

SAFE ZONE VIRGINIA

"Safe Zone Virginia" is a project sponsored by the Virginia Association of College and University Housing Officers (VACUHO) Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues Task Force. Part of the mission of the VACUHO Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues Task Force is "...to enhance the campus climates in the state of Virginia, concerning gay, lesbian, bisexual, and ally issues." The Safe Zone Virginia project is a direct response to the need for such enhancement. The purpose of this program is to involve allies in creating a safer campus environment for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people and to affect positive change in the campus climate.

The University of Richmond's Safe Zone Virginia Executive Board has adopted the following as its Mission Statement: "The purpose of the Chapter is to reduce homophobia and heterosexism on our campus and thereby to make our campus a safer and freer environment for all members of our community regardless of sexual orientation. In pursuit of that purpose, the Chapter will identify and train individual faculty, staff, and students to serve as resources for members of the campus community in the process of thinking through and becoming more knowledgeable about issues of sexual diversity, will inform the campus community of the availability of those trained individuals, and will organize and sponsor educational programs for campus community groups." By agreeing to become a participant in Safe Zone Virginia, you have agreed to undergo training and to serve as a resource for people seeking clarification of issues of sexual diversity.

The Safe Zone Virginia sticker, which you are asked to display on your office doors or bulletin board, helps to convey a message that you are supportive, trustworthy, and sensitive to the needs and concerns of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. In addition, the sticker indicates that within your office or room homophobic and heterosexist comments and actions (both are defined in this packet) will not be tolerated silently but instead will be addressed in an educational, informative, and non-threatening manner. The sticker does not indicate whether you are or are not gay, lesbian, or bisexual; it merely states that that you are gay-affirming or gay friendly (in other words, an ally).

The Safe Zone Virginia sticker bears the pink triangle, a symbol used during World War II by the Nazis to label gay men who were sent to concentration camps to be exterminated as part of Hitler's "Final Solution." The sticker also bears the program name: "Safe Zone Virginia." VACUHO's name does not appear on the sticker,

because it was hoped and intended that this program will spread beyond housing officers to include allies among other student affairs professionals and other university community members as well. In fact, at UR allies include members of the faculty, administration, student body, and support staff as well as Residence Life staff.

The Safe Zone Virginia project is intended to be an on-going educational process for all involved. Upon agreeing to participate in Safe Zone Virginia, you received this packet of information about gay and lesbian history and culture, the development of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities, issues facing non-heterosexual youth, laws affecting the lives of non-heterosexual people, and ways you as a member of this campus community can be more supportive. The UR Safe Zone Board, in cooperation with the full membership, will update the packet periodically as needed; please feel free to suggest additions or changes. The VACUHO Task Force will continue to urge its Association to support program topics in this area in order to provide further avenues for education and will serve as a reference for anyone who has questions, wants on-campus speakers, or is looking for other resources on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues.

Your main responsibility as a Safe Zone Virginia participant is to be open to questions from and about lesbian, gay, and bisexual people and their issues. Most such questions will probably come from students who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or unsure of their sexual orientation, but some questions may come from colleagues and some may come from students who are heterosexual and who are disturbed by the presence of a non-heterosexual person in their classes, residence hall, or family. Please use and share the information in this packet when talking with anyone about gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. Where possible, support policies that bring equity to otherwise inequitable situations and give open support for gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. Encourage others to become a part of Safe Zone Virginia. The more people are willing to talk about these issues with facts and openness, the safer our campus will become for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people.

The length of your commitment to Safe Zone Virginia is up to you. As long as you want to participate, display your sticker on your door or bulletin board. If you decide to discontinue your participation, simply remove your sticker and inform the Board secretary. There will be no questions asked. Being an ally can be tough at times. Your genuine dedication to this program, no matter what its length, will create a positive space within your community.

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