



News from the Grassroots

April 2025

Issue 148



2025 Power Analysis

We had a great Power Analysis this month, where new and veteran chapter members gathered together to talk about ways we can build power across the state. Each of our chapters was represented in committee reports, small group discussions, and larger group discussions.

During the Power Analysis, we discussed our organization's values and current goals for building power. We also identified who has power in our state and federal contexts, as well as discussed ways that we can build power creatively and productively moving forward.

One way that we have built power this year has been through the work of our statewide strategy committees. Each committee reported to the group about actions taken and campaigns won. They also discussed how the committees participated in lobbying activities during the General Assembly session: speaking with legislators, testifying before committees, speaking with media, and partnering on specific bills.

When asked about their visions of power in Virginia, participants shared how they view power, desired power dynamics, and how they would like to see power shift in the state.

Here's what some of the attendees had to say about power:

"My vision of power is a strong, united representation of people working collectively to find solutions to issues facing Virginia Residents in a positive and productive manner," said Sharon Gomez of the Norfolk Chapter.

"Power is the ability to meet everybody's basic needs. We build power by getting through to local decision makers," said Jessica Moody of the Charlottesville Chapter.

"My vision of power is when everyone has a voice and a seat at the table. I hope to see more diversity in Virginia leadership especially those who support immigrants," said Olivia Carvajal of the Fredericksburg Chapter.

"I believe that building a healthy community starts with knowledge and purpose. So in order to fix an issue, I must first have knowledge of the issue and through that I can move with purpose," said Richard Riiz of the Suffolk Chapter.

"My vision of power in Virginia is one where communities, especially those historically marginalized, have the tools, knowledge, and support to shape the decisions that affect their lives...For me, power means the ability to organize, educate, and empower individuals so that they can hold institutions accountable. It's about ensuring that all people, particularly those in underserved communities, can actively participate in decision-making processes and push for policies that support their rights and well-being. In Virginia, true power is built through solidarity, collective action, and an unwavering commitment to justice and equality," said Lawrence Howerton of the Halifax/South Boston Chapter.



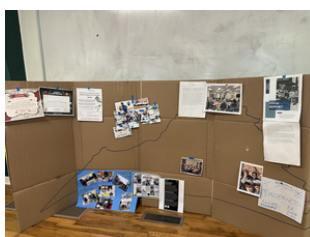
Brandy reviewing the values of VO



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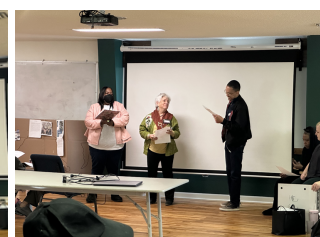
Elisabeth sharing about the Faces of Power



Chapter Brag Wall



Housing Statewide Committee report



Environmental Justice Statewide Committee report



Restoration of Rights Statewide Committee report

We are Continuing to Call on our Members of Congress

Our chapters are continuing to call on members of Congress to protect the interests of their constituents. Members of our Eastern Shore, Fredericksburg, New River Valley, Norfolk, Suffolk, Wise County, and Wythe County Chapters rallied, held town halls, and arranged press conferences to call on their 2nd, 7th, and 9th congressional representatives to act. Representatives Kiggans, Vindman, and Griffith have been less than responsive to initial attempts to communicate concerns with them, with the exception of a couple of roundabout and deflective responses.



Marching to Congresswoman Kiggans' office in Virginia Beach

While our chapters have mostly encountered silence during this time, Representative Kiggans (D-02) signed-on to a letter that is intended to assure congressional districts that those representatives will not cut Medicaid for the most vulnerable residents. However, this letter offers little reassurance to those who are covered under Medicaid Expansion. Virginia's trigger language for the expanded eligibility would revoke Medicaid coverage for over 630,000 Virginians who depend on that coverage should federal support decrease even slightly. So, we are continuing to push for responses that will satisfy the needs of all constituents

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 protest 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.



Rally outside of the Accomack County Courthouse

On the Eastern Shore, members rallied for the second time to get the attention of Representative Kiggans and request a response. Their previous attempt to confront her silence was met with resistance, and they were asked to leave the premises. This time, they rallied outside of the Accomack County Courthouse, making their concerns known, with some members even recording videos directed toward Kiggans.

Similarly, after having no success talking with Representative Vindman (D-07) directly, members of our Fredericksburg Chapter have also made plans to readdress him and share their concerns about health care and immigrant rights.



Waiting outside of Representative Vindman's office in Fredericksburg

In the southwest region of the state, our Wise County Chapter held a press conference in front of the Lee County Community Hospital, urging Representative Griffith (D-09) to defend Medicaid. Chapter members protested and shared stories, and the action generated [press coverage](#) and a sideways response from Griffith. Griffith gave a statement to the media that Medicaid would not be cut, insisting that the House committee with jurisdiction over health care policy is "not considering any reductions to services for people eligible recipients of Medicaid or Medicare," and attributing lack of transparency to "rampant" misinformation.



Rally outside of the Lee County Community Hospital



Rally near Representative Griffith's office in Christiansburg

Lastly, but certainly not least, our New River Valley and Wythe County chapters rallied in Montgomery County to also put pressure on Representative Griffith and to demand answers for why he has not responded to their calls. The gathering focused largely on funding cuts and how vital programs like Medicaid and child care hang in the balance.

These gatherings across the state demonstrated our collective power and made the statement that Virginia residents demand to have a say in the outcome of issues that impact them.

In Case You Missed It: Denise Smith's Op-Ed in Cardinal News



In Southwest Virginia, more than 180,000 people depend on Medicaid for their health care

A Bland County woman describes how Medicaid has helped her adult son and how that's now in jeopardy.

by Denise Smith
April 15, 2025



One of our founding State Governing Board members, Denise Smith, had an op-ed published in Cardinal News this month on Tax Day!

The article was released alongside a [report about the budget reconciliation bill](#) that promotes tax breaks for wealthy families while simultaneously proposing massive cuts to programs such as Medicaid and SNAP.

"Tax cuts that primarily benefit the wealthy leave care systems underfunded. That leaves families carrying the weight. When Medicaid and other care programs are cut, the impacts ripple through families' economic security, workforce participation, health outcomes and community stability. Our fight is to redirect resources from the wealthy few to care systems that serve everyone," said Denise.

[CLICK HERE](#) to read the op-ed!

Reentry Round Table in Honor of Second Chance Month



Williamsburg Reentry Round Table

April is Second Chance Month, and a couple of our chapters held celebrations to commemorate the nationwide effort to raise awareness about the challenges individuals face after incarceration and to highlight opportunities to succeed upon reentry into society.

The newly-formed Williamsburg Chapter held a round table discussion where participants recognized the importance of supporting formerly incarcerated individuals in finding employment, housing, and other essential resources. The event was co-hosted by Faithwalkers, an organization dedicated to reducing recidivism and helping community members overcome barriers.

Our Wythe County Chapter also honored returning citizens through a Second Chance Month celebration at their monthly chapter meeting.

Richmond Housing Press Conference



Yesterday, our Richmond Chapter held a press conference before the City Council meeting to highlight the need to prioritize funding for healthy and affordable housing in Richmond. The press conference was held in partnership with New Virginia Majority and the Richmond Chapter of the Democratic Socialists of America.

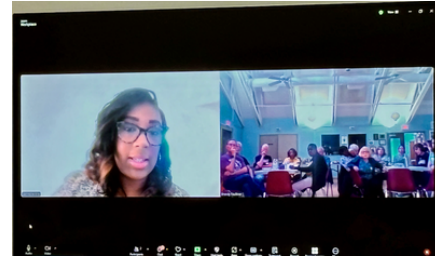
The press conference was a continued effort to urge the city to implement the proposed rental inspection program as a "form of accountability for slumlords, making landlords answer to the same codes and regulations by which all other homeowners must abide," said one speaker.

After the press conference, the group attended the city council meeting, using the action to stand in solidarity with one another. The speaker addressing the city council asked all attendees who have been impacted by the affordable housing crisis in Richmond to stand.



Chapter members and partners held signs and showed collective power throughout the evening, and the press conference was covered by WRIC 8 News (ABC) following the action. Watch the news coverage of the press conference [HERE](#).

NRV Education Justice Forum



This month, our New River Valley Chapter hosted its annual Education Justice Forum, providing a space for students, parents, teachers, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) administrators, and community members to come together to talk about public education issues important to them. The chapter is able to use information from the forum to determine the chapter's education issue priorities and to discover potential campaigns. This year they co-hosted the event with Montgomery-Radford-Floyd NAACP, one of the chapter's education justice partners.

The forum focused on education inequities like discipline disparities, achievement gaps, and racism. For example, African American students in MCPS are failing SOLs at twice the rate of white students. Recently, the school board passed a policy to address hate speech, but the chapter is concerned about how that policy will be implemented in their district.

"If MCPS wishes sincerely to promote equal success rates for all students, this distressing disparity must be addressed head-on, with honesty, and not with rhetoric," said Ruth Grene of the NRV Chapter.

Senator Aird, a Virginia Senate Education and Health Committee member, delivered the keynote address for the event by Zoom. She provided helpful updates on important legislation from the 2025 General Assembly session and shared her thoughts about the state of public education in Virginia. The forum also featured large and small group sessions that addressed the state of public education in Virginia, a community visioning activity, and action planning.

For attending, participants received the "key" to good organizing (pictured below).



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!

[Share here!](#)



Tour of Faith Mobile collects and distributes free clothing and essential items to people experiencing poverty and homelessness in Charlottesville, VA. Founded by Letitia Curry-Stinnie in 2018, the program operates under the aegis of Virginia Organizing's Joint Plan of Work program, partnering with local businesses, nonprofits, and congregations to gather donated items and distribute them where people gather, making empowering relational connections in the process.

Letitia's vision is to uphold the joy and human dignity of marginalized neighbors, and it is a vision rooted in her faith. "I do this work of giving back because God wants me to," Letitia says. "I have a kind heart, and I never want to see someone go without. I want everyone to be happy and everyone to feel good, and clothing is a way people express themselves. When you look good, you feel good."



A recent example of the kind of partnership she seeks includes sourcing formal attire from individuals and local boutiques for a Mother's Day photoshoot hosted by Georgia's Friends, a women's reentry and recovery residential community.

Community members were able to pick out their wardrobe, have fun with the shoot, and then keep the items they wore. Letitia also has a long-standing partnership with Mt. Zion African Baptist Church's Neighbors With No Address street outreach program, which has enabled her to get coats, shoes, and hygiene supplies to over 300 people living on the streets, as well as partner with Labcorps to provide free health screenings. And the connection to Mt. Zion made it possible for Tour of Faith Mobile to establish a partnership with Pacem, Charlottesville's rotating thermal shelter that utilizes the facilities of local congregations.

"I've always wanted to partner with Pacem," Letitia says. "Seeing how good people looked in the donated clothes, and how happy and appreciative they were, was exciting and joyful."

Letitia is always looking for community support to help sustain and grow the work. As the name of the program implies, Tour of Faith Mobile needs a working vehicle to do what it does, and Letitia has been looking for a donated vehicle for use to shuttle people to appointments and job interviews. She also relies on donations of new and used clothing from businesses and individuals. And monetary gifts help cover vehicle maintenance, fuel, and other operational costs.

If you are interested in supporting her work, you can reach out to her directly [here](#)!

Leader of the Month

Terry "Bean" White - Norfolk Chapter

Bean has been a member of the Norfolk Chapter for close to a decade, and has been a valuable participant in our local and statewide work.

He first got involved with Virginia Organizing when he learned about our work with Restoration of Rights under Governor McAuliffe. After having his own rights restored, he began helping with the Restoration of Rights efforts in South Hampton Roads.

In addition to Restoration of Rights, Bean has worked on several campaigns during his time with VO. He has participated in campaigns to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, dismantle racism, defend immigrant rights, fight climate change, promote mindfulness in schools, protect against predatory lending, and advocate for healthcare reform.



Most recently, Bean attended the March 19 rally at Congresswoman Kiggans' office in Virginia Beach, sharing his thoughts about the importance of Medicaid and his disappointment with the congresswoman's silence.

Bean appreciates that VO gives him the opportunity to "meet different people and get different perspectives on life." He continued on to say that "people have different views but we all work together toward one common goal, to help each other...we're doing our thing!"

Bean, we are honored to have built power with you in so many ways throughout these years!

GIVE LOCAL 757!



We're All In for GiveLocal757!

Virginia Organizing is proud to join this year's GiveLocal757 — a regional day of giving that brings our community together to support the causes we care about most.



Mark your calendar for May 6, 2025, and help us build grassroots power, amplify local voices, and fight for justice across the Commonwealth.



Your support makes all the difference.

Give early or learn more:



<https://www.givelocal757.org/organizations/virginia-organizing>

Together, we can create lasting change — right here at home.

Follow VO on social media for updates!

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Instagram - @vaorganizing and @nnvaorg

BlueSky - @nnvaorg.bsky.social

X - @vaorganizing and @nnvaorg

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