

Message on the 250th Anniversary of the Virginia Declaration of Rights
June 12, 2026

On June 12, 1776, Virginia unanimously proclaimed the Virginia Declaration of Rights, the first official declaration of individual liberties in the American Colonies and one of the most consequential documents in the history of human freedom. Its immortal truths inspired both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, forever shaping the destiny of our Republic.

As the flame of liberty spread across the American Colonies, the Fifth Virginia Convention met in Williamsburg in the spring of 1776 to construct a new order of self-governance for a free and sovereign people. Determined to cast off the chains of British tyranny, they fought to secure what no King could take away: the right to govern themselves, to speak freely, to worship as they chose, and to be judged by their fellow citizens rather than the decrees of a distant crown. Leading this extraordinary effort was the great patriot and statesman George Mason, whose extraordinary vision and unwavering devotion to liberty produced a document that would change the course of history.

Inspired by the timeless wisdom of enlightenment thinkers like John Locke, the Virginia Declaration of Rights boldly proclaimed the eternal truth that all men are by nature equally free and independent, possessing inherent rights that are endowed by our Creator and beyond the reach of any earthly power. It declared that all political power is vested in the people and that the government exists to serve the citizen, not the citizen to serve the government. The Declaration also affirmed the time-honored principles of separation of powers, checks and balances, freedom of the press, trial by jury, and the free exercise of religion, enduring pillars of liberty that remain the bedrock of our Republic today.

For most of human history, these truths had lived only in the hearts of men: felt deeply yet never spoken, never committed to law, and never wielded as a shield against the ambitions of tyrants. The Virginia Declaration of Rights changed that forever, establishing in permanent words what providence had long ordained, but no free people had ever before enshrined in the foundations of their government. Just weeks later, Thomas Jefferson would draw upon the language and ideals of this extraordinary document while drafting the Declaration of Independence. Years later, James Madison relied upon its enduring wisdom as the blueprint for the Bill of Rights, securing the fundamental liberties that continue to make America the single greatest beacon of freedom and prosperity the world has ever known.

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of its adoption, we renew our solemn pledge to preserve and defend the sacred principles enshrined in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. We reaffirm our commitment to protecting these liberties bestowed upon us by Almighty God, upholding equal justice under the law, and carrying forward this glorious inheritance of freedom for generations to come.

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