

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

March 2020 Issue 91



Norfolk Wins their School Campaign!

In February the Norfolk Chapter won their campaign to convince the school board to adopt new policies to reduce suspensions. Currently in Norfolk, students of color and students with disabilities are suspended at much higher rates than white students. 20 leaders went to the February school board meeting to support three who spoke about the urgency of this issue.

You can watch videos of two of the speakers on our Facebook page. They urged the board to approve:

Structured in-school suspensions in all schools, with instructors who are well-paid and trained in restorative justice, implicit bias, and trauma-informed care. This keeps kids in school, surrounded by support, and current with their education during suspensions.

Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) implemented with fidelity; this will require one full-time staff member at the district-level who can oversee training, conduct a Tiered Fidelity Inventory, and help NPS move toward fidelity.

Professional development for all NPS staff in:

- Restorative Justice
- Implicit Bias
- Student engagement
- De-escalation training

Now the chapter will work to ensure that Norfolk City Council approves a budget for these changes.

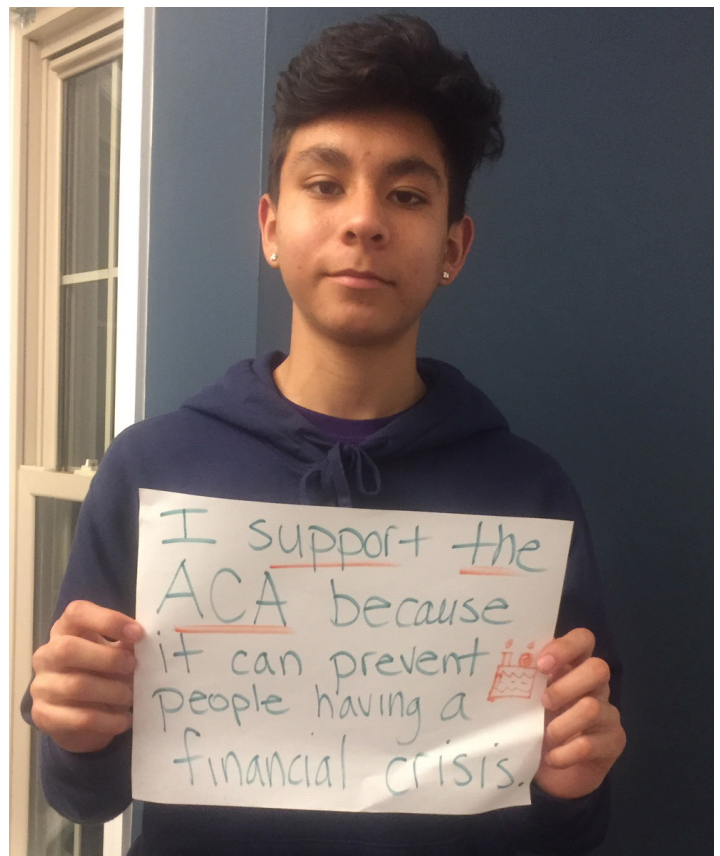
ACA Anniversary

The ACA turned 10 years old Monday! Thanks for everything you did to help us in this long fight to achieve affordable, accessible health care for all Virginians! Check out some of the things our chapters and members did to celebrate!

We had two radio interviews, and letters and op-eds in local newspapers by Ronna Wertman of the SAW Chapter, Tim Jost of Harrisonburg, and Denise Kirchner of Richmond.

We posted "10 Stories for 10 Years" on our website and Facebook.

The Shenandoah Valley Chapters held a virtual celebration of the anniversary. You can see their video of leaders holding signs about why they support the ACA on their Facebook page.



Don't forget to apply for your absentee ballot if you have a local election in May!

Voters may choose the reason "2A My disability or illness" for absentee voting due to COVID-19. Voters who choose the absentee option should do so as soon as possible so they can get their ballots in time to return them by mail by Election Day.



Welcome to Amanda Dameron - Apprentice Organizer!

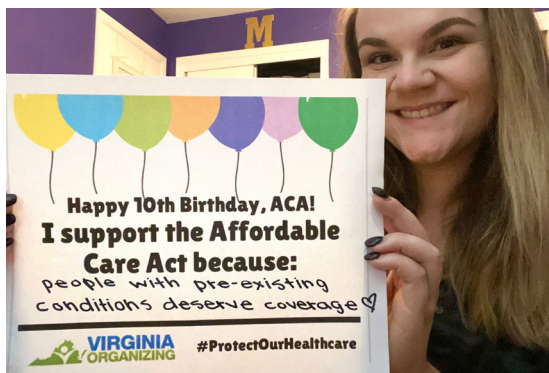
Amanda Dameron grew up in rural Franklin County, but after she moved to Harrisonburg for college she decided to stay in the Valley. Amanda lost her father very early in life, and as a result felt drawn to a major in psychology. She wanted to become a grief counselor and help others work through the issues she had experienced.

However, after she took an internship with a domestic violence shelter in Harrisonburg, she saw that "bigger systemic issues result in individual mental health struggles." She wanted to work on policy from then on in order to help more people. First, she pursued a career in social work. Classes with Professor B. J. Bryson (who is also a member of the Harrisonburg Chapter of Virginia Organizing) made Amanda realize, "Oh wow, I can work on a bigger scale."

Eventually she understood that she wanted to be a community organizer and became an intern with Virginia Organizing. "It was this excellent combination of working individually with people and building relationships (which was what I loved about social work), but building them in order to work on larger policy and system-level issues that I felt called to do."

Asked what issue she cares most about, Amanda says, "Every time I start work on an issue with Virginia Organizing I instantly become passionate about it, but I have found working with undocumented people in Harrisonburg very fulfilling. I'm excited about everything." We're excited that you're joining the staff, Amanda!

Amanda will be developing new chapters in central Virginia between Louisa County and Waynesboro (excluding Charlottesville/Albemarle County). If you have things you want to see change in these communities, please contact her at amandadameron@virginia-organizing.org



Education Justice Forum in Christiansburg

On Saturday, February 29, the New River Valley Chapter of Virginia Organizing and the Montgomery-Radford-Floyd Branch of the NAACP hosted their second Education Justice Forum. More than 30 parents, students, educators, and community members joined together to reflect on experiences and share ideas for improving public education.

One of the goals for the forum was to cultivate an inclusive space for everyone to share and feel validated in their experiences. Participants described feeling welcomed and grateful for the forum, with one parent saying, "I finally felt like my frustrations and concerns were being heard."

The two organizations will continue to identify strategies to take action to dismantle racism in our school systems. The NRV Chapter is wrapping up its campaign to get Montgomery County Public Schools to update its MOUs with law enforcement to reflect the state model for school resource officers.

Chapter members are excited to continue building relationships with parents and students as they engage new folks in the chapter's upcoming listening campaign. Leaders will help to develop strategy for improving education. Newer members are getting involved in Radford City.

We are all working to make sense of the long-term implications of the current health crisis on public education.

**Take action! Contact members of Congress
and urge them to provide economic relief to
ALL families. Immigrants have been left out of
COVID-19 relief measures so far. The switch-
board is 202-224-3121. Call today!**

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

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