

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

January/February 2020 Issue 90



Big Wins in the General Assembly

Every chapter has sent leaders to the General Assembly legislative session, and some members have visited several times. We've all been fired up by the hope of seeing change happen that we've been working on for many years.

Our priorities have done so well that we can't include all the wins in this list!

- ◇ **The school-to-prison pipeline** work has been successful! Both the House and Senate have passed all of the legislation we worked for, including decriminalizing disorderly conduct for students and providing better training and memoranda of understanding for school resource officers.
- ◇ **The Fair Energy Bills Act** passed in the House of Delegates. **The Environmental Justice Act** passed in both the House and the Senate!
- ◇ Both houses also passed bills **allowing people to drive regardless of immigration status**. The House passed the version we support, which would make actual driver's licenses available. The Senate bill only allows driver privilege cards. We don't support this bill because privilege cards don't protect immigrants' privacy.
- ◇ **The Virginia Fairness in Lending Act** passed both houses. This law will finally regulate predatory lending companies effectively. This is a big win after years of organizing by many groups!
- ◇ **Bills that would raise the minimum wage** passed in both houses. We want the Senate to accept the House bill, which raises the wage quickly throughout Virginia, not just in certain areas.
- ◇ Virginia ratified the **Equal Rights Amendment!**
- ◇ **Protection from discrimination for LGBTQ people passed!**





Leader of the Month - Dave Rogers of Charlottesville/ Albemarle County

Dave Rogers first came to Charlottesville when he was an undergraduate at UVA in 1965. After graduation, he moved to the Tidewater area to become a teacher, but he missed Charlottesville and soon moved back. He has lived here ever since, raising a family and working as

a teacher and later a principal in at least six local public schools.

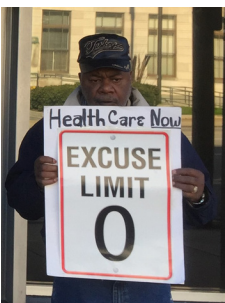
When Dave began to think about retiring six years ago, he looked around for some way to be helpful in the community and found the Charlottesville Chapter of Virginia Organizing. "I really liked the idea of helping people find opportunities they might not find otherwise. This town is very spread out and doesn't have good public transit. It can be hard to access the help you need. Connecting people with resources restores a sense of community."

For the last five years, Dave has been participating in the Charlottesville Chapter's steady work of registering voters in mostly African American neighborhoods. On many Saturdays all year round, Dave sits at a table outside a popular barber shop or a restaurant in one neighborhood and asks people who walk by if they are registered to vote.

He noticed from the beginning that many people of color, especially men, would walk by saying only "No, I can't vote." It gave him a passion for the restoration of civil rights for people coming out of prison. Dave says, "It's a complicated process with many hoops to jump through when it doesn't need to be. Many states restore rights automatically. In Virginia you come out and you already have a very difficult time establishing yourself. You have to get an I.D., a place to live, a job, and many other things, and so it's just too frustrating to have all these steps you have to take in order to vote."

The chapter trains volunteers and provides them with materials so that they can make it easier for people who want to restore their rights. The other thing they do is build power in the community. "I'm there every week, so sometimes a person will come up to me and say 'So and so told me you could help me do this.' It means I have credibility and I can have conversations with new people."

Thank you for your work, Dave! You've helped hundreds of people vote, and you're helping to dismantle systemic racism in Charlottesville.



Health Care in Virginia

Sunday, February 16, several General Assembly committees will negotiate a state budget. We hope our legislators will use this opportunity to create a state-based exchange with strong protections for consumers. We will send updates as the plan develops.

Take Action: Contact your State Senator!

The Virginia House of Delegates passed many excellent bills this session. The Senate, unfortunately, weakened many of them in their version, if they passed them at all. Please contact your senator and urge them to...

1. Support driver's licenses not privilege cards.
2. Support the Fair Energy Bills Act.
3. Support the House version of the minimum wage bill, which would raise the wage to \$15/hour across the state, not only in certain areas.



Dismantling Racism Workshop - Southside Chapters

A racially diverse group of community leaders met at Greater Triumph Missionary Baptist Church in Pittsylvania County for Virginia Organizing's first Dismantling Racism Workshop of the year.

It was a powerful experience. We shared personal stories, reviewed some foundational concepts in dismantling racism theory, and created individual and collective action plans. We're looking at a joint campaign with the Pittsylvania County NAACP to get more inclusive history taught in the public schools and continuing to work on the school-to-prison pipeline locally and statewide.



Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Staunton/Augusta County/Waynesboro, Suffolk, Washington County

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

Virginia Organizing
703 Concord Avenue
Charlottesville, 22903
434-984-4655

info@virginia-organizing.org
<https://www.virginia-organizing.org>