

During council's recess, Palestinians in Gaza have continued to suffer unimaginable conditions created by Israel's US funded genocide of Palestinians. **Nowhere** is safe in Gaza. Israel has continued to push Palestinians around, deeming areas "evacuation zones"<sup>1</sup> on a whim, while they've relentlessly bombed UN schools, refugee camps, hospitals... the list goes on. Just last week, they shot and killed an American activist in the West Bank<sup>2</sup>... the WEST BANK—NOT Gaza. Where is the outrage over this? Better yet, where is the outrage over Israel's mass murder of *at least* 16,500 children, of which over 2,000 were under the age of two<sup>3</sup>? Where is the outrage over the at least 885 medical workers, 172 press workers, and 289 aid workers Israel has targeted and killed?<sup>4,5</sup>

And these are **very** conservative numbers. A study by the Lancet, which is one of the world's oldest medical journals, states that the number of deaths is certainly much higher—likely over 186,000.<sup>6</sup> There are thousands of Palestinians missing, buried under the rubble or dumped in mass graves<sup>7</sup> by the Israeli military after being slaughtered. Where is the outrage over the illegal detainment, torture, and rape of thousands of Palestinians held hostage in Israel?<sup>8,9</sup>

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## What is the Virginia Israel Advisory Board (VIAB)?

The [Virginia Israel Advisory Board](#) (VIAB) is an Israel business promotion entity in the United States embedded within the Virginia state government since 1996 and funded by the state's taxpayers. VIAB funnels millions of dollars toward Israeli businesses and away from Virginia companies.

Unlike other community-specific state advisory boards, VIAB is taxpayer funded. It received \$244,872 in fiscal year 2024 alone. VIAB also diverts millions of dollars each year in state, federal and private grants towards Israeli corporations. It collaborates with state-funded entities like colleges and universities in projects designed to benefit Israel, instead of Virginia students, residents, or businesses.

No other country receives Virginia taxpayer funding for business promotion. VIAB pressures state lawmakers and the local business community to develop a long-term stake in Israel, despite Israel's systemic apartheid, human rights violations in occupied Palestine, and the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

## Why dismantle VIAB?

### Doing business with Apartheid & Genocide

Israel's brutal military occupation of Palestine and its apartheid system is condemned by the United Nations, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and globally by human rights organizations. The International Court of Justice (ICJ) has ordered Israel to end its "plausible genocide" in Gaza, where an estimated [186,000 Palestinians have been killed](#) by Israel. Israel has ignored the ICJ's order to dismantle illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

VIAB primarily promotes Israeli military and police technology, which was largely developed to oppress Palestinians and maintain its military occupation of Palestinian lands. [VIAB brought](#) Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to Herndon, Virginia and helped IAI [secure \\$1 million](#) in funding. IAI is an Israeli state-owned company that builds [military drones and weapons systems](#) used to kill Palestinians in the ongoing genocide in Gaza and occupied Palestine. The UN has directly [called for an arms embargo](#) against Israel, yet VIAB encourages Virginia to invest in weapons built for Israel.

VIAB facilitates access to Virginia's economy for companies that [break international law](#) by doing business with illegal settlements within the occupied West Bank. Both [Energix](#) and [IAI](#) have been cited by the United Nations for violations of human rights by having facilities in the occupied West Bank and the Golan Heights.

VIAB may also be in [violation](#) of the [U.S. Foreign Assistance Act](#) by providing assistance to companies like [Elbit Systems and IAI](#) that enable Israel to engage in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.

### **Subsidizing Israeli instead of Virginia businesses**

VIAB is the only foreign advisory board in the state of Virginia, and VIAB receives a taxpayer-funded budget as well as office space easily accessible to the General Assembly. Yet no other advisory boards representing specific communities in Virginia receive these taxpayer-funded advantages. This includes the Virginia African American Advisory Board, the Virginia Asian Advisory Board, the Virginia Latino Advisory Board, the Virginia Council on Women, and the Virginia LGBTQ+ Advisory Board.

[VIAB's mission](#) is to redirect economic development funds towards Israeli instead of Virginia businesses. As of 2023, the Commonwealth already has a [\\$162 million trade deficit](#) with Israel. VIAB projects increase that deficit by diverting economic development funds to Israeli instead of Virginia companies. Scarce Virginia and federal taxpayer-funded financial incentives should go to local companies that will reinvest their profits into Virginia communities rather than transfer them to a foreign country.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

VIAB helps Israeli companies [“build and grow their U.S. operations in Virginia”](#) by exerting undue influence over the distribution of scarce taxpayer development funds. For example, in the VIAB project code-named [Project Jonah](#), VIAB helped Israeli fishery company AquaMaof divert Tobacco Commission and Virginia Economic Development Partnership funds from a socially responsible Virginia fishery, Blue Ridge Aquaculture, giving the Israeli company an unfair market advantage. Virginia's innovators must be able to compete fairly for Virginia economic development incentives unhindered by foreign conflicts of interest.

### **Unethical Practices**

VIAB's leadership appears to have engaged in a pattern of unethical practices. VIAB's annual report overstates its economic impacts in the state of Virginia. A state Cabinet-level official [found its annual report](#) to be “likely the most inflated and without merit that I've seen in my decade here.” VIAB sought to [weaken state oversight](#) over its activities by lobbying for the 2018 reconstitution and transfer of VIAB funding and operations from the Office of the Governor to the General Assembly. The selection of its executive director provoked scrutiny from the [Virginia Office of the Attorney General](#). The executive director also received additional compensation from Israel advocacy groups, triggering a [Virginia Conflict of Interest and Ethics Advisory Council](#) inquiry.