



The Fredericksburg Chapter of Virginia Organizing partnered with other groups to host a "Know Your Rights Workshop" for immigrants in Virginia.



Eastern Shore leaders gathered in February for one of seven Virginia Organizing rallies held across the state in support of health care (see main article).



Emerging leaders in New River Valley held a planning meeting to discuss local campaigns, becoming a Chapter of Virginia Organizing, and changes they would like to see in their community.

News From the Grassroots

Virginia Organizing Takes Action Across the State on Health Care

In our December 2016 newsletter, we wrote about how important it was to protect, improve, and expand health care coverage for all people. Since then, Congress has taken steps to move forward with a repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) using the budget reconciliation process.

Virginia Organizing Chapters across the state decided to take action to make sure Congress knows that we are paying attention and care about our access to affordable health care.

Danville leaders gathered in December and again on February 14 to tell Congress, "don't break our hearts."

"I'm here with Virginia Organizing to encourage our legislators to protect the Affordable Care Act," said Danville Chapter member Matthew Bailey. "My wife and I have recently been able to afford health insurance for the first time in several years because of the Affordable Care Act. Recently, we've been concerned whether we're going to lose that coverage or not."

Other leaders are concerned about what losing health care will mean for those with pre-existing conditions.

"I am scared of what Congress will do with the Affordable Care Act," said Angela Davis of Norfolk. "I had an aneurysm October 2015 and stayed in the hospital intensive care unit for five days. My bill was well over \$100,000, and was paid in full — I only had to cover a \$25 copay. If we lose the ACA, what happens next time and to people in similar situations?"

In Harrisonburg, business owners and individuals came out to support health care.

"As a small business owner, the Affordable Care Act allows me to maintain my health care while investing in growing my business," said Eleanor Held, a member of the Harrisonburg Chapter of Virginia Organizing.

Health care providers are also concerned about possible repeal of the ACA.

"Because of the Affordable Care Act, I am able to receive health care through my parents coverage as a college student. Opponents have yet to come up with a better plan — or any plan at all," said Geena Felton, a member of the South

Hampton Roads Chapter of Virginia Organizing. "It would be a shame to study nursing and not be able to receive health services for myself."

Virginia Organizing rallies have taken place in Abingdon, Danville, Eastern Shore, Fredericksburg, Harrisonburg, Norfolk, and Virginia Beach.

"Virginia Organizing believes Congress needs to work on expanding access to affordable care for all people and improving on current health care laws to reduce premiums, deductibles, and prescription drug costs and provide greater access to more doctors and hospitals," said Virginia Organizing Board member and Fredericksburg Chapter leader Duane Edwards.

To see more actions, be sure to check our calendar at www.virginia-organizing.org/events.

Important Dates!

March 1: Day of Empathy: Ending the School-to-Prison Pipeline

April 28-29: 2017 Power Analysis

September 29-October 1: Save the date for Grassroots Gathering 2017!

Real people. Real change.

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Seeking Input from Consumers

Have you had a bad experience with a student loan servicing company or know someone who has? Have you had trouble with debt collectors or financial institutions? Have you had negative experiences with payday, car title, or internet loan companies? Did you know that the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is available to help with those complaints?

The CFPB takes complaints on their website at www.cfpb.gov or by calling 855-411-2372. The CFPB recently filed a lawsuit against one of the largest student loan servicers in the country. Representatives from the CFPB told Virginia Organizing that they found out about some of the issues with this servicer through complaints filed to the CFPB. Your complaints raise red flags about financial institutions and whether they are following the law.

If you have a CFPB story you'd like to share, we'd love to hear it! Email amanda@virginia-organizing.org with your name, contact information, a brief description of your story, and whether or not you are interested in sharing your story in the media.

Portsmouth Chapter Meeting with School Superintendent

Virginia Organizing leaders who are directly affected by the school-to-prison pipeline and excessive suspensions and their supporters will meet with Dr. Elie

Bracy III, superintendent of Portsmouth City Schools in early March. Virginia Organizing has invited Dr. Bracy to address the high rate of suspensions in Portsmouth, and answer questions from the public relevant to the topic. He will lay out his plan to permanently reduce suspensions for Portsmouth students. In the process, he will address potential solutions such as mindfulness training, Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), implicit bias trainings, parent communication, and additional training for administrative staff.

Looking for Ways to Take Action?

Virginia Organizing recently set up an action page that is updated weekly with concrete ways you can take action that will build on the strategies we are already using to create change. Your voice, combined with those across the state, give our actions more power and show those who have the ability to make changes how we really feel. We encourage you to visit www.virginia-organizing.org/act-now each week to learn new ways you can participate in the civic process. If you want to go further, you can find information about additional ways to act at www.virginia-organizing.org/take-action.

Take Action!

Please call Governor Terry McAuliffe at 804-786-2211 and tell him you want to see American Sign Language interpreting at his events and in the General Assembly meetings. You can also contact your state legislators. Find out who represents you at <http://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>.

Leader of the Month Jill Carson



Jill Carson, a leader in the Lee County Chapter, was a founding member of Virginia Organizing Project's original Organizing Committee back in 1995. Since then, Jill has stayed focused on helping real people make real change.

"Meet people where they are," she said. "And don't preach to the choir. Go out and find people you wouldn't otherwise talk to. That's what this is all about."

Jill first got involved when two people she trusted, Sister Beth Davies and Sue Ella Kobak, asked her to meet a community organizer they knew.

"He started to talk with us about this whole concept of organizing. We went out doing 1:1s and putting people together who had like concerns. That's where Virginia Organizing started!"

Jill is especially proud of their first campaign. After learning that no people of color were ever called for jury duty, Jill and other leaders organized to challenge the process. Their work resulted not only in the first people of color serving on juries but poor white citizens were selected for the first time too!

More recently, Jill has fought to reopen Lee County's only hospital. By meeting with the Hospital Authority, appealing to statewide officials, and organizing public forums, the Lee County Chapter is working to make real change.

Thank you, Jill, for all your work to build a more just Virginia!

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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Local Chapters and Areas Served

Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro
Charlottesville/Albemarle County
Danville
Eastern Shore
Harrisonburg/Rockingham County
Fredericksburg
Lee County
Lynchburg
Martinsville/Henry County
New River Valley
Portsmouth
Richmond
Roanoke
South Hampton Roads
Washington County
On Campus: UMW, UVA, E&H, U of R,
ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU

News in Brief

- We are looking for monthly sustainers to help grow our capacity for grassroots organizing and create more change in Virginia! Will you help us by making a monthly donation of \$10 or more at www.virginia-organizing.org/donate?
- Virginia Organizing is encouraging everyone to know your rights if you are ever confronted by law enforcement. This is especially important for those in the immigrant community as ICE raids increase. Visit <https://www.aclu.org/know-your-rights> to learn more.
- Interested in what Virginia Organizing accomplished in 2016? Our annual report is out! Visit www.virginia-organizing.org/organizational-reports to view it!
- Virginia Organizing is planning a telephone media conference for March 1 to have people share their experiences with the school-to-prison pipeline and mass incarceration for a national Day of Empathy. If you are interested in participating, please contact us at amanda@virginia-organizing.org.

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