



Better Decisions, Better Outcomes



Advancing Lived Experience Representation and Compensation in Virginia

Those closest to a problem are often furthest from the decision-making table.

Virginia relies on hundreds of boards, councils, and committees to shape policy, programs, and services. Yet only a small fraction explicitly require lived experience representation, and even fewer provide compensation for participation. As a result, valuable expertise from people directly impacted by systems and services may be missing from key decisions.

Research Approach

The research project, [Lived Experience: A Missing Link in the Creation of Informed Policy](#) (Monroe-Mihailoff, B., 2026), included a review of Virginia statutes, analysis of approximately 300 executive branch boards, councils, and committees, interviews with stakeholders, and a review of national research and best practices related to lived experience engagement and compensation.

Key Findings:

- Research shows lived experience participation improves relevance, trust, equity, and real-world effectiveness of policies and programs.
- Virginia has approximately 300 executive branch boards, councils, and committees. Of these, fewer than 20 have explicit lived experience representation requirements.
- Existing requirements vary widely and lack a consistent framework.
- Compensation for lived experience participation is uncommon and inconsistent.

Recommendations:

Require Lived Experience Representation on Relevant State Boards, Councils, and Committees	Develop a standardized policy requiring lived experience representation on state boards, councils, and committees when firsthand experience is relevant to the group's purpose, whether advisory, policy-focused, or supervisory.
Require Fair Compensation for Lived Experience Participation	Establish a consistent compensation framework that recognizes the time, expertise, and contributions of lived experience members serving on state boards, councils, and committees.
Protect Public Benefit Eligibility	Codify compensation for lived experience participation as excluded from income or eligibility determinations, when applicable, so participation does not jeopardize public benefits.

Source: Bowen Monroe-Mihailoff, Lived [Lived Experience, A Missing Link in the Creation of Informed Policy](#). Virginia Management Fellows Program and Virginia Department of Social Services, Office of Trauma and Resilience Policy, 2026.