



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

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What is the Green New Deal?

You may have heard of it on social media. It is circulating under the title #GreenNewDealVA or #GreenNewDeal on Twitter and Facebook. It's a new environmental justice campaign developed by the Sunrise Movement, with support from a number of progressive legislators such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and our own state delegates Sam Rasoul and Elizabeth Guzman.

Virginia Organizing signed on to support the Green New Deal with a number of partner groups such as the NAACP, Chesapeake Climate Action Network, and Virginia Interfaith Power and Light. We feel strongly that this kind of legislation is the right approach to climate change because it combines reducing greenhouse gases with equity for low income communities and people of color.

People in low income communities already suffer the worst damages of climate change even though they are least responsible for it and have no extra funds to protect themselves from floods or hurricanes. In Virginia, people face either very little job opportunity or, if there are jobs in their area, they face high housing, child care, and health care costs that their wages do not cover. They often cannot afford to live close to their jobs. They live in housing with poor quality insulation. They cannot afford to pay more for heat and gas as a way to force them to use less energy.

The Green New Deal will place the cost of transforming the economy squarely on those who can afford to pay it: the most wealthy. People in the top income brackets have benefited from growing income inequality, and they benefit financially from new technologies such as solar panels and electric cars, which are heavily subsidized. The Green New Deal will focus on justice and economic opportunity as well as renewable energy. We hope you will join us in supporting it!



From the left: Kim Lemburg, Kimberly Dyke-Harsley, Ivorie Glass, and Larry Jones of Lynchburg at Heritage High School

Progress in Lynchburg!

The Lynchburg Chapter of Virginia Organizing has been organizing for alternatives to school suspension for some time and their hard work is helping to make change happen! On January 10, community members made their voices heard during a "community conversation" event at Heritage High School, part of the school system's strategic planning process. School officials made a commitment to tackle the school-to-prison pipeline and deal with racial disparities in school suspensions by using more restorative justice approaches.

The News & Advance covered the event, too. This is a major step forward for Lynchburg!

Affordable Housing Rally in Fredericksburg!



Felicia Charles, Outreach Pastor for the City of God Church in Stafford County

About 40 people came out at the beginning of a snowstorm to rally for better housing policies in the City of Fredericksburg on Saturday, January 12. St. George's Episcopal Church hosted the rally, and speakers included chapter leaders Gayle Bracy, Bryn Pavek (speaking for leader Judy Love), and Deborah Snyder.

Gayle Bracy told the crowd, "On average families are paying more than 30% of their income on housing costs alone. This is more than what experts say people should spend on housing. Because of this, utilities, food, and childcare have to take a back seat."

Felicia Charles spoke movingly about her experience. Felicia was affected by the 2008 housing market crash. She lost her home and struggled to find housing. She stayed at the Thurman Brisben Center but later was able to find a home again. She has experienced housing insecurity first hand and now works to help others who are in the same situation.

The chapter also invited several speakers from the community. These professionals have extensive experience of the suffering local residents have been through because of the high cost of housing. Speakers included Edmond Sane-aka from Warfighters Refugee Project and David Cooper from the Thurman Brisben Center. Bruce Callander provided music. Many thanks to all the speakers and attendees and to St. George's Episcopal for hosting.

The persistence of Fredericksburg's chapter leaders is having an effect. On January 22 they presented their proposal for a housing trust to a work session of City Council, something they had been offering to do for many months without success. A housing trust would provide a safety net for residents who cannot pay their rent temporarily. It could be the first step towards reducing the very high rate of evictions in the area.

Bob Straight represented Virginia Organizing and gave the presentation. The chapter gained insight into the positions of city councilors on the issue. The work goes on!

Leader of the Month - LaVerne Jackson of Newport News



Originally from Ohio, LaVerne Jackson moved to Virginia because of her husband's military assignment here. She raised her children and worked as a nurse in pediatric health care, retiring after serving for many years as the Clinical Director of the Riverside Pediatric Clinic. She got involved with Virginia Organizing a few years ago and was very happy to join again, now that the group has an organizer helping to get a new chapter started.

LaVerne has always been politically active out of concern over injustice, but her primary reason for joining us was the crisis of children's health care she saw in her clinic. They treated over 10,000 children who were under-insured or uninsured, and then the federal government cut their funding. She worked for the Affordable Care Act and the

expansion of CHIP and Medicaid for many years.

"Health care is still a problem because many doctors don't take the affordable insurance, and I don't like the work requirements for Medicaid," she says. "The income limits are too low. If you work, you get disqualified. Newport News is an expensive place to live anyway because of transportation costs, and the rents are ridiculous!"

The emerging chapter in Newport News has decided to work on transportation for their first campaign.

"The bus system in Newport News doesn't run after 9 p.m., so if you work nights you're stuck. They run very infrequently, too. I had an employee who had to take three buses to get to work and then walk six blocks to get to the clinic from the bus stop," LaVerne explained. "We are asking for the transit service to run 24 hours/day and also make their service more frequent."

LaVerne enjoys Virginia Organizing because of "the other people in the chapter who have similar interests and are working on other projects." Chapter members recently visited their state delegate in Newport News before the General Assembly session started. Members thanked him for his work on predatory lending, asked him to change his mind on Medicaid work requirements, and discussed the school-to-prison pipeline. The new chapter is certainly off to a great start with experienced leaders like LaVerne guiding it. Thank you for your work, LaVerne!



Tyran Green of the Portsmouth Chapter briefed Congressional staff on the need to fully fund IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) on January 25. The briefing was hosted by the Alliance to Reclaim our Schools in order to highlight the effect of the under-funding of schools on low income communities of color.

Tyran described the way her children who had been identified as needing support in the classroom never received it because the schools lacked funds to pay for teaching assistants, therapists, and assistive technology. To hear Tyran's excellent speech, please visit our website.



Harrisonburg Chapter leader Eric Olson-Getty presenting at the community forum

Forum on the Harrisonburg Community - Law Enforcement Relations Survey

In partnership with two other groups, Better Together/Mejores Juntos and Southerners on New Ground, the Harrisonburg/Rockingham County Chapter developed and carried out a survey of Community - Law Enforcement Relations in the city. Ten members of the chapter did the hard work of canvassing neighborhoods to gather the data of the survey.

In December they held a forum in partnership with the Valley Justice Coalition to present the results to the community. The forum was well attended and the report will help groups in the City of Harrisonburg to work more effectively for justice with law enforcement. To read the report, please see our website.

Take Action!

The General Assembly may pass at least two bills this session that would make helpful changes to the law about driver's licenses. HB 2025 would make it possible for all Virginians, whatever their immigration status, to apply for "driver privilege cards." Senator Bill Stanley introduced SB1013, which would end driver's license suspension for failure to pay court costs and fines. Please contact your state legislators and ask them to support these changes so that everyone who needs to drive to keep their jobs and care for their families can do so.

You can find the names and addresses of your state senator and delegate by using the helpful map at

<https://whosmy.viriniageneralassembly.gov>.

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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