would benefit the lives of everyone in Suffolk even if it's just an activity.

