

## News from the Grassroots

September 2025 Issue 152

### Charlottesville I.C.E. Protest



At the end of August, our Albemarle/Charlottesville, Richmond, and Waynesboro Chapters came together to raise awareness about I.C.E. activity against our immigrant communities in the central region of the state. Over 100 people joined the protest in solidarity, far exceeding attendance expectations, and further highlighting our members' commitment to supporting immigrant communities.

The action also generated media coverage by NBC29 and CBS19, interviewing members about the protest.

"We can't sit quietly anymore," said Connie Wright-Zink, of the Waynesboro Chapter. "This is the time for people to get out and vote, register to vote, tell their friends and neighbors that this is a serious, critical issue, and this is a time that we have to be loud."



Our recent actions protesting I.C.E. activity around the state have taken place in response to a 350% increase in immigration arrests and detentions across Virginia reported in July. Virginia Organizing continues to take action to ensure that Virginia is for immigrants. Our communities thrive when we work together for justice and equality.



### Fredericksburg Immigration Listening Session



This month, our Fredericksburg Chapter held a listening session to hear from members of local immigrant communities. Throughout the session, attendees shared about their lives, concerns, and what it is like as an immigrant in Virginia. They provided perspectives as longtime residents, naturalized citizens, and first-generation U.S. citizens.



Additionally, members spoke about the foundational nature of immigration in the U.S., what keeps communities together, and how immigrant communities greatly contribute to the overall structure and economy of Virginia. The session underscored the resilience, determination, and resulting action that defines so many of the communities that we fight to protect.

### BIPOC Pride Event



As a part of our commitment to gender justice in Virginia, our Newport News/Hampton and Waynesboro Chapters attended a Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Pride event in Norfolk this month. The all-day event was hosted by the Thriving Transmen of Color and had over 40 people in attendance. The event even generated interest and participation from attendees of another simultaneous event nearby.

Chapter members enjoyed supporting the cultural event and engaging with community members about the work of Virginia Organizing. The chapters also recruited new members and connected with other organizations to foster collaboration. They have been invited to participate in the event again next year!

## Richmond LUHT Meeting

Committee meeting in Richmond last week in support of the proposed Residential Rental Inspection Program (RRIP). The program needs a passing vote from the LUHT committee, but the committee neither passed nor rejected the program during their September 16 meeting. Instead, the committee met behind closed doors to make amendments to the ordinance, then voted to send the amendments to the Richmond City Council with a recommendation to pass it on September 22. Unfortunately, the amendments were removed from the City Council meeting agenda, and the Council did not vote on the RIPP amendments. The vote for the amendments has been moved to the October 14 City Council meeting.

The chapter also attended a press conference with the Richmond Housing Justice Collective before the September 22 city council meeting, for which press were in attendance.

## Wythe County Medicaid Information Session



On September 6, our Wythe County Chapter hosted a Medicaid Information Session to provide information to the community about the impact of new legislation on Medicaid. A panel of experts educated the public about the new changes to Medicaid requirements, who qualifies for it, and how cuts to Medicaid might affect Virginians moving forward.

The panel included Dr. Al Amyer, Wendy Gilliam, Rhonda Seltz, Elisabeth Chaves, Research and Policy Director for Virginia Organizing, and Denise Smith, of the Virginia Organizing State Governing Board. Attendees also received helpful information about healthcare resources for the future.



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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

## Leaders of the Month



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!

## Don't forget:

**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!](#)

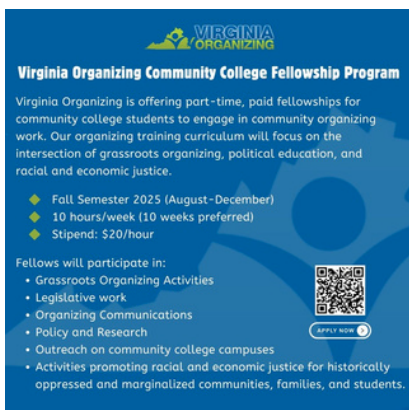


## Thank you to our summer Interns and Fellows!

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)



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](mailto:bjohns@virginia-organizing.org) for [bjohns@virginia-organizing.org](mailto: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](#).

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## 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!

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](mailto:mtabbanor@virginia-organizing.org).

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

## 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.

**2025 Grassroots Gathering**

FROM SAPLING TO DOGWOOD | 30 YEARS OF PERENNIAL POWER

Join us for a special gathering in honor of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Virginia Organizing!

**Saturday, September 26, 2025 - Sunday, September 28, 2025**

**Airfield Conference Center**  
15189 Airfield Rd  
Wakefield, VA 23888

The 3-day event will feature impactful workshops, special honors, and a look back at the power that we have built over the past three decades.

[info@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:info@virginia-organizing.org)  
[www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org)

**Register Now**

[Register here!](#)

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!](#)

**VIRGINIA ORGANIZING**

**2025 BEACH RAFFLE**

One week in a 3-bedroom, oceanfront condo on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

**TICKETS:**  
1 FOR \$5  
5 FOR \$20

Winning ticket will be drawn at the Grassroots Gathering, September 26-28, 2025. Winner will receive one week at a 3-bedroom, oceanfront condo on Hilton Head Island, SC. Week is negotiable with owners and not all weeks will be available. Winner does not need to be present to win.

**Register Now**