

## **Hala's Plan for Quality, Affordable Healthcare for All Virginians**

When Hala's son was born, her job at the time offered no health insurance. When her newborn son experienced health complications, Hala was able to get care through Medicaid -- and it saved his life. That's why she's fighting for access to affordable healthcare for all Virginians.

In 2018, Hala made good on her campaign promise as a deciding vote in the House of Delegates to expand Medicaid and has consistently stood up against Republican attempts to repeal protections for people with pre-existing conditions. Now more than 500,000 Virginians are enrolled and Hala was so proud to stand with Governor Northam, activists, and her colleagues during this historic moment.

COVID-19 has laid bare so many inequities in our healthcare system, and we must take steps to address access to care for those who have been hardest hit during this public health crisis. Throughout this crisis, more than 700,000 Virginians--including 100,000 children--are not insured, and even more, are underinsured. We must continue the progress that our General Assembly has made to provide access to quality, affordable healthcare for all Virginians.

As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will be a champion for expanding access to affordable, quality healthcare for all, ensuring prescription drug price transparency, tackling rising drug costs, promoting healthcare equity, prioritizing mental healthcare, protecting reproductive rights, and modernizing our healthcare infrastructure.

### *Hala's Record:*

#### ***Expanding Access to Affordable Healthcare for All***

In the General Assembly, Hala has been a fierce advocate for affordable healthcare. A defining vote in expanding Medicaid for now more than 500,000 Virginians, Hala has consistently been a fierce fighter against Republican efforts to eliminate protections for pre-existing conditions and gut the Affordable Care Act. She also was a critical vote to cap insulin at \$50 per month.

#### ***Supporting and Expanding Rural Healthcare***

Virginians living in rural areas continue to lack access to basic healthcare services, and as we recover from the pandemic, we must work to ensure every Virginian has access. Hala knows this means expanding access to telehealth. In the General Assembly, Hala passed legislation to increase broadband access, so that many rural Virginia residents can access their doctors via telehealth. She also co-patroned Delegate Dawn Adams's legislation to expand telemedicine throughout the Commonwealth.

#### ***Ensuring Prescription Drug Price Transparency and Tackling Rising Costs***

Hala also knows that the cost of prescription drugs is too high and unaffordable for many Virginians. That is why she co-patroned Delegate Sickles's legislation to provide prescription drug transparency during this past session.

### ***Promoting Healthcare Equity***

Racism is systemic in our healthcare systems. Disproportionately, Black and Brown Virginians are less likely to be insured, but face severe health disparities when it comes to cancer, diabetes, maternal and fetal mortality, heart disease, strokes, and asthma among other things. To make things worse, Black and Brown Virginians are more likely to contract and die from COVID-19. This pandemic has exacerbated already existing inequities in our system, and it is morally imperative that we must act. In the General Assembly, Hala passed legislation to assemble a workgroup to create Virginia's first Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Team, which will review and advise the General Assembly on policy to eliminate policies to eliminate Virginia's gaping disparities. She also co-patroned Majority Leader Charniele Herring's legislation to address maternal mortality disparities this past session. Additionally, she advocated for increasing FAMIS coverage to include all Virginians.

### ***Prioritizing Mental Healthcare and Decriminalizing Mental Health***

Prioritizing mental healthcare is a personal issue for Hala as she has supported family who have struggled. That is why in the General Assembly Hala supported increased funding in our budget for emergency services, including increased hospital beds in Emergency Rooms and aid for substance abuse issues.

### ***Protecting Virginians with Disabilities***

In the General Assembly, Hala has been an advocate and ally for Virginians with disabilities because her own son is neurodiverse. In the General Assembly, Hala sponsored budget amendments to increase funding for ID/DD waivers by \$55.6 million and testified about the impact this would have on families.

### ***Protecting Reproductive Rights and Expanding Access to Care***

Hala started her work in politics as a women's rights advocate and founded the Prince William Chapter of the National Organization for women. She firmly believes that reproductive rights are human rights, and that reproductive healthcare, including abortion care, is essential care that must be accessible to all Virginians and must be covered by insurance. Hala was a brick wall against Republican efforts to block access to abortion and other essential reproductive care, and she was a critical vote to repealing harmful TRAP laws that blocked abortion services for many Virginians during the 2020 session. During this past session, Hala co-patroned several bills that expanded access to reproductive care. She co-patroned Delegate Hudson's bill to repeal the ban on abortion coverage in state health exchange and Senator Boysko's bill to provide 12 months of contraception through FAMIS.

### ***Modernizing our Healthcare Infrastructure***

As a national security specialist, Hala secures our nation's critical infrastructure and prepares our infrastructures for disasters, like COVID-19. It is why she has been an advocate for modernizing our critical infrastructure, including our healthcare infrastructure, by providing additional budget funding to the Virginia Department of Health.

*The Plan:*

### **Expanding Access to Affordable Healthcare for All**

Healthcare is personal to Hala. When her son was born, both Hala and he suffered from life-threatening complications. Medicaid saved their lives. That is why Hala has stood up to Republican attempts in that state legislature to undermine the Affordable Care Act and to strip protections for people with pre-existing conditions. As a former Medicaid recipient, Hala will continue to champion affordable and accessible healthcare for all Virginians as Lieutenant Governor. She will expand access to affordable healthcare for all by:

- **Implementing a state reinsurance program.** During the 2021 General Assembly session, Hala was proud to support Delegate Sickles's enabling legislation to move Virginia closer to starting a state reinsurance program. Now our Commonwealth must receive approval of the Section 1332 waiver. This waiver in the Affordable Care Act will allow our Commonwealth to receive federal funding to support our creation of a reinsurance program. Reinsurance programs have been implemented in both red states like Alaska and blue states like Oregon and Maryland. They have lowered premiums by up to 30% per year and have stabilized individual plans while increasing insurer participation in the marketplace. Virginia has to secure a Section 1332 waiver to continue our progress and expand quality, affordable care for all Virginia residents. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will be a strong advocate for our Commonwealth during our waiver application process.
- **Strengthen our Medicaid program by creating a statewide Medicaid "buy-in" option on the exchange.** Hala knows that access to healthcare is life-saving, and too many Virginians are caught in the Medicaid coverage gap. The costs of high premiums and deductibles make receiving essential care out of reach for too many Virginia families. Virginia has the opportunity to strengthen our Medicaid program by creating a program that will allow folks caught in these gaps to buy into the Health Exchange program, expanding essential coverage for lower income Virginians.
- **Provide financial support for families struggling with healthcare premiums.** During her time in office, Hala has heard from Virginians

across the Commonwealth that they are often paying more for their health insurance than their mortgage or rent, making healthcare just unaffordable and out of reach. With our Health Exchange program, Virginia has the opportunity to provide tax credits and direct support to middle class families who may not qualify for federal assistance. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will work with General Assembly leadership and the Governor's administration to secure additional funding to support Virginia families with healthcare costs.

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### **Supporting and Expanding Rural Healthcare**

1 in 8 Virginians live in a rural community, and rural Virginians for too long have faced significant health disparities due to lack of access to basic healthcare services. Folks in rural communities are more likely than average to live with an undiagnosed underlying pre-existing condition, causing premature death. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will fight to expand access to rural healthcare and ensure that every Virginian no matter their zip code or locality has access to quality, affordable healthcare. She will support our rural communities by:

- **Expand telehealth options and close access gaps.**  
In the General Assembly, Hala was a fierce advocate to expand broadband to ensure that every Virginian has access to telehealth options. She also voted to expand telehealth options, which will help rural Virginians receive essential healthcare. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will build on this progress by increasing flexibility and scope of practice in telehealth availability, and she will continue to advocate for universal broadband; so everyone can access these services.
- **Incentivizing medical students to practice in rural areas.** One of the biggest impediments to care for rural Virginians is that providers are not available in their area. By replicating a program similar to Governor Northam's G3 initiative, as Lieutenant Governor, Hala will create a program to cover some medical school costs for medical students who stay and serve rural Virginia areas.
- **Partnering with federal legislators to provide additional funding for transportation costs.** Many rural Virginians have to drive more than 100 miles currently to see providers. The cost and time burden of transportation makes this essential care inaccessible for many Virginians. Hala will partner with our federal delegation to increase funding for rural transportation to see providers.

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### **Ensuring Prescription Drug Price Transparency and Tackling Rising Costs**

- **Set price caps on life-saving medications, like inhalers and Epi-Pens.**  
Over the past few years, many Virginians have seen the cost of essential life-saving medications skyrocket--some by more than 6000%. During the

past sessions, Delegate Ayala supported legislation to cap insulin at \$50. Virginia must take immediate action to ensure that Virginians can have access to essential medications, and as Lieutenant Governor, Hala will advocate for legislation to cap inhaler costs at \$50 and Epi-Pen costs at \$100, adjusting when necessary with the Consumer Price Index.

- **Create a Consumer Protection and Accountability Division within the State Corporation Commission.** As prices continue to increase for prescription drug costs, 1 in 4 Virginians struggle to pay for essential medications. Our Commonwealth must take action. This year, Delegate Ayala co-patroned legislation to provide drug price transparency, and as Lieutenant Governor, she will support the creation of a Consumer Protection and Accountability Division at the State Corporation Commission. This Commission would be able to hold pharmaceutical companies accountable for price gouging, devise plans to lower healthcare costs for Virginians, and provide oversight and protection for healthcare recipients.

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### **Prioritizing Mental Healthcare and Decriminalizing Mental Health**

Prioritizing mental healthcare is a personal issue for Hala as she has supported family members who have struggled with mental illness. This is why Hala championed additional funding for ID/DD Waivers as Delegate. Hala also knows that too often mental health crises and our criminal justice system are linked. Our country has seen time and time again that people who are in crisis do not receive the help they need and end up in our criminal justice system instead. Nearly 1 in 5 Americans deal with a mental illness, and too often Virginians are turned over to law enforcement authorities rather than getting the help they need. When in jail, people with mental illness stay almost twice as long as other individuals facing similar charges. It is time to stop using jails and prisons as default mental health facilities. During last summer's special session, Hala was proud to co-patron the Marcus Alert legislation, which established a statewide mental health awareness response and brought community understanding services. Our community members deserve help--not death--when they are in a crisis. This legislation moved Virginia forward and was a step in the right direction. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will continue to prioritize mental health care and decriminalize mental health.

- **Tackling the suicide epidemic among Virginia's veterans.** Nationwide, we are facing a suicide epidemic among our veterans, and Virginia is no exception. Virginia's veterans have a suicide rate significantly higher than our general population's rate. In fact nearly 200 veterans committed suicide, and even more attempted in 2018. As the daughter of an Air Force veteran, Hala knows that we must take bold

steps to support our veterans and end this epidemic. Hala will break down barriers to care for our veterans and create a PTSD Fund, similar to what has been implemented in states like Illinois, to provide financial assistance for veterans in crisis.

- **Focus mental health resources on early intervention, crisis prevention and wellness across the lifespan by expanding STEP-VA.**  
Virginia's mental health system has been underfunded for years, and despite the creation of STEP-VA and the Virginia Mental Health Access Project, our Commonwealth currently ranks in the bottom half of states for access to mental healthcare and services. In the General Assembly, Hala fought to increase funding to \$30.2 million for the STEP-VA program, which modernized and ensured quality, consistent mental healthcare throughout the Commonwealth. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will build upon this progress by increasing funding for STEP-VA, increasing investment in prevention programs and supporting early intervention services to prevent serious mental crises.
- **Increasing funding for substance abuse disorder prevention and treatment.**  
The opioid epidemic has destroyed Virginia for years. Because of the pandemic, opioid deaths increased by a staggering 66%, accounting for nearly 2000 deaths in 2020. COVID exacerbated this epidemic because of the lack of available treatment, economic strains, and the psychological impacts of isolation and social distancing. This is absolutely heartbreaking. In the General Assembly, Hala fought for increased funding for mental healthcare for folks struggling with substance abuse and for increased prevention programs. She also supported funding that increased the availability of Naloxone that our first responders have when responding to an overdose. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will build on this progress by increasing funding for syringe access programs and naloxone distribution. She will also fight to break down barriers for housing and employment opportunities for those recovering from addiction.
- **Decriminalizing mental health and supporting crisis diversion centers.**  
Nearly 1 in 5 Americans deal with a mental illness, and too often our residents are turned over to law enforcement authorities rather than getting the help they need. When in jail, people with mental illness stay almost twice as long as other individuals facing similar charges. Jails are not equipped to provide mental health treatment, and correctional officers are often not trained to deal with these situations effectively. In many cases, people with mental health conditions are segregated and isolated,

which research shows only worsens their problems. It is time to stop using jails and prisons as default mental health facilities. Instead, we should divert non-violent offenders with mental illness and substance use disorders into treatment instead of incarceration. This would save lives, foster recovery and reduce costs. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will support legislation to decriminalize suicide, to support financial assistance so that families do not go bankrupt paying for mental health or addiction treatment, and to increase funding for mental health professionals throughout our Commonwealth. She will support a historic funding package to ensure every locality in our Commonwealth has the ability to set up crisis diversion centers and to fully fund the pre-existing centers who too often are underfunded by our localities.

- **Supporting our children's mental health.**

Depression and anxiety in children has skyrocketed throughout COVID-19. As our children isolate and quarantine themselves, we know that they are hurting. In Hala's own family, she has seen relatives struggle with mental health as we try to stay safe during COVID. This issue is personal for her. In the General Assembly, Hala supported Governor Northam's creation of the Virginia Mental Health Access Project, which provides essential training to pediatricians and creates regional teams of mental health providers to serve children. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will build on this progress by expanding the Virginia Mental Health Access Project to children under 5 and young adults up to 26 throughout the Commonwealth.

### **Promoting Healthcare Equity**

Racism has been systemic in Virginia's healthcare system for far too long, and it is time to take action. Black and Brown Virginians are more likely to suffer from pre-existing conditions and are more likely to be uninsured. COVID-19 has laid bare the gross inequities in our healthcare system as well as Black and Brown Virginians are nearly twice as likely to contract and die from COVID-19. As the first woman of color Lieutenant Governor in Virginia's history, Hala will promote healthcare equity and dismantle systemic racism in our healthcare system.

- **Combat maternal, fetal and infant mortality disparities.** When Hala gave birth to her son, she suffered from life-threatening complications and felt that her doctors did not listen to her. She and her son almost died. Unfortunately, Hala's story is not uncommon, and too often, Black and Brown Virginians face worse outcomes. Black women are twice as likely to face severe complications during birth, four times as likely to die while giving birth, and a staggering nine times as likely to lose a pregnancy or

an infant. Earlier this month, Hala released her plan to combat maternal, fetal, and infant mortality by:

- *Implementing required implicit bias training for our healthcare providers in Virginia,*
- *Establishing pregnancy medical homes to connect high-risk women with health and social services,*
- *Increasing access to doula care, and*
- *Creating a universal paid family and medical leave program in Virginia.*

You can read her full plan here.

- **Require bias and cultural competency training for healthcare providers.** Doctors and nurses are too often not listening to their patients, especially their Black patients, which can lead to preventable and fatal complications. Other states who have implemented this training, like Massachusetts and California, have seen a drastic improvement in patient outcomes from communities of color. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala would work with the General Assembly to pass legislation to create and require this life-saving training.
- **Diversify Virginia's healthcare system.** Currently, only 19% of healthcare providers are Black, and only 9% are Latinos in Virginia. Our Commonwealth needs to ensure that our healthcare professionals reflect the diversity of our communities. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will support funding scholarships for underrepresented communities to attend higher education institutions and intend to go into these fields. She will also advocate for increased recruitment by underrepresented communities to explore healthcare internships in our public high schools.
- **Improve health data collection and reporting by race and ethnicity.** In order to end racial disparities, we need consistent reporting on health data by race and ethnicity. This data will provide valuable information to help us determine the best policy approaches towards eliminating these disparities. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will advocate for quarterly public reporting by the Virginia Department of Health to allow the public to see progress made along with a yearly report and analysis to the General Assembly, including policy recommendations to improve outcomes.

### **Modernizing our Healthcare Infrastructure**

As a national security specialist, Hala prepares our nation's critical infrastructure for disasters, like COVID-19. It is why she has been an advocate for modernizing our critical infrastructure in the General Assembly. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will invest in ensuring that our healthcare system is prepared for a natural disaster and is up-to-date for Virginians.

- **Modernize our Medicaid enrollment processes.**

For too long, Virginians have struggled with complex, paper-based applications, language barriers, and notoriously long wait times to enroll in Medicaid. Virginia ranks in the bottom half of states for enrollment and Medicaid application processing times. As a former Medicaid recipient herself, Hala knows that families need care and will fight to modernize our Medicaid system to ensure families receive care quickly and efficiently. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will modernize our by moving our Medicaid application process online like many other states and provide expanded language options.

### **Protecting Virginians with Disabilities**

In the General Assembly, Hala has been an advocate and ally for Virginians with disabilities because her own son is neurodiverse. In the General Assembly, Hala sponsored budget amendments to increase funding for ID/DD waivers and testified about the impact this would have on families. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will stand up for Virginians with disabilities.

- **Use federal dollars to support permanent supportive housing.** As an advocate for stable, affordable housing, Hala knows that safe, permanent housing is an evidence-based strategy that merges affordable housing while providing consistent, essential services for Virginians with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Unfortunately, our disAbled community is more likely to face housing insecurity. While Medicaid currently covers these services, housing insecurity threatens consistency of needed services. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will encourage the use of our federal dollars to provide permanent, affordable housing with these essential services.
- **End the ID/DD Waiver Wait List.** Currently in Virginia, the wait time between when you register on the ID/DD Waiver List and when you receive services is on average 10 years. This is unacceptable. As Delegate, Hala authored a \$55.6 million budget amendment to help close this gap that received partial funding. Unfortunately, there is still so much work to do. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will fight to close tax loopholes to finally fully fund our ID/DD Waiver program and end the long waits for essential care services.

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### **Protecting Reproductive Rights and Expanding Access to Care**

Hala has spent almost a decade as a women's rights activist. She helped organize Virginia's participation in the Women's March after Donald Trump's election and founded the Prince William chapter of the National Organization for Women. In the General Assembly, Hala stood up to Republican attacks on women's reproductive care and always voted to support a woman's right to

choose. Now that Donald Trump and the Republican Senate packed the Supreme Court with anti-choice justices, our state legislatures are the battleground to protect choice. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will continue to fight for women's health care. She will work to expand access to birth control and contraception, and defend a woman's right to choose.

- **Pass a constitutional amendment codifying *Roe v Wade*.**

For years, Republicans and their anti-choice allies have slowly been trying to chip away at *Roe v. Wade*, which guarantees the right to safe, legal abortion. More than 75% of Virginians support a woman's right to choose, and now more than ever before, we must ensure that the right to safe, legal abortion is enshrined in our Virginia Constitution. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will support a constitutional amendment to enshrine the right to choose into our Constitution and will actively campaign to ensure its passage with Virginia voters.

- **Increase abortion access and coverage.**

Because of decades of Republican-backed TRAP laws and other targeted abortion restrictions, only 7% of Virginia counties have clinics that are able to provide abortion services. Some Virginians have to travel hours to receive this essential care. To make things even worse, fake clinics, also known as "Crisis Pregnancy Centers," outnumber abortion clinics in Virginia by 5 to 1. Our leaders in Virginia must combat attacks on reproductive while also increasing abortion access and coverage throughout the Commonwealth.

- **Ensuring access to contraceptive care.**

Nearly 2 out of every 3 women in Virginia use contraceptive care on a regular basis in Virginia; however, more than 500,000 Virginia women live in a place where they do not have access to a full-range of contraceptive care. Virginia women should have full access to reproductive care no matter their zip code, and the status quo is unacceptable. As Lieutenant Governor, Hala will support using telehealth to prescribe contraceptives and require all pharmacies to fill and dispense all FDA approved contraceptives.