

News from the Grassroots

March 2025

Issue 147

Rallying for Medicaid, Child Care, and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau



Rally in front of Congresswoman Kiggans' office in Virginia Beach



Rally near of Congresswoman Kiggans' office in Onley

On March 19, our Norfolk and Eastern Shore Chapters rallied outside of Congresswoman Kiggans' offices in Virginia Beach and Onley, respectively, to pressure her to respond to the needs and requests of her constituents. Dozens of residents from both areas gathered to express their displeasure about the lack of response from the congresswoman and to attempt to schedule a meeting to discuss their concerns about healthcare, child care, and consumer protections.

Not only was the congresswoman absent from both offices, despite Congress being in recess, but both chapters also faced opposition from her offices and were asked to leave the premises.

One speaker on the Eastern Shore declared her dissatisfaction with being asked to leave the property by stating, "Jen's door...I don't know is it locked? Is she M.I.A.? I don't know where she is, but she is not listening to us!"

While neither chapter was able to secure a meeting with Kiggans, both groups left information sheets outlining the concerns of her 2nd district constituents and the issues they would like her to support. A small number of Virginia Beach residents were also able to express concerns directly to one of the congressional aides.

The Virginia Beach rally was held in partnership with the Interspiritual Empowerment Project and the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy.

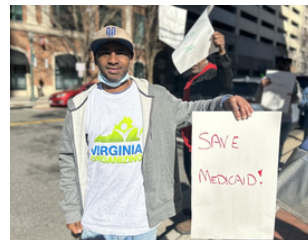
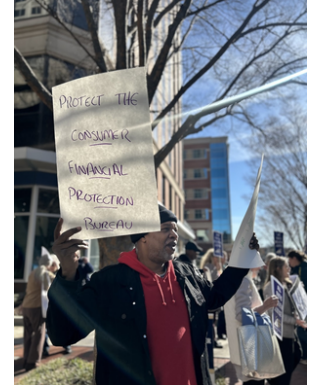
Sentiments were shared through chants and protesting signs. Multiple members also shared why they attended the rallies, including Terry "Bean" White of the Norfolk Chapter.

"I think for Medicaid, we need to go ahead and keep this in place so people won't lose their benefits, kids won't die, adults won't die, and medicine won't go up so much that people can't afford it," said White



Terry "Bean" White of the Norfolk Chapter

Within the next few weeks, our New River Valley, Wise County, and Wytthe County Chapters will also hold actions near Representative Griffith's offices to pressure him to hear the concerns of his 9th District constituents.



Danville Chapter Affordable Subsidized Housing Win!

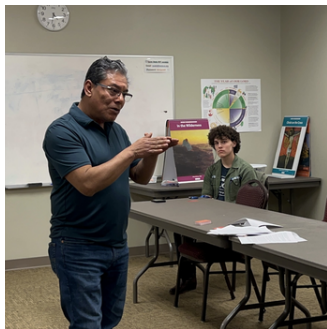
Our Danville Chapter has been working on a campaign to get the city to create affordable subsidized housing units over the past year. Chapter members have spoken before city council, met with the city manager and developers, and held actions to express the need for affordable housing in the city.

The efforts of the chapter have resulted in concessions to make way for three affordable housing options in the new complexes. Specifically, the chapter's meetings with city officials ensured that, in determining plans for the units with the developers, specific units were allocated toward affordable subsidized housing. The chapter encouraged the city to use its leverage with developers to incorporate affordable housing options on the front-end of negotiations.

For example, T.D. Fitzgerald Apartments will offer half of their apartment units for those making less than 80% of the median income. Similarly, the \$11.5M Seeland Valley Apartment complex has designated 34 single-bedroom and 18 two-bedroom units specifically for moderate-to-low income residents 55 and up.

This is a huge win for the chapter and a great reminder that our collective power can influence change!

Know Your Rights Workshops Continue



Know Your Rights Workshop in Williamsburg, March 16, 2025

Our Know Your Rights workshops have gotten off to a strong start, with workshop sessions held by multiple chapters, including Fredericksburg, Harrisonburg, and Williamsburg.

In the workshops, members learn about immigrant rights, do's and don'ts for how to respond to law enforcement, and preparation steps for themselves, their families, and their loved ones. The workshops are not only designed for directly affected communities, but they are also designed to provide information and resources to community members who are interested in supporting our immigrant communities.

Everyone who attends the workshop is given resource cards with reminders of immigrant rights and how to respond to law enforcement, which are available in multiple languages.

If you are interested in attending a Know Your Rights workshop in your area, please reach out to your local organizer.

The Williamsburg Chapter is Growing!



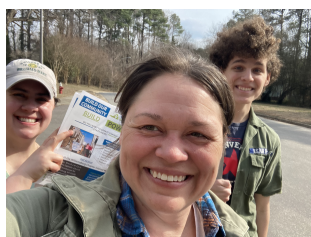
Williamsburg Chapter's second interest meeting, March 1, 2025.

The Williamsburg Chapter held their second interest meeting this month, topping the last month's turn out with 25 people in attendance! This has come from the efforts of chapter leaders spreading the word about Virginia Organizing throughout the community, with multiple chapter members engaging in

canvassing and attending chapter-related activities.

As mentioned, the chapter also held a Know Your Rights workshop this month with 12 people in attendance. Many of the attendees were thankful for the information and resources, with one attendee even shouting "I'm with you!" to signify her trust in what the chapter leadership is doing for the community.

For more information about the Williamsburg Chapter, contact Meghan McNamara at meghan@virginia-organizing.org.



Featured Community Partner | Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHC)



This month, we are featuring Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments as our Featured Community Partner. This article is a repost from September 2021.

Sometime in the last two years, as the COVID-19 pandemic has swept over the world again and again, you may have read or heard that health care workers sometimes refer to themselves as the "last line of defense" against the virus. This is in contrast to our more normal perception of nurses as being on the "front lines," which naturally arises from the fact that they have the most direct contact with acutely ill patients. When a health care worker correctively tells us that they are, in fact, the "last line," they mean that they only encounter a COVID patient after all other preventive measures have failed to prevent infection. It is a charge to the rest of us, who live upstream from the hospitals and clinics, to take appropriate measures to minimize the likelihood that we'll become someone's patient.

For Katie Huffling, Director of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE), the same principle applies in any public health crisis. Katie's background is as a nurse midwife, and for several years she worked in the "last line" in a hospital outside Washington, D.C. The practice served a patient population that was predominantly low-income people of color, many of whom were undocumented and uninsured. A large percentage of her patients were exposed to toxins in their environment as a matter of course in their daily lives, and that had negative health impacts on pregnancy and childhood development.



Katie wanted to do more than treat patients who were already sick and experiencing poor outcomes. She wanted to address the underlying environmental conditions that were turning people into patients in the first place, so she joined with like-minded nurses from across the US to launch ANHE in 2008. The practitioners she works with are people who wanted to do systemic environmental work, but found themselves isolated in silos that limited their impact. ANHE provides groups with a network, leveraging funding to make collective efforts that ensure the voice of nurses are at the center of environmental policy debates and research.

Before the pandemic put an end to in-person contacts Katie spent a lot of time in D.C. doing coalition-building work, work that has become long hours on Zoom. Those efforts have made a difference. Recently the state of Maryland passed a ban on fracking, an accomplishment that ANHE shared with coalition partners. "I broke down in tears when they announced the news," Katie says.

Katie says that the future promises to be intense with the climate crisis forcing communities to make transitions to a new economy. "We have to hold our regulatory system accountable, because there is always a tension between industries wanting to push the limits and the need to put community health first," she says.

ANHE relies largely on foundation grants, but that often limits the scope of issues they can work on. For example, Katie says, “we would love to do more work on clean water, as well as food and agriculture and toxic chemicals.” These are issues ANHE sees as critical public health risks, but there is currently little funding available to address them. In practice, funders who are heavily focused on climate issues do not regard these as climate-related.

Looking to the future, Katie hopes to see more funds become available to build a broader systemic response to the many environmental challenges that negatively impact communities. In the meantime, she reminds us that it is critical that people in this work support each other and take care of ourselves. “We need to model a culture of taking time for yourself to recharge.” That is a reminder to all of us who are working long hours to build a better world: the personal is political, so we can’t heal the world without tending to our own healing.

#GiveLocal757



Our Newport News/Hampton and Norfolk Chapters are participating in the 2025 Give Local 757 fundraising campaign on May 6, 2025.

This collaborative fundraiser will allow Virginia Organizing to generate support on the Give Local 757 platform by participating in “prize pools” based on the level of support the chapters gain before and during the event.

The chapters will also hold a virtual event on social media where followers can follow along with the progress of the campaign throughout the day.

Follow VO on social media for updates!

Facebook - Virginia Organizing and Virginia Organizing Newport News
Instagram - @vaorganizing and @nnvaorg
BlueSky - @nnvaorg.bsky.social
X - @vaorganizing and @nnvaorg

Looking Ahead - 30th Anniversary of VO!

As we reminisce on the past 30 years of Virginia Organizing, we also want to take this opportunity to look to the future. That is why we are asking you to share your hopes and dreams for the next 30 years with us! Tell us what you want the future of Virginia and Virginia Organizing to look like!

Submit your hopes for the next 30 years here!

[Share here!](#)

Leader of the Month

Kimberly Dyke-Harsley - Lynchburg Chapter

Kimberly has been a wonderful contributing leader in the Lynchburg Chapter. Her involvement with VO has included giving the chapter accomplishments at the 2024 Grassroots Gathering, consistently attending Environmental Justice Strategy Committee meetings, and testifying during the General Assembly.



In fact, Kimberly brought the idea for the HB 1894 bill to the committee and has continued her strong advocacy alongside her family members who are incarcerated.

"Her hard work and persistence are directly responsible for getting us this far" said State Governing Board member, Brandy Faulkner.

Specifically, Kimberly has:

- Worked to get stories from other incarcerated and directly affected persons.
- Kept the EJ committee informed about how extreme heat is affecting incarcerated people in Virginia.
- Taken leadership roles in every meeting we have had with legislators (Dels. Rasoul, Seibold, and Shin).
- Been present for and testified at both House and Senate hearings this General Assembly session.
- Attended meetings with other organizations to promote the bill and build coalition support.

Brandy continued with her appreciation for Kimberly's contributions by saying, "I think everyone in our organization should know how amazing and inspirational Kim has been. The bill is in the governor's hands, and she prays it will be signed. But, we wouldn't be here without Kimberly."

Kimberly, we are thankful for all of your tremendous work!

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Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Fredericksburg Area, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Halifax County, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Newport News/Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Richmond Area, Suffolk, Waynesboro, Wise County, Wythe County