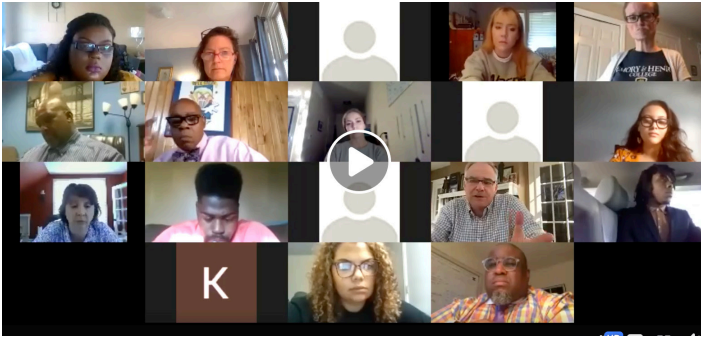


VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

November 2020 Issue 96

Meetings with U.S. Senator Tim Kaine on Zoom



On October 29, leaders from Southwest Virginia met on Zoom with Senator Tim Kaine to talk about voting, racism, health care, and other issues. The meeting was hosted by Virginia Organizing's Washington County Chapter. A large group of leaders participated, including the Future Black Leaders Coalition, students and staff from Emory and Henry College, and several African American pastors of area churches. It was shared live on Facebook.

Chapter leader Kiyanna Court (top left) asked, "After the election the Affordable Care Act will face a challenge in the Supreme Court. What are you and the Senate prepared to do to make sure that millions of Americans don't lose their health care and prescription drugs going forward?"

Senator Kaine answered by saying that that is the question that keeps him up at night. He said he opposed the rushed nomination of Amy Coney Barrett and said it was done in order to place her on the court in time for the hearing on the ACA November 10.

Senator Kaine described the harm that would be done to hundreds of thousands of Virginians if the ACA is overturned, and then said that he had introduced a public option bill called Medicare X in the Senate.

Medicare X "would allow the government to create a public health insurance program that would be much more reasonably priced than private insurance," he said.

This policy could be bought by anyone on the existing exchange. Why would it be affordable? "We wouldn't have to collect a profit, pay fancy salaries, advertise on the evening news, pay state and local taxes, pay returns to shareholders, so we would have a very affordable policy," he said.

Senator Kaine also told these leaders that he "applauds" their work to dismantle racism in Southwest Virginia. He recognized the "lonely" nature of the work they do, given the smaller numbers of African Americans in the region compared with more urban areas of Virginia.

The Eastern Shore Chapter also held a meeting with Senator Kaine on October 19 so that poultry workers could tell their stories and ask him to introduce better worker protections at the federal level. The senator listened and said he was convinced and would speak on behalf of workers on the Senate floor during the next session.

New River Valley Education Justice Campaign Update

The New River Valley Chapter of Virginia Organizing and the Montgomery-Radford-Floyd Branch of the NAACP are celebrating the adoption of new memorandums of understanding (MOUs) between Montgomery County Public Schools and local law enforcement.

The NRV Chapter and the NAACP have worked for 16 months to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline in their schools. The new MOUs redefine the role of school resource officers by ensuring that SROs do not participate in providing student discipline, but instead allow for other trained school personnel to attend to student needs.

"As a parent of an MCPS student, and a member of Virginia Organizing, I'm glad to see MCPS start to direct resources and take further steps to improve equity in schools," said Ginny Pannabecker, "including directly involving students, families, and community members across class, race, ability, gender-identity, and other groups to center those who have traditionally been left out of planning and discussions and to take steps that improve our schools for all. I look forward to seeing and hearing regular updates on the results of this community-involved work."

Local community leaders of Virginia Organizing and the MRF NAACP continue to work with area schools so that they become more equitable places for students to learn, to grow, and to be nurtured as future leaders in the New River Valley. Leaders celebrate this shift in district policy and will look forward to future work with parents, students, and other community members to achieve education justice.



Above: New River Valley parents and chapter leaders at the Education Justice Forum the chapter held last February.



Right to Vote Coalition

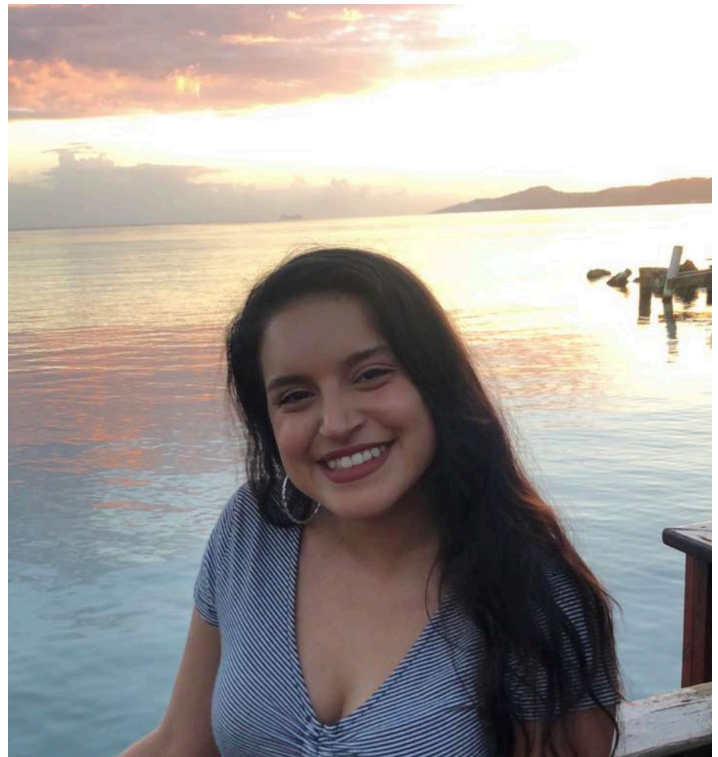
We celebrated the high number of new voters in the 2020 election, especially those who have had to apply to get their rights restored. Our next step is to work with the Right to Vote Coalition to get the General Assembly to stop stripping people of their rights when they are convicted of a felony. Racial disparities in the application of the law and vindictive sentencing led to mass incarceration of Black people in Virginia. We want this discrimination, which has destroyed so many lives, to come to an end.

The Richmond Public Library currently has an online exhibit entitled "Block the Vote," where you can read the history of the deliberate suppression of the voting rights of Black people in Virginia at <https://rvalibrary.org/block-the-vote>.



Giving Tuesday is December 1!

We hope you will remember Virginia Organizing's grassroots work for justice on this international day of giving. We will be sharing more about our current campaigns soon, but you don't have to wait. Donate today!



Welcome to new apprentice organizer, Natalie Romero of Charlottesville!

Nata is a recent UVA graduate, originally from Houston, Texas. At UVA she studied Global Development Studies and Sociology with a concentration in U.S. Intervention in the Americas. She is also a painter and is a part of the Freeman Artist Residency in Charlottesville. She will be organizing the Charlottesville/Albemarle County Chapter.

Nata believes in transformative justice, community accountability, and the art of healing.

"At a very young age, I understood the power behind community because we survived by sharing resources and showing up for one another. Because of this I am passionate about immigrant and working-class justice, education reform, housing and food justice. I organize because I believe in the power of radical transformation, and I want to share that with those I love," she says.

Contact Nata at natalie@virginia-organizing.org.

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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