

# **We Who Believe in Freedom**

**Mid-Year Report 2020**

**Virginia Organizing**



## From Chairperson Ladelle McWhorter:

August 2020 marks Virginia Organizing's 25th anniversary of grassroots work for justice in Virginia!

**The year began with a wonderful sense of the power we've built together.** We joined several coalitions and successfully lobbied the General Assembly for a historic number of legislative victories on immigrant rights, environmental justice, predatory lending, the school-to-prison pipeline, voting rights, LGBTQ rights, the ERA... it was an amazing session.

Since then we quickly adapted to new conditions in the pandemic, offering an online learning series to promote leadership development, moving chapter meetings to conference calls and Zoom, and holding our annual Power Analysis online during May. We will hold the Grassroots Gathering online in August.

**We haven't slowed down at all!** If anything, the recent energy in the streets over racist policing and monuments is powerfully blending with the groundwork we laid over the last 25 years of movement organizing to propel the transformation of our communities.

For instance, when we started working on the school-to-prison pipeline years ago, chapters worked to convince school boards to follow best practices in their MOUs with school resource officers (SROs). Now the Lynchburg Chapter has called for SROs to be removed from their schools.

Norfolk convinced their school board to adopt restorative justice as a way to address racial disparities in the schools. They even won the funding for it from their city council during this economic crisis!

**What may have seemed impossible last year has become more than possible.**

Thank you for contributing everything you give to Virginia Organizing.

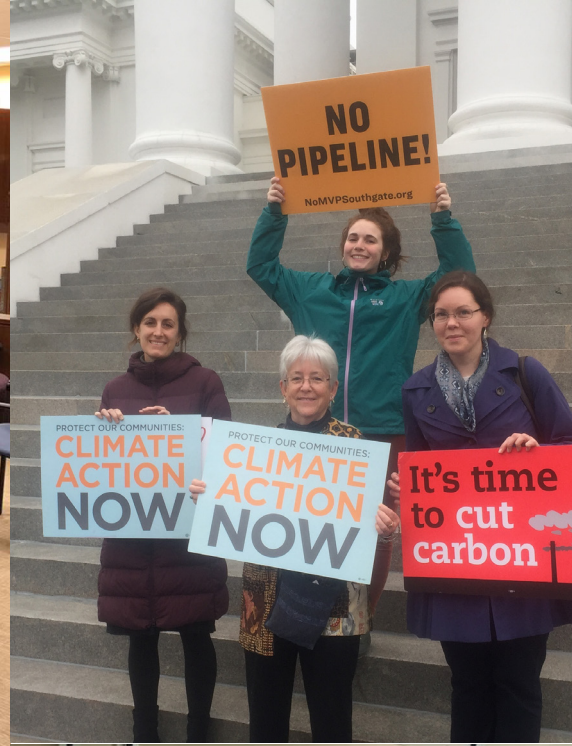
"We who believe in freedom cannot rest until it comes." \*

*Del*

\* "Ella's Song" from Sweet Honey in the Rock







From across the state, leaders met with their elected representatives in the General Assembly, rallied in support of environmental justice, and spoke out in favor of driver's licenses for all. Terry White of Norfolk even attended the State of the Union as Senator Mark Warner's invited guest.







Danville and Martinsville chapter members share stories at their Dismantling Racism workshop.



Senator Steve Newman refused to meet with Lynchburg leaders in Richmond, but they managed to stop him in the hallway.

Eastern Shore Chapter held a COVID-19 Memorial service in June.





## Statewide since January

- We offered **35+ public webinars** for leadership development, voter registration, and to build power on our issues. We also held a tele-townhall about the pandemic with Senator Tim Kaine that more than **2000 Virginians** participated in.
- Grassroots leaders from every one of our 16 chapters and developing chapter areas **visited their legislators** during the General Assembly session, some multiple times.
- More than 140 public officials from Lee County to the Eastern Shore signed our letter to the Virginia Congressional delegation asking for **relief funds for local governments**, Medicaid, and frontline workers. Officials included current and former mayors, city councilors, county supervisors, school superintendents, commonwealth's attorneys, and state senators and delegates.
- We generated public comments to the Virginia Safety and Health Codes Board, along with a broad coalition of groups, and won the first state-level **worker safety standards** in the United States. These standards are not voluntary, are superior to CDC regulations, and will force companies to take necessary measures to protect their workers from COVID-19.
- We joined a coalition of environmental groups to develop an "Energy Democracy" series of online workshops that teach Virginians how their power companies work and how to begin **to take control of their utilities**.
- We added new **Central Virginia** organizer Amanda Dameron and two new board members: Tyran Green of Portsmouth and Barbara J. Harris of Norfolk.



# Highlights of Chapter Campaigns and Victories

- As a result of the pandemic, poultry workers in the Shenandoah Valley and Eastern Shore began to get sick. With a coalition of groups, the **Harrisonburg/Rockingham County** and **Eastern Shore** Chapters supported efforts to force their employers to protect them from the disease with “COVID Car Rallies” that were covered widely in the media and led the governor to take action. This campaign led directly to the new regulations adopted by the Safety and Health Codes Board.
- The **Norfolk** Chapter won their campaign to convince the city school board to put restorative justice measures in the 2020-2021 academic budget and convinced their city council to fund the measures.
- The **Lynchburg** Chapter won both of their school campaigns. The school board removed the automatic restriction against people with felony records volunteering in the schools. They agreed to 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, the chapter pushed for the school board to add sexual orientation and gender identity to the non-discrimination policies and the board unanimously approved this change.
- The **Washington County** and **Lee County** Chapters have been organizing for racial justice with the Future Black Leaders Coalition--who have held two Black Lives Matter marches and the first ever Bristol Juneteenth celebration--and with Justice, Equality, Peace, and Change in Marion.
- The **New River Valley** Chapter held an Education Justice Forum to listen to parents and students affected by systemic racism in the local schools. They also partnered with the Christiansburg Institute to offer several discussions on local African American history and a Juneteenth celebration and participated in Black Lives Matter marches and rallies.
- **Newport News** held a tele-townhall to discuss the state of education in the city and learn about the city’s plan for an equitable recovery of the school system in regards to Covid-19. The panel included the superintendent of schools, the chairman of the school board, and the chief executive officer of South-eastern Virginia Health System in Newport News. More than 150 city residents participated.
- In **Richmond**, members are starting a process of community-led research into issues of housing and education. During the General Assembly session, leaders from the Latinx community in Southside and Chesterfield organized in support of the campaigns for driver’s licenses and in-state tuition.
- The chapters in **Danville** and **Martinsville/Henry County** partnered with the Pittsylvania County NAACP to hold the first Dismantling Racism workshop of the year in Pittsylvania in January. **Suffolk** and **Fredericksburg** leaders participated in Virginia Organizing’s first virtual Dismantling Racism workshop in June.











## Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Central Virginia, Danville, Eastern Shore, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Richmond, 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, VA 22903  
434-984-4655  
[info@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:info@virginia-organizing.org)  
[www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org)