



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

May 2019 Issue 84



2019 Statewide Power Analysis

Every spring our State Governing Board, staff, and a small group of leaders gather to plan our organizing strategy for the year to come. This year we met again at the beautiful Massanetta Springs Conference Center outside Harrisonburg at the end of April.

We heard an in-depth report from Del McWhorter, our chairperson, about the board's decision to call for state officials involved in blackface scandals to resign. Leaders had a chance to express their ideas about how best to dismantle institutional racism in our state government.

We celebrated our wins the previous year and decided to keep working on our four top priorities: the school-to-prison pipeline, environmental justice, immigration reform, and health care for all. Many leaders also recommended that we do more work on the issue of criminal justice reform, to address injustice in who goes to prison and why.

We also enjoyed a game of jeopardy/family feud/college bowl in order to learn in greater depth how the General Assembly works. Who has power within the General Assembly and how do they use that power during the process of a bill becoming law? We brainstormed ideas about how to influence the process more effectively.

Longtime friend of Virginia Organizing Libero Della Piana of Just Strategies joined us and led a valuable workshop on setting priorities. Thank you to everyone who gave their weekend to the work of envisioning our strategy for the year.



De-ICE the Valley!

The Harrisonburg/Rockingham County Chapter has been taking their immigration reform campaign in a new direction lately. The chapter is seeking to "De-ICE the Valley" by calling on local officials at the county jail and in the city to refuse to cooperate with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

In partnership with several other groups, they have formed a new coalition called FUEGO (Friends United for Equity and Grassroots Organizing) and held a protest outside an ICE administration and detention facility in the city on May 12. This week they will also protest funding for the city/county jail at the Harrisonburg City Council meeting. If you have not done so already, please sign their pledge to stand up for the dignity and human rights of immigrants.

They also held a successful International Dinner to raise money for the chapter. Many thanks to the 30 restaurants and cooks who donated the delicious food! Thanks also to Rebecca Brown, Carol Snell Feikema, and Mallory Washington, three of the many chapter members who gave their time to the work of soliciting and collecting these donations.



Leader of the Month - Connie Wright-Zink of the SAW Chapter!



Connie Wright-Zink of the Staunton/Augusta County/Waynesboro Chapter (SAW) grew up in the San Fernando Valley of Los Angeles. She and her husband moved first to Northern Virginia in 1995 and then out to a rural area in the Shenandoah Valley where they are enjoying a semi-retired life of raising chickens and bees and helping out local organizations.

Connie is also a professional quilter. In her picture she's holding the beautiful quilt she made and donated to her chapter for a fundraiser. You can still buy raffle tickets for this

quilt! (Contact us for more information.)

Volunteering has always been a way of life for Connie. Her mother participated in the League of Women Voters and the ACLU, and Connie volunteered with a local free clinic in high school, taught children in her Unitarian Church, and got involved in Indivisible when she moved to the Valley. She volunteers because "you get overwhelmed looking at the big picture so you have to think local."

Connie was sick of feeling powerless. She likes Virginia Organizing because there is so much training in the skills necessary to make change happen and she appreciates the presence of directly-affected people in all decision-making. She wants to help people who have been marginalized to communicate their own message, not speak for them.

The SAW Chapter has been working for several years to create high quality communication access for people who are deaf or hard of hearing at Augusta Health, a local hospital. Connie hopes they will be able to convince new management at the hospital to carry out the policies they won last year. She also hopes to work alongside members of the deaf community in a coalition that takes on many issues. "This work takes a lot of brain power and energy to come up with creative ways to solve problems," she says, and that's why she finds it so engaging. Thank you for your creativity and hard work, Connie!



Public Transit Reform

Recently the emerging chapter in Newport News visited their city council to advocate for better public transit. Leader Jeff Minor was one of the speakers during the comment period.

"The services of Hampton Road Transit aren't up to par with what we're paying as tax payers," Jeff told them.

"We need to hold HRT accountable in order to serve the public better. I have missed appointments because buses come late or they come too early. The bus that comes by my apartment is supposed to come every thirty minutes but sometimes it comes fifteen minutes early. Generally I have appointments at Riverside Hospital and at the family practice. If my connections meet right it takes about 20 or 30 minutes to get there. If my connections don't work out I've missed my appointment," he added.

"People lose jobs because the buses aren't reliable. We don't know when buses are broken down or if they're running right. We need a way to let the public know where their buses are. Hours should be expanded too. When folks have jobs that have them working until midnight the buses have already stopped running. Lastly buses should be more senior friendly. I know there is adjusted price for older folks, but a lot of bus stops don't have any shelters. It's rough standing out there for 30 minutes during the summer heat or when it's cold in the winter. People have things to do and families to take care of. They're dependent on the bus services. I think y'all should ride the buses for a little while. Ride them to get groceries, to go to work, to get to the doctors to experience life as a person dependent on the transit system," Jeff concluded.

Thanks to all the members who are working for access to public transit on the Peninsula!

Mother's Day Organizing



Brandy Faulkner from the New River Valley Chapter and other leaders from around Virginia gathered in Richmond on May 11 to join Mothers Out Front in a media conference about environmental justice.

Brandy spoke about the racism in Dominion Energy's choice of Union Hill for an enormous fracked gas compressor station. Union Hill is a small, historic, rural community in Buckingham County that was founded by free people of color after the Civil War. The compressor station will have a destructive effect on the air quality and noise in their area.

"I call on Dominion Energy and its partners to stop construction on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline and to place people over profit....These are our communities, and we don't want your fracked gas and \$7 billion pipelines," Brandy said.

Speakers also demanded that Dominion work quickly toward a low carbon future in order to protect the earth from climate change, and they called on Dominion to provide electricity without gouging low income residents.

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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