

# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## News from the Grassroots

October/November 2018 Issue 81

### Happy Thanksgiving!

Virginia Organizing would like to wish all of you a wonderful holiday with friends and family.

This Thanksgiving, we're grateful for all of the contributions you make to our grassroots work for social justice. Your donations, your presence at rallies, your meetings with decision makers, your contributions to the work of our chapters...all of these gifts have helped to bring about real change in Virginia.

The biggest change we won this year was the passage of Medicaid expansion in Virginia! Hundreds of thousands of people are signing up for health care now who couldn't get it before, thanks to you.

#### From Natasha Kell in Marion, Va.,



"I am very excited about Medicaid expansion. I can finally go to the doctor! I have not had regular doctor visits in over ten years. When I was young, I was diagnosed with arthritis and thanks to Medicaid, as a child, I received regular health care. As an adult, I lost Medicaid because I made too much working at Pizza Hut.

"Having access to Medicaid again means I can care for my health, get the medicine I need, and have a regular doctor again. Now I don't have to be afraid of losing my job because of my health needs, so I don't have to worry as much about my family.

Getting access to Medicaid means I can

be a better mom to my sons and a better worker.

"People with health insurance do not know what it's like to fear getting sick because you can't afford to go anywhere but the emergency room. It's hard to know what it's like to work through the pain without relief because you cannot get the prescriptions you need. We do not know how critical going to the doctor is until we cannot go.

"I've never been so excited to go to the doctor. When I got my letter in the mail telling me I was going to be enrolled, I was so happy. I'm grateful to everyone who made this happen. I'm grateful for the simple opportunity to get care for my arthritis again. I'm grateful that I can keep working and taking care of my family.

"I hope you will support Virginia Organizing on Giving Tuesday, November 27, 2018. Giving Tuesday is an opportunity to bring more of this kind of help to everyone who needs it. Thank you!"

### Protect Immigrant Families



On November 4, the Harrisonburg Chapter joined the TPS Journey for Justice, sponsored by the Committee of Salvadoran Paisanos United (COSPU). They held a march, rally, and visit to Representative Bob Goodlatte's office to deliver a petition asking him to reinstate TPS, the Temporary Protected Status of many immigrant groups.

Have you commented on the new public charge rule yet? The deadline is December 10. The Department of Homeland Security wants to prevent immigrants from getting food and medical assistance! We want to stop this change from going into effect. Please see our website, <https://virginia-organizing.org/comment-on-new-public-charge-rule/> for more information about how to write and submit a public comment.



Petition delivery in Rep. Goodlatte's office

## Leader of the Month - Gayle Bracy Fredericksburg Chapter



Gayle Bracy grew up in Baltimore, Maryland and attended school in Ohio and Maryland. She graduated from the University of Maryland School of Business Administration. She joined the Air Force and completed her tour of service. She was hired by the Department of Defense as a civilian, working in Italy and Germany and landing finally at Fort Belvoir in Northern Virginia. The daily commute did not leave much room for volunteering or helping others. She often promised herself, during her commuting days, that once she retired she would give some of her time to community service.

Now that she's retired, she's become one of Virginia Organizing's hardest working leaders. She chose us because every issue the Fredericksburg Chapter was working on spoke to her. They were the issues that she cared most about: affordable housing and the school-to-prison pipeline, especially. "Helping families, the homeless, the elderly," she says, "every one of those issues improved somebody's life."

Since she joined she's also noticed the diverse membership of Virginia Organizing. She attended the Grassroots Gathering in Wakefield this year and was happy to see that the statewide group is just as diverse as her own chapter, which is not something she sees in many other organizations.

Gayle contributes to the work of the chapter in many ways. She works with the group to complete strategy papers, researches strategy for creating affordable housing, develops briefings, and writes letters to the editor. She attends forums, rallies, meetings, and board presentations. "Politicians all know we have an 'issue,'" she notices, "but they don't see that we have a looming crisis."

Gayle's career often involved long commutes to work in places she couldn't afford to live. She knows how much that costs a family, and she wants to see change. She wants to see more people get involved, too. "We all could help each other if we would just decide to help the next person."

Thank you for your service, Gayle! Thanks for all the gifts you bring to Virginia Organizing.



On November 19 we had members from across the state meet with Secretary of Education Atif Qarni and Deputy Secretary Holly Coy in Richmond to talk about the School to Prison Pipeline. From right to left: Shirley Edwards (Portsmouth), Brandy Faulkner and Megan Shepherd (NRV), Winston Whitehurst (Norfolk), Jerry Hill (Washington County), Deputy Secretary Holly Coy, Willie Justis (Eastern Shore), Ruth Greene (NRV), and Brian Johns (Charlottesville). Thanks to all the leaders who attended!



Dana Wiggins from the Virginia Poverty Law Center offering assistance at the Predatory Lending Forum in Portsmouth

## Forums on health care and predatory lending all over the state!

We have held two types of forums in many locations over the last two months.

First, we teamed up with lawyers from the Virginia Poverty Law Center to offer information and advice about high interest loans. In Bristol, Portsmouth, Pennington Gap, and Newport News, we invited people who are directly affected by predatory lending to come learn how to get out from under those devastating loans.

We also organized community leaders to write letters to the editors of their local newspapers about the harm these loans do. Virginia Organizing has been calling for a cap of 36 percent on interest rates in the Commonwealth to protect consumers from loans that keep people stuck in a never ending crisis of debt repayment.

At our other forums we partnered with state agencies in Hampton Roads to make sure people who need health care coverage in 2019 are aware of the benefits they may be eligible for now that we have Medicaid expansion. Social workers and other experts were on hand to answer questions about eligibility and help people sign up.

## 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, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Washington County

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

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