

RELEASE
DON'T BUILD

New Beginnings

Virginia Organizing
Mid-Year Report 2021

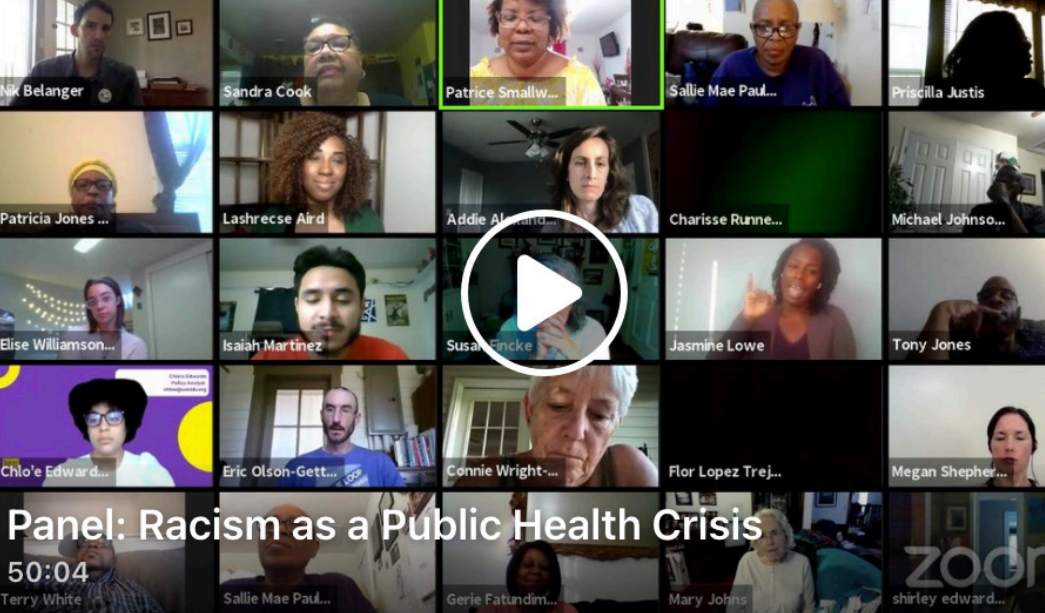
MASS
INCARCERATION
NOT Practical
NOT Affordable
NOT Effective
NOR HUMANE

IF IT
DOESN'T
WORK
QUIT
DOIN'
IT!

25



VIRGINIA
ORGANIZING



Panel: Racism as a Public Health Crisis

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In addition to the panel discussion of Racism as a Public Health Crisis, we also offered two other opportunities for leaders statewide to meet with members of Congress:

- a townhall with Rep. Bobby Scott about H.R. 3, the Lower Drug Costs Now Act, which Rep. Scott sponsored
- a townhall on environmental justice with Rep. Don McEachin

And we held our Statewide Power Analysis Conference online once again. We have gradually begun to hold chapter meetings and some rallies in person.

From Ladelle McWhorter, Chairperson

Members of Virginia Organizing have been proud to continue our work, as urgent as it ever was, to dismantle systemic racism in Virginia.

During the General Assembly session this year, we supported Delegate Lashrecse Aird's successful efforts to declare racism a public health crisis in Virginia. In June we held a panel discussion with Del. Aird as our special guest to discuss some of the wide-ranging effects of this issue—and what we can do to confront it.



We see the public health crisis of racism for immigrants who lack access to Medicaid. We see it in environmental justice communities targeted by polluters. We see it in disparities in maternal mortality, infant mortality, and life expectancy for people of color. And we see it in the lack of access to vaccines and treatment for COVID-19 in Virginia's jails and prisons and many low-income communities.

During the panel discussion, Sendy Portillo told the story of the unnecessary death of her friend, Sheila, a mother of four, who was refused treatment for her stomach cancer because she did not have a social security number. We also heard from Dr. Makunda Abdul-Mbacke of the Martinsville/Henry County Chapter about the bias among medical professionals that leads to higher maternal mortality for people of color.

In this report you can learn more about the work we've done on environmental justice statewide and the high cost of prescription medicine at the federal level, as well as see highlights from local work in our chapters. We visited legislators before, during, and after the General Assembly session, and hundreds of members joined our lobby training series on Zoom.

Your support for Virginia Organizing has helped transform Virginia into a place where leaders like Dr. Abdul-Mbacke and Sendy influence policy-making. You are also helping us grow every year, even during these extraordinary times. The Richmond Area Chapter, where Sendy is a leader, is one of our newest, along with Suffolk and Waynesboro.

This has been a year of new beginnings because of your support.

My deepest thanks,

Del



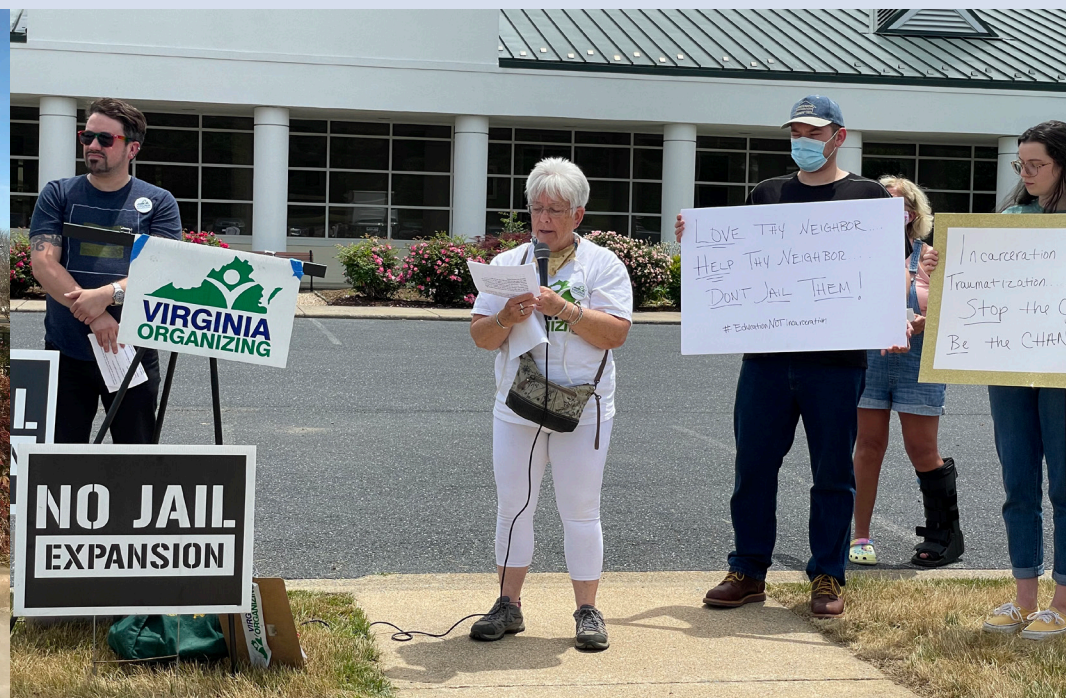
The Suffolk Chapter visited their city council in June to demand an independent civilian review board to oversee the police department.

The Richmond Area Chapter held a rally during the General Assembly session to support the Right to Vote Amendment.



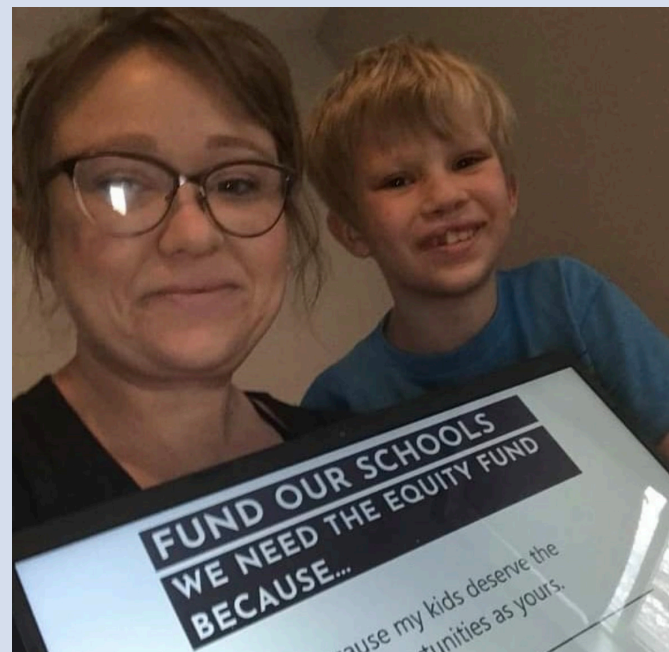
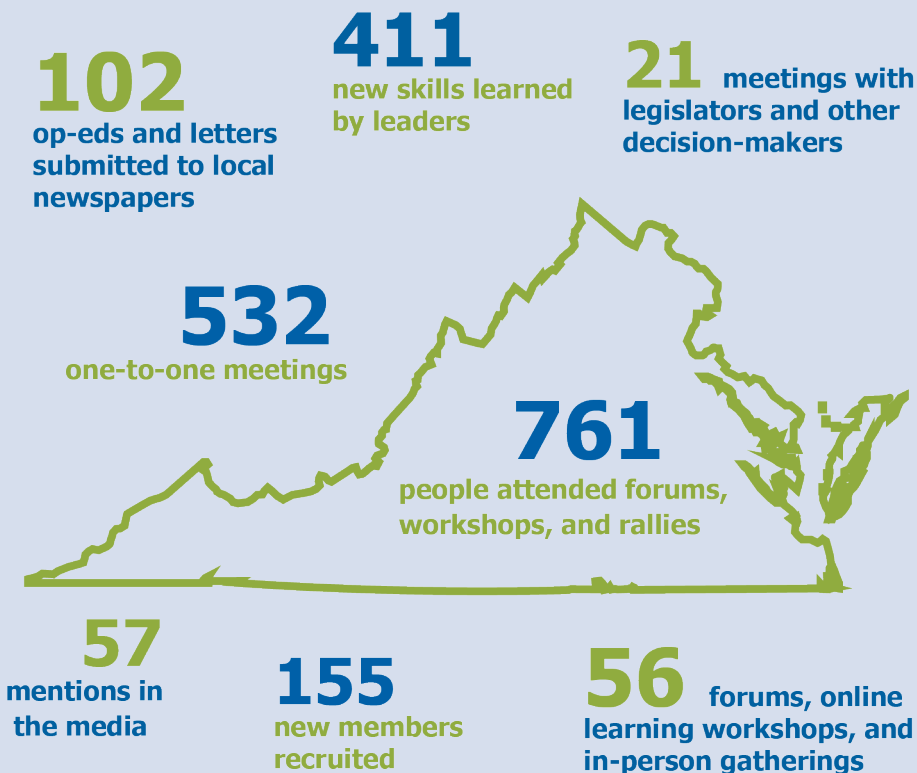
The Harrisonburg/Rockingham County and Waynesboro Chapters rallied to stop the expansion of the Middle River Regional Jail.

Connie Wright-Zink of the Waynesboro Chapter spoke at a second rally to support the No Jail Expansion campaign.



Highlights from the Chapters!

1. Norfolk leaders organized for vaccine equity and got the city health department to offer COVID vaccines to everyone incarcerated in the local jail.
2. In the New River Valley Chapter, members fought to bring back bus routes that had been cut during the pandemic and won their campaign.
3. The Richmond Area Chapter developed a local Student, Parent, and Caregivers' Bill of Rights with input from families and allies and is working with Richmond Public Schools to adopt it as official policy.
4. The Harrisonburg/Rockingham County Chapter mobilized resistance throughout the Shenandoah Valley to the expansion of the Middle River Regional Jail (MRRJ) and succeeded in eliminating new beds from the proposal.
5. The new Waynesboro Chapter began their campaign for more affordable housing and participated in the Valley work to stop the MRRJ expansion.
6. Henrico and Suffolk leaders organized for strong civilian review boards with local governments and police departments.
7. The Fredericksburg Chapter held a multi-step power analysis to build a campaign to reallocate funds from police departments to community needs.
8. Charlottesville co-sponsored a Commonwealth's Attorney forum before the primary in June.
9. Portsmouth won a commitment from Portsmouth Public Schools to address high suspensions by bringing mindfulness training to their classrooms.
10. The Eastern Shore Chapter has been working to bring better broadband services to rural areas, with a focus on education and job opportunities.
11. Newport News leaders have done research for a new campaign on housing policies and equitable redevelopment.
12. The chapters in Danville and Martinsville/Henry County organized a virtual panel on credit and capital in communities of color as a starting point in their campaign to dismantle racism in the local banking system.
13. Southwest Chapters worked on the statewide Fund our Schools Campaign with their legislators and local school officials, as the area needs significant infrastructure improvements in public schools.



Lori Rouse Mann, art educator and leader from the Washington County Chapter, worked to promote the equity fund in the statewide Fund our Schools campaign because "my kids deserve the same opportunities as yours."



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
Southwest
Suffolk
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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