

# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## News from the Grassroots

November 2019 Issue 88



### Protect DACA - #HomeIsHere!

Virginia Organizing, in partnership with many groups statewide, held eight DACA rallies, vigils, and other actions this month because on November 12 the Supreme Court heard arguments from the Trump administration seeking to end the program.

Chapters have also written more than 400 postcards to Senator Mark Warner asking him to make passing the Dream Act in the Senate a priority.

On Tuesday, November 19 the New River Valley Chapter held a "Teach-in for DACA" at Virginia Tech. Brandy Faulkner, a Virginia Tech professor and leader in the NRV Chapter, asked the deeper question, "Why do you think this is such a challenging issue?" (Read more about Brandy below.)

Sarah Ovink, also a professor at Virginia Tech, spoke about the consequences for students if DACA is rescinded.

"If we are not providing that full and fair equality to everyone that lives within our borders and who needs our protection and arrived here as children, then we are not living up to our promise," Ovink said.



### Local Campaigns for Better Public Transit

In Newport News members visited City Council to speak about the severe problems they are having with public transit. Board member Jay Johnson and leader Jackie McIntyre both spoke at the meeting.

"If I was supposed to be at work at 8 and it doesn't come until 10, my employer doesn't understand. They want us on time," Jackie said. "It can mess up my employment."

Jay spoke about the difficulties veterans have had making their medical appointments and also about the lack of vision the city has demonstrated.

"They maintain that extra service means more cash," she said. "I'm saying, no, it's possible that more creativity could mean more service as well."

In the emerging Suffolk chapter, members also have trouble with the bus system, which runs on a very limited schedule. They held a rally calling for longer hours and more buses on November 6.

"It's hard for a guy to get a job and maintain a job when you can't get to your job," chapter member Hakim Muhammad said. "It's virtually impossible. How can you support your family when you can't earn, you can't earn because you can't get to work. And you're living in a city as big as Suffolk? It's unheard of, it's crazy."

Public transit is a crucial tool for fighting many of the issues we all face in Virginia, from climate change to air pollution. Good public transportation could make our cities more livable for residents. Most of all, chapter members in Newport News and Suffolk just want to be able to get to work, go shopping, and visit their doctors!



Jackie McIntyre and Jay Johnson at the Newport News City Council Action



## Leader of the Month - Brandy Faulkner from the New River Valley Chapter

Brandy Faulkner wanted to get involved with Virginia Organizing years before there was a chapter in the New River Valley, so she joined immediately when a new organizer started doing 1:1s in her area. "I was really excited to see a grassroots organization with so much

history working in Montgomery County," she says. "We've had a lot of other organizations come and go, but I've always believed that if you're going to make headway on an issue the work has to be led by people in the community, and that's what Virginia Organizing makes possible."

Brandy is the Gloria D. Smith Professor of Africana Studies at Virginia Tech. She was born in New York but moved to Southside Virginia when she was young, went to high school, college, and graduate school here, and now teaches here. She has lived in Blacksburg for 13 years.

The school-to-prison pipeline and environmental justice have been two of the issues she is most passionate about. Both issues are about young people and protecting the potential of the next generation. Brandy has participated in the chapter's school board visits, rallies, forums, and other actions, and also joined the statewide environmental justice strategy committee and attended meetings with officials at the Department of Education in Richmond.

"Underrepresented children in schools are often seen as inferior students," she says. "They're treated as disciplinary problems, and they don't get the time, attention, and resources that other children receive. Eventually they're shuffled off to the criminal justice system. It makes me so sad that these children, who are just as capable as anyone, are not able to develop their potential. We need to get to the bottom of what's happening and figure out how to fix it."

Environmental justice is an equally urgent issue, and Brandy has been one of Virginia Organizing's most active leaders in working for it. "My dad was a textile worker," she explains, "and he developed health problems related to the toxins he was exposed to. We don't always connect the pieces of the puzzle, but disregard for workers' health and safety, pipelines, climate change, they're all part of the same problem. Every one of us is affected, but some people more than others. I want to make sure we are sustainable and just and moving towards a healthy planet."

Thank you Brandy for all the work you do for the New River Valley Chapter and Virginia's future!



## Vallen Ellis on #GivingTuesday and Virginia Organizing

I grew up in Norton, Virginia, a small town in Southwest. It's pretty far from the rest of the state and pretty rural and mostly white. I'm biracial. I faced a lack of understanding when I was growing up. I didn't know anyone who was really like me until I got to college. I had a lot bottled up inside.

I go to the University of Virginia's College at Wise, and that's where I first met someone from Virginia Organizing last spring. They recruited me to apply for a summer internship with them because I said I care about making my community fair for everyone. I spent the summer in Charlottesville learning how to organize.

It's all about giving a voice to people. We visited several chapters, meeting one to one with every type of person you can imagine. We canvassed neighborhoods, made calls, and planned rallies. I learned about the importance of justice and the things that different people face. I also learned about myself. (cont.)

I have a voice. I have a story. When you share your story, you encourage others to do the same, and that empowers them. After practicing all summer, I wrote an op-ed about growing up biracial in Southwest. It was published in the **Roanoke Times**.

The internship with Virginia Organizing made me stronger as a person. I'm glad I had the opportunity, and that's what Giving Tuesday is all about, sharing our opportunities with others. I hope you will donate to grow more chapters for Virginia Organizing in 2020 so that other people can discover their voices, too.

Donate today on our website: [virginia-organizing.org](http://virginia-organizing.org)



## Welcome Back, Addie Alexander, Richmond Area Organizer!

Addie Alexander grew up in Charlottesville and got involved in Virginia Organizing early. She was a summer intern during her college years and also joined the chapter in Williamsburg. After graduating from William and Mary, she taught at the Universidad del Atlantico in Colombia on a Fulbright grant for a year. In 2013 she became the Fredericksburg organizer and helped with the chapter's successful school-to-prison pipeline, restoration of rights, and health care campaigns.

Addie organized in Fredericksburg for four years and then organized for tenant's rights in New York City. In 2019 she moved back to the Commonwealth to work with Virginia Organizing again in the Richmond area.

Addie feels that the highlight of her earlier work with us was seeing how local organizing about the school-to-prison pipeline and restoration of rights led directly to changes on the state level.

"What I love about working with Virginia Organizing is seeing an idea emerge from people's real life experiences," Addie says, "and then working with those same people to develop that idea and grow into a powerful force for change."

## 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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