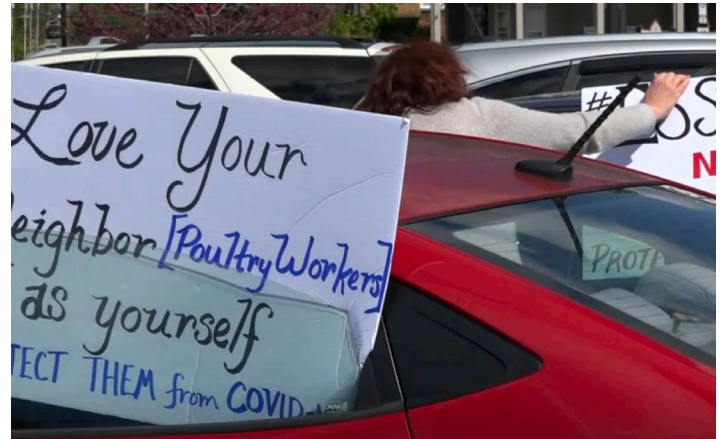




VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

April/May 2020 Issue 92



COVID Car Rallies for Poultry Workers

The Eastern Shore and Shenandoah Valley Chapters joined the Legal Aid Justice Center and several other groups in holding two COVID Car Rallies on Monday, April 27. The rallies were covered by local and national media.

As WHSV in Harrisonburg reported, workers are calling for "the State Board of Health and Gov. Northam to use their authority to have the Virginia Occupational Safety and Health produce enforceable regulations on worker safety, including social distancing, sanitizing, disinfection, PPE requirements, mandatory notifications to the Virginia Department of Health, whistleblower protections, mandatory shutdowns for sanitizing following a positive test, and mandatory testing for COVID-19."

One worker from the Cargill plant in the Valley has already died. As Felicia Matthews of the Eastern Shore Chapter said in her interview, "We understand they provide meals for millions of people, but lives are more important right now."

Many of the employees of these plants are immigrants who have not even been able to get relief checks and other government assistance during this crisis. We want Tyson, Perdue, and Cargill to take responsibility for their workers' health and safety. This is a basic right any worker should be able to take for granted.



Virtual Power Analysis Report

On May 2, the Statewide Governing Board, staff, and leaders from every chapter gathered on a Zoom call to begin our yearly Power Analysis. We usually hold this meeting in person every spring to analyze the power we have built locally and around the state, to discuss the wins and losses of the previous year, and to strategize ways to build more power in Virginia.

This year we have had to break the work up into several virtual sessions. We will meet again as a group on May 30.

We heard reports from chapter leaders about their local campaigns, and we began to consider whether we will continue to work on the four priority issues we have focused on in the last few General Assembly sessions, or shift to new ones. Our four priority issues have been:

- Immigrant rights
- School-to-prison pipeline
- Environmental justice
- Health care

It's clear to all of us that the pandemic will change everything. It already has. Even if we keep all four of these issues, each of them requires new kinds of work. Access to treatment and testing for the coronavirus has become an important new health care campaign, for instance.

We also discussed the problem that many students are not receiving the education they deserve while schools are closed. Cities and counties facing budget shortfalls have considered cutting funds for education just when students need even more support. Organizing around school budgets during social distancing will require new strategies.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed to the meeting. We missed seeing each other in person, but we still had some fun!

Welcome New Board Members!



Barbara J. Harris

Barbara became involved with the Norfolk Chapter during the restoration of rights campaign in 2016. She has helped to register voters, lobby legislators, and joined actions for Medicaid expansion, environmental justice, and the school-to-prison pipeline. During this time, she also became a licensed minister. She is a retired nurse and lives in Norfolk with her husband Allen and her son, Anthoine.



Tyran Green

Tyran Green helped to found the Portsmouth Chapter and worked as a leader and later an intern with Virginia Organizing. She first connected with the local organizer over school-to-prison pipeline issues, and also participated in Medicaid expansion, predatory lending, and other local actions. She has often helped support the work of other chapters in the area. Tyran is a real estate agent and photographer and her favorite scripture is Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." She lives in Portsmouth with her children and grandchildren.



Lynchburg Wins its School Volunteer and Non-Discrimination Campaigns!

Since November 2018, the Lynchburg Chapter has been attending the Lynchburg City School Board meetings every month in order to urge them to change their restrictive volunteer policy. Individuals with felony convictions such as leader Robert Flood (pictured) could not volunteer in the schools.

In April, the school board removed the automatic restriction and will now review volunteer applications on a case-by-case basis! Lynchburg is only the 14th school district to decide not to exclude these volunteers automatically.

In addition, for the past six months, the chapter has pushed for the board to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the non-discrimination policies. On May 7, the board unanimously approved this change to the non-discrimination policies!

Members wrote a steady stream of letters to the editor, presented public comments at board meetings, attended school board work sessions and retreats, met with the school superintendent, and recruited many allies to get the policy changed.

Congratulations to the chapter on these two important victories!

Take action! Contact members of Congress and urge them to cap interest rates on all loans at 36 percent. Predatory lenders should not be able to prey on people who are even more desperate because of this crisis! Call the Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to speak with your representative 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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