



**HHR Media Contact:**

Rachel Becker  
[rachel.becker@governor.virginia.gov](mailto:rachel.becker@governor.virginia.gov)

**VFHY Media Contact:**

Brennan C. Smith  
[Bsmith@vfhy.org](mailto:Bsmith@vfhy.org)

**Y Street Media Contact:**

Sarah Climaco  
[sarah.climaco@allisonpr.com](mailto:sarah.climaco@allisonpr.com)

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**Virginia Teen Activists' Work on Tobacco Prevention Recognized  
as a Model for Other States**

**RICHMOND, VA.** – Today, youth activism is impacting meaningful social, political and environmental change and commonwealth teens are joining in on this powerful work. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) included Y Street, Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth's (VFHY) youth engagement program, in a guide of initiatives across the country demonstrating best practices for tobacco prevention and control. These youth – also called Y-Sters – were featured for their work in helping schools across the state go tobacco-free and e-cigarette-free.

"Y-Sters are passionate about creating a healthier Virginia. It's an honor to see our work cultivating healthy school environments for our fellow students featured in 'Youth Engagement in Tobacco Prevention and Control,'" shares Savion, a senior at Greensville County High School and Y Street Leadership Team member.

"Since 2004, over 9,000 youth have been trained to make their schools and communities healthier. This honor is a culmination of the work done by VFHY to empower Y Street youth, and their own efforts to empower their peers to make healthy choices and promote a healthier Virginia. VFHY is proud of the work done by Y Street leaders that resulted in this recognition," said VFHY Executive Director Marty Kilgore.

Y Street is the state's largest youth-led movement, partnering with high schools across the state each year. Between 2015 and 2018, Y-Sters helped 47 school divisions – and nearly 100,000 students – become tobacco-free and e-cigarette-free by meeting with principals, superintendents, and school boards through its VA 24/7 campaign. Once securing key decision-makers' support, the campaign provided free resources to school divisions across Virginia, such as signage and a comprehensive toolkit, to help with implementation, communication, and enforcement of the policy.

"The rise in young people using e-cigarettes and other tobacco products is dangerous," said Daniel Carey, MD, MHCM. "It is truly inspiring to see these youth activists come together to



educate and protect their peers from the harmful effects of these products. I am impressed with their leadership and dedication, and I know their hard work will continue to have an effect for years to come."

The campaign met its final milestone with the successful passage of the 100% Comprehensive Tobacco-Free and E-Cigarette-Free Schools bill banning tobacco and e-cigarette use at Virginia schools and school events.

Ruth Brown, a member of the Y Street leadership team explains, "We, as active youth leaders, made a change for ourselves and the generations to come. Now that this bill has passed, I've seen the impact of youth activism in creating meaningful change."

To learn more about Y Street, visit [YStreet.org](http://YStreet.org). To view the CDC guide, visit <https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/stateandcommunity/best-practices-youth-engagement/pdfs/best-practices-youth-engagement-user-guide.pdf>.

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#### **About the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth (VFHY)**

Established by the Virginia General Assembly in 1999, the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth empowers Virginia's youth to make healthy choices by reducing and preventing youth tobacco use, substance use and childhood obesity. Since the Foundation began its work in 2001, high school smoking in Virginia has been cut by more than 70 percent and the number of middle school smokers has dropped by 85 percent. The Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth directly reaches about 50,000 children each year through classroom-based prevention programs in public schools, after-school programs, community centers, day cares and prevention programs across the state. VFHY's award-winning marketing campaigns deliver prevention messaging to more than 500,000 children annually. For more information, visit [www.vfhy.org](http://www.vfhy.org).

#### **About Y Street**

Founded in 2004, Y Street is the Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth's teen volunteer group for high school students. Y Street youth work on obesity, nutrition, and tobacco and nicotine-use prevention campaigns, such as Rev Your Bev and Share The Air, to help promote a healthier Virginia. Y Street members have worked on public health issues with top government officials, including the U.S. Surgeon General and Virginia's Governor, Attorney General, and First Lady. For more information, visit [www.YStreet.org](http://www.YStreet.org).