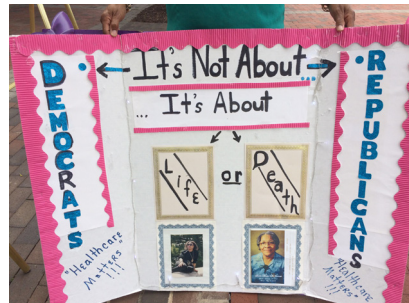


VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

June/July 2018 Issue 79



Virginia Expands Medicaid (Finally)!

On July 1, the new state budget will expand Medicaid! It will cover a much larger group of people than it did before. If you need it, please see <http://www.coverva.org/expansion/>. It explains who we think will be able to get covered and how to sign up. Sign-ups won't begin until January 1, 2019.

At Virginia Organizing we have been working for health care for everyone for many years. We fought for the Affordable Care Act (ACA or "Obamacare"). When it passed, we hoped it meant that all people could get coverage. Instead, Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli chose to sue the federal government to avoid providing Medicaid to new people.

When the Supreme Court allowed states to refuse to expand Medicaid, we went into action. We lobbied our legislators in the General Assembly for expansion. For the last five years, they wouldn't do it.

Then Congress began to try to repeal the ACA. All through 2017 we held rallies to protect the law. Groups all over the country did the same. They were unable to repeal it.

Last November, state elections showed that voters cared more about health care than any other issue. We knew it was possible at last to win Medicaid expansion. We went into action statewide.

In December, we held 11 media conferences with our partner the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (VICPP). In February, we held rallies in all of our chapters. Throughout the winter we visited every delegate and senator who represents our districts. We visited them in their home offices, and we visited them in Richmond.

All through these months, members of Virginia Organizing contacted legislators, wrote letters to the editors of their local newspapers, spoke with journalists, and showed up to protests all over the state.

It was a close thing. Medicaid expansion passed by only three votes in the Senate!

We wanted Medicaid expansion for everyone--without work requirements. We didn't get that. It would not have passed at all, though, without that compromise. Now hundreds of thousands of low income workers will be eligible.

We will continue to work on behalf of health care for everyone, and fight unnecessary work requirements. We will also keep you informed of the process for signing up as it develops. We are confident we will accomplish our goals. When we organize, and we don't give up, we win.

Welcome, New Board Members!



Ebony Guy of Danville

Ebony grew up in Halifax County, Virginia, and moved to Danville in 2010. She has been an organizer since she was 17, when she discovered that her passion was similar to that of her grandmother, who was a well-known civil rights activist. She has focused on civil rights and voter registration,

advocating for people who haven't yet found their voices. She has worked on a number of political campaigns.

Ebony's first local issue campaign with the Danville Chapter was the successful "Ban the Box" initiative. She has been a leader in Virginia Organizing since 2013, when she decided to concentrate on long-term local campaigns that make a difference after elections are over. She looks forward to learning more about the strategy of statewide organizing.



Marty Jackson of Danville

Marty began working with the Danville Chapter of Virginia Organizing in 2013. As a returning citizen, he understands the issues that many people face when trying to re-enter society.

"I love that Virginia Organizing is so focused on the community and letting all people in the community speak out and be their own advocates," said Marty. "I love

that the voices of the underprivileged are heard!"

In 2014, Marty helped lead the successful "Ban the Box" effort in Danville, resulting in a unanimous vote from city council and dozens of newly active supporters.

Over the years, Marty has also organized a prayer vigil for Medicaid expansion, recruited new members through door-to-door canvassing, spoken at school board meetings to get more students of color in advanced classes, and fundraised for Virginia Organizing by asking his friends and co-workers for donations.

Marty continues to work to end mass incarceration and help returning citizens get their lives back.



New Board Members, continued



Natasha D'Souza of Harrisonburg

Natasha was born in New Jersey but moved with her family to rural Page County, Virginia, when she was a child in 2006. She is a first generation American. Her parents emigrated to the U.S. from India, which, she says, had a huge influence on her identity and her passion for human rights.

She moved to Harrisonburg in 2010 and did her undergraduate work at James Madison University in International Affairs and Middle East Studies. She will complete her graduate studies in International Human Rights Law in the near future. Currently, she lives in Northern Virginia.

Natasha got involved with Virginia Organizing after she returned from documenting human rights abuses of Palestinians after college. She was looking for a way to take action in Harrisonburg. "I felt a kind of reverse culture shock when I saw the abuse of refugees and the denial of immigrant workers' rights in our own community," she says. She joined the Harrisonburg Chapter and worked on the DACA and TPS protection campaigns and the campaign to defend the rights of poultry workers.

"My mother always told me that charity starts in the home. Virginia is my home and Virginia Organizing has been my way to give back."

Southwest Regional Organizing Workshop

Leaders and organizers from the Lee County, Lynchburg, New River Valley, and Washington County Chapters gathered in Pulaski for a regional organizing workshop on June 2. Workshops included fundraising, recruiting new members, meeting facilitation, and media training. Many leaders had been engaged in school-to-prison pipeline campaigns in their chapters, and they felt meeting each other and hearing about other campaigns gave them new ideas and a sense of solidarity.

Roberta Thacker-Oliver came all the way from Lee County for the workshop.

"The SW regional gathering was great! It is always good to gather with both experienced and new organizers and share ideas and thoughts. We all learned so much!" she said.

Brandy Faulkner of Blacksburg was also enthusiastic about the day of training.

"One of the best things about organizing is spending time with others who are working hard to bring change to their communities. It was so great to spend time with our regional organizers to learn how to be effective, how to sharpen our skills, and to share our experiences. We got to practice storytelling, got great advice on effective fundraising, and also thought about how to build power," she said.

Thank you to all the leaders who participated and the Pulaski First Presbyterian Church for hosting us.



Grassroots Gathering: September 28-30, 2018 Airfield Conference Center, Wakefield, VA

Registration is open now online at our website:

<https://virginia-organizing.org/grassroots2018>



Welcome, Ciera Killen! - Hampton and Newport News Apprentice Organizer



Ciera Killen joined Virginia Organizing this month as the Hampton and Newport News Apprentice Organizer. Ciera has lived in Virginia her entire life. She graduated from the College of William and Mary with a bachelor's degree in Public Policy. During college she interned on a gubernatorial campaign and as a peer health educator. In health education she learned the value of making change

through community dialogue and community engagement.

Her college classes led Ciera to want to be a community organizer. She felt that many people who speak about poverty and public policy never stop to ask those experiencing the issues their perspective or opinions.

"I really want to help those who have been left out of these conversations to finally claim their seat at the table."

Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro, Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Hampton/Newport News, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Portsmouth, Roanoke, South Hampton Roads, Washington County

On Campus: UMW, UVA, E&H, U of R, ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU

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