



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

July/August 2019 Issue 86



Intern Action!

Virginia Organizing hired 10 summer interns this year. They began work July 1 and finish August 16. During the first week of August, they all went to Martinsville to participate in the chapter's environmental justice week of action. They knocked on 1,625 doors asking community members about high utility bills and other energy issues! The week of action concluded with a large community meeting about the ongoing campaign.

The interns also attended our three-day Dismantling Racism Workshop in Wakefield. The workshop brought together leaders from all of our chapter areas, including several from Portsmouth, Lynchburg, Newport News, and Eastern Shore.

The interns have gone in smaller groups to participate in chapter meetings and other actions in several areas. They canvassed in Newport News, Portsmouth, and Waynesboro, and they held a living wage rally outside a Chick-fil-A in Charlottesville.

Each of the interns has also written a letter to the editor about an issue of their choosing. Many of them have been published so far.

- Brianna Patillo's letter about Lynchburg's school volunteer policy was published in the **Lynchburg News & Advance**.
- Amanda Dameron's letter about the appointment of Ken Cucinelli was published in the Harrisonburg **Daily News Record**.
- Maddy Ayalew's letter about the dehumanizing mistreatment of immigrants today was published in the Charlottesville **Daily Progress**.



Protect the ACA!

The Charlottesville/Albemarle County Chapter and our summer interns held a rally in front of the Freedom of Speech Wall in Charlottesville in early July to call for Congress to protect the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Leaders spoke about being able to access affordable health care for the first time thanks to this groundbreaking legislation.



Cake Delivery!

On the 54th birthday of Medicaid and Medicare, the New River Valley Chapter delivered a birthday cake to the office of U.S. Representative Morgan Griffith in Christiansburg. They asked him to start protecting these programs that have improved the lives of many thousands of Americans.

Leader of the Month - Rebecca Sue Brown of Harrisonburg/Rockingham County



Rebecca moved to Harrisonburg in 2010 after living much of her life in Colorado. Due to progressing symptoms of then undiagnosed Ehlers Danlos Syndrome, she had to endure nine surgeries over the next four years. She was mostly homebound during those years, unable to work or meet people in her new community.

Then in 2014 she attended her first Virginia Organizing chapter meeting because she was outraged at the way the leasing company that managed her apartment treated her and other tenants in the Harrisonburg area. "I had a friend whose home flooded with raw sewage when the neighbors had a burst pipe, and the landlord refused to clean their home. My landlord leased my home out from under me six months prior to my renewal date despite the lease saying they would give three months' notice."

Although the chapter didn't take up that issue, Rebecca really liked this method of organizing. "Looking at social systems and how they work is really interesting to me," she says. Her background in Economic Sociology meant that she understood the value of working for deep, structural change.

Her gifts also made her a leader in the chapter. Rebecca enjoys planning events, and she doesn't shrink from work that some of us find uncomfortable like fundraising. For the last four years, Rebecca has been on the Grassroots Gathering Planning Committee and she has run the silent auction at the Gathering. She specializes in selling ads for the program book, and as a result her chapter always excels at fundraising.

Rebecca served as the planning committee chair for Harrisonburg's International Dinner fundraiser last spring. The event cost the chapter nothing because every single item they needed for the dinner was an in-kind donation! She advises, "Find out which issue people care about and speak to them about what their donation will mean and has meant to organize change around that issue. People can give different things. If they say no to a monetary donation, ask for food for your next event, or an item like a gift card for the silent auction, or ask them to attend a meeting, or all three! And importantly, follow up with a thank you note, so they know they are remembered and their kind donation mattered. And if they don't want to help, that's good information, too. You know who not to ask next time!"

Rebecca has recently moved to Northern Virginia, but she promises to stay connected with us and attend GG2019. Why does she love Virginia Organizing? "As a person who became increasingly disabled, I lost a lot, including my ability to be gainfully employed, and that was an incredibly painful blow to my sense of self. But, through this life experience, I learned that living by your principals and values is what really matters the most. You can accomplish profound things by being clear who you are and having a clear goal.

"Virginia Organizing was a place where I could contribute. We are never opportunistic in the way we organize. The local community informs our campaigns and not the other way around. We are so clear on who we are, what we do, and how we build power.

"Virginia Organizing was part of my journey to personal and communal power. Who you are being when you organize is what matters most, and that's why I trust Virginia Organizing and why I love us so much."

Thank you, Rebecca, for contributing so much to the Harrisonburg/Rockingham County Chapter and all of Virginia Organizing.

Take Action!

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has proposed a debt collection rule that does more to protect abusive collectors than consumers. Virginia Organizing has fought too hard for strong consumer protections to see them taken away. So what can you do about it?

- Share your personal story about how debt collection affects your community.
- Submit a public comment opposing the proposed rule.
- Find an attorney to help stop abusive debt collection practices.

To take action, go to the website of the National Consumer Law Center at www.nclc.org/takeaction.



Welcome to our New Southwest Organizer, Susan Stancill!

Susan has been a member of Virginia Organizing since January 2019 and became the Southwest Organizer in July 2019. She is originally from Winston-Salem, N.C., and graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she also completed law school. Susan has been committed to social justice issues all of her adult life. She has been active in the Moral Monday movement under the Reverend Dr. William Barber and was an ardent opponent of the "Bathroom Bill" and Amendment One in North Carolina, which sought to further marginalize and place at risk members of the LGBTQ community.

Susan moved to Southwest Virginia three years ago and immersed herself in many of the economic and social issues facing the region through her involvement in a congressional campaign. As a result of her experience, she has come to appreciate and embrace the non-partisan model espoused by Virginia Organizing as the best model to move Southwest Virginia forward.

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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