



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

December 2019 Issue 89



**Happy Holidays
from all of us at
Virginia Organizing!**



Take Action: Know your Legislators!

The 2020 General Assembly session will begin in January. Some districts were changed and many new senators and delegates were elected.

We have prepared a one page document to summarize our priorities this session. Contact us to check it out and join us in calling legislators to ask them to support these campaigns.

Do you know who your legislators are? The General Assembly offers a helpful tool to find your senator and delegate at <https://whosmy.virginiageneralassembly.gov/>.

Health Care and Immigration Events in Richmond!

Virginia Organizing and SEIU Virginia 512 leaders met with Rep. Abigail Spanberger on December 14. They held a roundtable discussion on the outrageous price gouging drug companies have been engaged in and its effect on people who need insulin and other medications.

The leaders also wanted to thank Spanberger for voting for H.R. 3, the "Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act," which passed in the House. NowThisPolitics made a Facebook video of the thoughtful discussion.



The Richmond Area Chapter has begun to develop its membership and direction. Local leaders held a "Know your Rights, Use your Voice" workshop with the Hispanic Center of Chesterfield about immigrant rights on December 11. In addition to the 25 participants in the room, the workshop was livestreamed to an additional 210 viewers who were able to ask questions online of the workshop leaders.

Participants expressed interest in increased access to driver's licenses and local work around stopping collaboration between ICE and the sheriff's department.





Leader of the Month - Kel BasAvraham of the Washington County Chapter

Kel BasAvraham grew up in Mississippi, and has lived in many places, but came to Abingdon in their 30s. They've lived in various places in Appalachia but moved back to Abingdon about 10 years ago. Soon after that they joined the Washington County Chapter of Virginia

Organizing. (Kel identifies as non-binary and uses the pronouns they/them/their.)

They got involved in Virginia Organizing because it's an issue-based organization, which they found very refreshing. Kel wanted to work on issues not campaigns because it seemed like issues would bring people together around problems they share. "Things have become very polarized in Southwest Virginia," Kel explains.

Some of the issues they have worked on are Medicaid expansion, banning fracking, and LGBTQ equality. They have sometimes encountered prejudice and hostility in Washington County, and it has been getting worse. "It's ironic because we have marriage rights and TriPride, but at the same time people are saying unspeakably rude things to me. There's nothing I can say about that. I just have to grit my teeth and wait for them to quit."

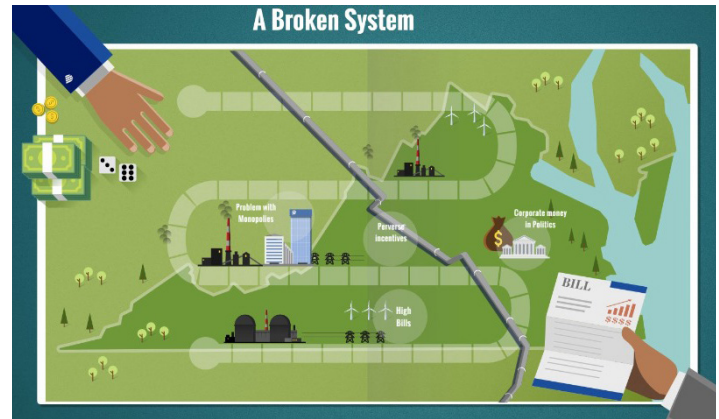
As a leader in the chapter, Kel works hard for the statewide organization. They write at least one letter to the editor every month and frequently get published. They helped put together the regional skill-building workshop in Abingdon last spring, and they worked on the Grassroots Gathering 2019 statewide committee.

Kel enjoyed many things about the Grassroots Gathering. "The climate change workshop was the one where I learned the most," they said. "Someone asked the question 'Why should I care about cleaning up from coal mining if it doesn't affect me?' The discussion that came from that was so great. It helped inform our work in Southwest."

Going forward, Kel wants to work on local public transit problems. "People have been blowing up my phone about it." Routes have been changed, and people who use the bus can't get where they need to go. Kel is experienced in building a campaign and says, "We've got to gather data before we can do anything."

Kel is also developing a workshop on "Gender what? Cis, trans, and non-binary gender" for the Appalachian Peace Education Center (APEC) and hopes to bring workshops on LGBTQ education to their local chapter.

Thank you, Kel, for your unwavering commitment to grassroots organizing in Southwest Virginia!



Energy Democracy Workshops

Chapters around the Commonwealth are holding Energy Democracy Workshops in partnership with Appalachian Voices and other groups. So far, the workshops have been offered in Charlottesville, Norton, Abingdon, and Harrisonburg.

The workshops are intended to explore and guide Virginia's progress towards a more sustainable, affordable, and equitable energy system.

A truly just energy system would allow the public to participate in decisions that have an impact on them and their communities:

- How much electricity we use and when we use it.
- How much we pay for it.
- Where our electricity comes from.
- Where energy infrastructure is sited.

Participants are invited to bring their electricity bills and learn why they are increasing. They hear about the erosion of regulation on monopoly utilities (like Dominion Energy) and how Virginians are building a strategy to democratize electricity access. Stay tuned for one of these workshops in your area!



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: Virginia Highlands Community College, Emory and Henry, UVA Wise, JMU, EMU, UVA, NSU, ODU, VT, Radford, Virginia Wesleyan, TCC, UMW

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