



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

May 2021 Issue 102

Tax Day Town Hall

On May 17, 60 Virginia Organizing members met with U.S. Rep. Bobby Scott to ask questions about the Lower Drug Costs Now Act, H.R. 3, and demand that Congress make drug corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

Margarida Jorge, the director of Health Care for America Now, also joined us. She explained that, "H.R. 3 would make it possible for the U.S. government to negotiate prices for the first time for Medicare and then extend that lower price to people with private insurance."

We want our representatives, and Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, to help get H.R. 3 passed this year.

Please ask your Member of Congress to co-sponsor H.R. 3! The Congressional switchboard is 202-224-3121.



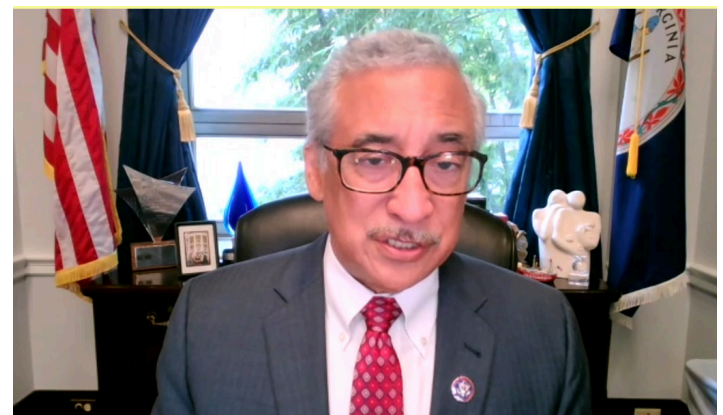
New Chapter in Suffolk!

On May 27, members in Suffolk petitioned the State Governing Board to become an official chapter of Virginia Organizing.

The Suffolk Chapter has been developing for the last three years. They won their first campaign, which was to push for better bus service for Suffolk residents. Suffolk County Transit responded to all of the issues members identified.

They have met with legislators at the General Assembly and in district many times.

Recently, they surveyed the community about encounters with police and met with the interim police chief. Members have participated in many of the health care actions and workshops other chapters in the region have organized. We're proud to welcome this hard-working chapter!



Create your Legacy!

For 25 years, Virginia Organizing has challenged injustices across the Commonwealth. Today, we want to ask you to think about the next 25 years. Virginia Organizing is only as powerful as the voices and people in our communities. One way to make sure those voices can continue to be heard is by creating a lasting legacy with Virginia Organizing. Including a legacy with Virginia Organizing in your will costs you nothing upfront, but is a powerful commitment to grassroots organizing and real change in Virginia forever.

In honor of our 25th anniversary, we want to challenge you to create a legacy that will keep our work growing and building power for the future.

Begin your legacy on our website:

<https://virginia-organizing.org/legacy-giving/>



Welcome to the State Governing Board, Karen Downing!

Karen Downing is a native of the Eastern Shore and its public schools. She went to Norfolk State University and then returned home in 1990 and got involved in service to the community.

When Virginia Organizing began to form a new chapter on the Shore in 2016, Karen got involved right away. She was concerned about many challenges that residents of the area face such as poverty, lack of access to health care, and education injustice. She has participated in Medicaid expansion rallies, visits to legislators in the district and in Richmond, and she has spoken to the Accomack School Board on several occasions as a leader of her chapter.

Karen has worked on several of the chapter's campaigns, including: health care, school-to-prison pipeline, Medicaid expansion, recruitment and retention of qualified teachers of color and universal coverage of broadband for the Eastern Shore. The Eastern Shore is an economically disadvantaged area and there are many disparities and inequities in the communities. The first time Karen spoke to the school board, she discussed the need for better sensitivity and cultural awareness among teachers so that they know how to address differences among students.

The chapter has been successful with several campaigns, but change, especially lasting change, takes time. Modified recruitment strategies, better salaries, affordable housing, and community support are needed to attract and retain teachers to the area. Karen's vision is of a "student-to-teacher pipeline," which would recruit children in the schools to get education degrees and bring them home to the Eastern Shore to teach in the community.

Karen likes a number of the strategies that set Virginia Organizing apart from other groups. "We choose a specific target and campaign and take decisive action," she says, describing the Medicaid expansion celebration with Senator Lynwood Lewis as one example of the chapter's successful relationship building. She also appreciates the importance of canvassing directly affected people, listening to their views, and recruiting them to join the chapter's campaign.

Sarah Miller | Newport News/ Hampton Apprentice Organizer

Sarah grew up in the Midwest and has a background in the military, which brought her to the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. In 2014 she got involved with the Norfolk Chapter. She worked on expansion of light rail in Virginia Beach, flooding in Norfolk, environmental justice, affordability of prescription meds, and voting rights.

"For me, voting rights has always been an important issue," she says. She's happy to see the improvements in the process for restoration of rights since then. Sarah says she chose Virginia Organizing because, "we do really meaningful work and it's a progressive and inclusive organization, not affiliated with any party."

Sarah is excited to organize on the Peninsula. The Chapter has been working on public transit issues, where they have had a lot of success, and they are taking on housing affordability. "Newport News families really want to address the needs of elder community members in keeping housing affordable," she says.

"What I really like about Virginia Organizing is the sense of community across the state," Sarah says. "I feel revitalized in the movement."



Glenda Crockett-Eans | Southwest Apprentice Organizer

Glenda grew up in Wytheville, where she and her family returned 17 years ago, and has worked as an elementary school teacher for 16 years. She went to college at North Carolina A&T State University in Greensboro NC, where she obtained her BS degree in Early Childhood Education and met her husband, Kerry Eans. They have two sons, Solomon and Kerrington.

Glenda and Kerry both got involved with Virginia Organizing when it was first founded and participated in efforts to change school hiring practices in their area and the living wage campaign. Kerry joined the State Governing Board and was chairperson in the late 90's.

They also co-founded the Concerned Citizens Network, which has held celebrations of the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dismantling Racism workshops for 25 years in Wytheville. After the murder of George Floyd, Glenda founded a group called "Change Agents," that successfully worked with the superintendent of Wythe County Public Schools to institute a policy banning confederate flags and other white supremacist symbols from the public schools.

Glenda feels called to be an organizer. "God gave me this opportunity to help people use their voice," she says. She's excited to continue her work of bringing people together to speak up for themselves with Virginia Organizing.



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
Richmond/Chesterfield/Henrico
Staunton/Augusta County
Suffolk
Washington County
Waynesboro

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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