

60 Years of Medicaid & Medicare

The end of July marked the 60th Anniversary of Medicaid and Medicare! Here's how some of our chapters honored the occasion.

Our Charlottesville Chapter held a celebration at the Freedom of Speech Wall downtown. Chapter members shared birthday cake and brought attention to the importance of these essential and long-running programs in Virginia.



Charlottesville Chapter
Medicaid/Medicare Celebration

Similarly, our Norfolk and Newport News/Hampton Chapters celebrated the occasion by bringing birthday cakes to their respective Departments of Social Services.

Our Halifax/South Boston Chapter also held a celebration, along with a community forum, to discuss the importance of Medicaid and Medicare, reflect, celebrate, and find renewed commitment to defending the vital programs.



Halifax/South Boston Chapter
Medicaid/Medicare Celebration



Norfolk Chapter Medicaid/Medicare
Celebration

While we take time to recognize the positive impact of these essential programs in our communities over the past six decades, we also want to acknowledge that it took less than six months for the current administration to pass a law that kicks more than 10 million people off Medicaid rolls, cuts \$500 billion from Medicare, and raises premiums for millions of Americans.

Cutting Medicaid won't save us a penny and the cuts won't even pay for all the tax breaks — the debt will still rise by \$3 trillion. This is NOT how you make America healthy again.

Community Closet Event in Hampton Roads

This month, our Newport News/Hampton and Norfolk Chapters held a Community Closet event in partnership with the Southeastern Transgender Resource Center. The event was designed to encourage community-building and grassroots advocacy, providing free gender-affirming clothing for community members who wanted to participate. This is a great example of our continued work toward gender justice!



2025 Juneteenth Celebrations



Our Norfolk, Newport News/Hampton, and Portsmouth Chapters with partner organizations marched through Downtown Norfolk to protest continued I.C.E. arrests of people in their homes, jobs, and neighborhoods. Despite a massive downpour, protesters held signs, chanted, and even engaged with local media. The protest brought out a large group of community members, at the protest site and at multiple sites around the city, and received honks of support from passersby.



Our Williamsburg Chapter also held a protest at the site where a beloved community member was detained by I.C.E. at the end of July. A diverse group of 50 community members came out to show their support and oppose the continuous activity of I.C.E. in the area.

One of our Williamsburg Chapter leaders, Raegan, spoke to the Virginia Gazette about how a chapter member witnessed the arrest and how the community is missing the father and business owner who was detained without due process.

"There is a community that is missing him," Raegan said. "People that care and people that would rather have their family member and their friend here with them."

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Recently Published Op-Eds

We have been speaking out about important issues that our communities are facing. One of the ways that we have been making our voices heard is through opinion pieces in statewide newspapers. Here are a few of the recent op-eds that our chapter members have published:

- About 25% of Virginia households are experiencing an energy affordability crisis (Cardinal News) by Matt Allenbaugh of Appalachian Voices and Connie Wright-Zink of the Waynesboro Chapter.
- Column: Despite Kiggans' claims, spending bill will harm Virginia (The Virginian-Pilot) by Patrice Smallwood of the Norfolk Chapter and State Governing Board.
- Virginia has one of the highest utility disconnection rates in the nation. The data center boom will make things worse. (Cardinal News) by Eric Bonds of the Fredericksburg Chapter

Putting the "Fun" in Fundraising



Wythe County Chapter All-White Fundraiser



Albemarle/Charlottesville Chapter Paint & Sip Fundraiser

Our chapters hold fundraisers throughout the year, and two of our chapters recently organized successful fundraisers that got their communities engaged!

The Wythe County Chapter held an All-White fundraiser party at Seven Sisters Brewery in Wytheville. The event featured a live DJ, food, voter registration, information about restoration of rights, and other ways to participate. Way to have fun and continue to make a difference!

The Albemarle/Charlottesville Chapter held a Paint & Sip night to honor Disability Pride Month! The tables were full of chapter members, friends, and family, and the chapter raised over \$300 for its grassroots work! Special thanks to local artist Kris Woodroof for instructing during the event.

Advocating for Restoration of Rights in Halifax



Our leaders are doing incredible work! Shawn Barksdale, Lawrence Howerton, and our Halifax Chapter members have done an outstanding job advocating for restoration of rights during a Men's Empowerment event in Halifax. Their efforts have positively impacted men in the community as they continue to encourage and educate them.

Great job!

Changes to the Affordable Care Act (ACA)

The "Big Beautiful Bill" that became law in July extended tax breaks disproportionately benefitting the wealthy, while failing to extend the ACA's enhanced tax credits that benefit the working class. This means that the current tax credits will expire this December and raise premium costs massively for millions of people who get coverage on ACA exchanges. It's estimated that about 100,000 Virginians will lose coverage altogether. Insurance companies who offer coverage on the exchange have already asked the State Corporation Commission (SCC) for average rate increases of 20% in 2026 that people will see when they re-enroll later this Fall. Insurance executives will prosper under this new law, but the millions of people purchasing health insurance through the ACA will struggle.

To keep this from happening, Congress will need to extend the tax credits when they pass a budget or a Continuing Resolution to prevent a government shutdown at the end of September. Some members of Congress have refused to extend the enhanced premium tax credits that 90% of people use to get more affordable coverage under Obamacare. Allowing these to expire means a 75% increase in enrollee premium payments on average, depending on income and family composition.

Small business leaders are among the best spokespeople for economic issues like rising healthcare costs. We are calling on local small business owners to engage with this issue by writing op-eds and letters-to-the-editor to raise awareness about and urge Congress to defend the ACA.

For other ways to get involved, please contact your local organizer.

Out in the Community: Civic Engagement

Every year, particularly during the summer, our members are out in their communities engaging with the public and educating about important issues that affect us all. An important purpose of our civic engagement work is to provide information about upcoming elections and candidates, and to register voters.

Here are some photos of our chapters out in their communities this summer!



Georgia and Gary of the Wythe County Chapter registering voters at the Wytheville Training School and Cultural Center.



Williamsburg Area Chapter clipboarding at the John Lewis rally.



Williamsburg Area Chapter tabling at Grove Christian Outreach Center carnival talking to people about Know Your Rights.



Chapter leader, Lawrence, spoke at the Halifax John Lewis event.

Thank you to our summer Interns and Fellows!

We want to say a big thank you to all of the interns and fellows around the state who have worked with us this summer! It is truly a pleasure to work with people who are passionate about creating positive change in their communities - we learn from each other!

A round of applause for all our interns and fellows!

- Abigail McCarty, Intern from Christopher Newport University (Newport News/Hampton Chapter)
- Euphrates Vanvoorhees, Fellow from Virginia Peninsula Community College (Williamsburg Area Chapter)
- Raegan Collier, Fellow from Virginia Peninsula Community College (Williamsburg Area Chapter)
- Ranger McKinney, Intern from Virginia Tech (New River Valley Chapter)
- Samantha Karentang, Intern from William & Mary (Williamsburg Area Chapter)
- Sam Rosenbaum, Intern from Western Albemarle High School (Charlottesville Chapter)
- Sarah Morid, Intern from William & Mary (Williamsburg Area Chapter)



Virginia Organizing Community College Fellowship Program

Virginia Organizing is offering part-time, paid fellowships for community college students to engage in community organizing work. Our organizing training curriculum will focus on the intersection of grassroots organizing, political education, and racial and economic justice.

- ◆ Fall Semester 2025 (August-December)
- ◆ 10 hours/week (10 weeks preferred)
- ◆ Stipend: \$20/hour

Fellows will participate in:

- Grassroots Organizing Activities
- Legislative work
- Organizing Communications
- Policy and Research
- Outreach on community college campuses
- Activities promoting racial and economic justice for historically oppressed and marginalized communities, families, and students.



We are still accepting applications for the second round of our Community College Fellowship Program this Fall! Through the program, we are offering part-time, paid fellowships for community college students to engage in community organizing work. Our organizing training curriculum will focus on the intersection of grassroots organizing, political education, and racial and economic justice.

This will be a valuable opportunity to train on issues like a lack of access to resources, difficulties with for-profit health systems, managed care organization (MCO) issues, language access issues, and more.

Contact Brian Johns at bjohns@virginia-organizing.org for bjohns@virginia-organizing.org questions or more information.

Featured Community Partner | Nature Connection Lab

Human societies evolved in tight communities intertwined with and nurtured by the unique landscapes where they found themselves, and the idea that there is something out there called “nature” that is separate from and below us is a very recent capitalist colonial phenomenon in human history. Under colonial occupation, “nature” is something to either be exploited and extracted from, or left entirely on its own, unspoiled by human interaction. Colonial capitalism has robbed us of our consciousness of interspecies community, of being in a relationship of mutual dependence with the landscape and the creatures who live there.

Carolyn Schuyler and Dorothe Bach began Nature Connection Lab three years ago to help heal that lost connection. Their work grew out of courses they offered through the Environment, Thought, and Practice major at the University of Virginia, where they saw how hands-on, immersive nature-based learning could transform students’ lives. They wanted to bring the same learning opportunities to a broader audience, and through a joint plan of work with Virginia Organizing, they now work with school systems, public parks, mental health agencies, and other community-based groups to help them integrate nature connectedness into their goals.



Their work takes them out of the classroom and into the field, where they can be found splashing in a stream with students or helping a teacher with curriculum design. Their clients include the nonprofit Life Adventure Center in Kentucky, and the Friends of Bellemeade Park in Richmond, where they have designed and led field trips for local school children. They are also assisting teachers at Thomas Jefferson Elementary School in Louisa to integrate nature connection into the school culture and mental wellness interventions, including the construction of a new nature play area on school grounds.

Their work is, in many ways, countercultural and subversive. They are crafting connection to land and community within an educational system that is designed to reproduce an economy that keeps us separate. Carolyn acknowledges the challenge: “The obstacles we face have to do with industrial growth culture, the desacralization of nature, and the pervasive myth that humans are superior to and separate from nature. Western cultures need a consciousness shift to widen our circles of compassion and care to all of the natural world.”

They plan to keep broadening the scope of their work, making the resources available to more of the community, by launching a Nature Connection Leader Certification Program in the spring of 2026. “Anyone age 18 and up is welcome to join us over seven weeks to delve into the science and art of nature connection,” Carolyn says.

As the alienating and isolating effects of an increasingly rapacious economy deepen, the work of Nature Connection Lab is more crucial than ever and well worth our support. Keep an eye out for ways you can get involved [here](#).

Virginia Organizing
703 Concord Avenue
Charlottesville, VA 22903
434-984-4655
info@virginia-organizing.org
www.virginia-organizing.org

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



Leader of the Month



Janice "Jay" Johnson - Newport News/Hampton Chapter

Jay Johnson has been a torchbearer of Virginia Organizing for 30 years. She was a founding member of the State Governing Board, and wore many hats throughout her tenure, including acting as chairperson and sitting on multiple statewide strategy committees.

As a recently retired member of the State Governing Board and an active member of the Newport News/Hampton Chapter, she continues to contribute her talent, passion, and commitment to her community. She is currently serving on the 30th Anniversary Planning Committee for this year's Grassroots Gathering.

Not only has Jay worked directly with Virginia Organizing for many years, but she also leads one of our Joint Plans of Work (JPW), Everybody's Got a Story, a storytelling collective that holds an annual storytelling festival in Hampton.

Jay's voice is appreciated all throughout the organization, and Sarah Miller, Newport News/Hampton Chapter Organizer, said that Jay "has been a strong pillar in our community and a continued support to our Peninsula community."

Thank you, Jay, for all that you have done and continue to do to build power with us!

Get Ready for Our 30th Anniversary!

This is a reminder to mark your calendars for **September 26-28, 2025 to join us at the Airfield Conference Center in Wakefield, VA.** This will be our first 3-day Grassroots Gathering since 2019, and we couldn't be more excited to spend that time with you all!

The Grassroots Gathering will include the impactful speakers, workshops, and activities we have become accustomed to - with a special recognition dinner to honor all the work that has been done over the past 30 years!

Register using the link below or by reaching out to your local organizer.

In the meantime, we are holding our annual Beach Raffle giveaway, for which a generous donor has agreed to once again donate a one-week stay in a 3-bedroom condo in Hilton Head, SC. You can purchase tickets for the raffle **online** or directly through your local organizer, and the winner will be chosen during the Grassroots Gathering celebration. Don't miss out - get your tickets today!

[Register here!](#)



[Register here!](#)



We will also be accepting ads for our Ad Book again this year. This commemorative book will include program information and will feature ads from organizations, businesses, and individuals throughout our communities. If you would like to purchase an ad for the Ad Book, please use the online form or [download this form](#) and email it to mtabbanor@virginia-organizing.org.

[Place an ad in the Ad Book](#)

To add to the excitement, we are redesigning our website and would like to hear from you! We ask that you take a few minutes to complete an online survey and share your thoughts. Your input is invaluable as we consider improvements to our website, and we want to redesign it in a way that allows you to engage with us how you would like and need. Note: Your responses will be anonymous.

[Take the Survey](#)

Last but not least, 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!](#)