



Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement  
Organizing for a New Dominion of Justice and Political Participation

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For immediate release

## VOICE Citizens Empowerment Group Condemns Criminalization of Entire Category of People

**NORTHERN VIRGINIA, March 1, 2017** - VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement), an 8-year-old citizens empowerment group representing 180,000 households here, today decried President Trump's decision to create a Victims Of Immigration Crime Engagement Office (VOICE) as, not only unnecessary and duplicative, but also a regrettable attempt to criminalize a whole category of U.S. residents, the vast majority of whom are law-abiding, tax-paying contributors to the country's economy.

"There is no merit in de-humanizing a group of people – whether it be immigrants, Jews, African-Americans, Muslims, Republicans, or Democrats," said Rev. Austin Almaguer, pastor of Vienna Baptist Church and a member of VOICE's Executive Team.

"It is regrettable that the President has co-opted a term that in Northern Virginia stands for the inclusion of every citizen in our society and instead uses it to malign one specific group of contributors to our country, who historically have lower rates of crime than natural-born citizens. This is a classic case of double-speak," added Rabbi Michael Holzman of Northern Virginia Hebrew Congregation, who is also a VOICE Strategy Team member.

Rev. Tuck Bowerfind, Rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church and a longtime VOICE leader concurred: "I think it risks suggesting that immigrants are somehow more prone to criminal behavior than non-immigrants and that victims of crimes by immigrants are somehow more worthy of justice."

Added Bowerfind: "VOICE and our 70 sister affiliates across the United States have a track record of making our regions stronger because we bring people together -- Muslims with Baptists, janitorial workers with suburban soccer moms, immigrants with business leaders, and so on."

"We know this works because by doing so VOICE and our sister affiliates have ensured that thousands of units of housing for working-class families have been built, jobs that pay living wages have been created, and we have won major sums for reinvestment by lenders in neighborhoods devastated by mortgage foreclosures due to predatory lending, among many other successes," he said.

Almaguer noted that victims in many localities already have access to advocates. This suggests that the action by the President is as much for show as to provide any real help. "What we need from our President instead is to condemn - forcefully and repeatedly -- the huge uptick in hate crimes against Muslims, Jews, and immigrants, to focus real resources on going after those who commit these crimes, and to reject those whose hate speech cloaked in nationalistic rhetoric encourages these acts," he said.

*VOICE is a multi-faith, nonpartisan citizens power organization comprised of religious and community institutions representing 180,000 families in Arlington, Fairfax, and Prince William counties and the city of Alexandria. For information on VOICE's success at effecting change on mortgage-foreclosure relief, affordable housing, dental care for low-income residents, expanded pre-K opportunities for low-income children, securing local funds for park and athletic facility renovation, and other issues, see [www.voice-iaf.org](http://www.voice-iaf.org). ###*