

# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## News from the Grassroots

September 2021 Issue 107

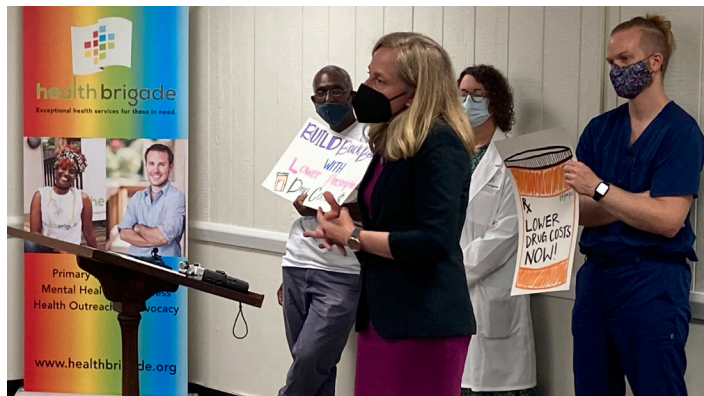
### Health Care Media Conferences

Chapters in the Richmond Area, Norfolk, Shenandoah Valley Chapters, Suffolk, and Eastern Shore all held media conferences in September to put pressure on Congress to pass the Build Back Better agenda and raise taxes on the rich and corporations to fund better health care and other services.

We want affordable prescription medicine. If H.R. 3 is included in the current spending bill being debated in the House, Medicare will be able to negotiate with Big Pharma for lower drug costs. The Richmond Area Chapter held their conference with Rep. Abigail Spanberger, who supports H.R. 3.

Several chapters featured speakers who have experienced the lack of adequate mental health care facilities in Virginia. Andrea Jackson of Waynesboro said, "I have been hospitalized at Western State two times in my life. I got an up close look at what those mental health direct service providers deal with day in and day out for very little pay. While I was hospitalized I was assaulted by another patient. If that happened to me in the short time I was there, I can't imagine what the workers face daily."

Several parents told powerful stories of the way their children were treated during mental health crises. Because services were not available, the police became involved. On the Eastern Shore participants in the media conference held signs that read, "Jails are NOT hospitals! Build Back Better!"



### Take action!

Contact Senator Mark Warner and your Member of Congress and urge them to support a spending bill that includes real funding for health care. Call 202-224-3121.

### Grassroots Gathering Workshop Series

Starting October 5, Virginia Organizing will host virtual workshops every Tuesday and Thursday from 6-7:30 p.m.

These workshops will cover organizing skills, issue campaigns, self-care and mindfulness, General Assembly 101, and more!

To register for any of the workshops, please register at [tinyurl.com/GG2021Workshops](https://tinyurl.com/GG2021Workshops). We'll follow up with a Zoom link.

Every workshop will have closed captioning and Spanish/English interpretation. ASL interpretation is available upon request.

### Grassroots Gathering Serie de talleres

A partir del 5 de octubre,  
Virginia Organizing organizará talleres virtuales  
todos los martes y jueves de 6 a 7:30 p.m.

Estos talleres cubrirán habilidades de organización,  
campañas de asuntos sociales  
y más.

Registrar aquí  
[tinyurl.com/GG2021Workshops](https://tinyurl.com/GG2021Workshops)

Cada taller contará con subtítulos e  
interpretación en español/inglés.  
La interpretación de señas Americanas  
está disponible a petición.



## Grassroots Gathering

We met for the main session of Grassroots Gathering 2021 on Saturday, September 11. Keynote speaker Libero Della Piana led a workshop on "Organizing in a time of crisis."

"Poverty is a massive lingering problem in this country... Because of the intervention of organizations like Virginia Organizing and many, many other organizations, we had the CARES Act and innovations like the eviction moratorium. The Child Tax Credit just started in July and it has already had a massive influence on poverty and if it were made permanent, it would be a game changer." Thank you, Libero!

We also held a Q & A with Attorney General Mark Herring and asked him how he will work to dismantle injustices in policing, the environment, and several other issues. He promised to meet with us for a more in-depth discussion after the election.



## Norfolk Paratransit Media Conference

Public transit riders who have disabilities have found it increasingly difficult to navigate the paratransit system through Hampton Roads Transit (HRT). The Norfolk Chapter has teamed up with riders and members of the Paratransit Advisory Committee to bring these issues to light. Yesterday they held a press conference where riders spoke out about their own personal experiences using paratransit and they unveiled a list of improvements they want to see HRT make to the system.

This is the beginning of a campaign to bring the public information about issues that people with disabilities face in the community and to ask HRT and Via (the subcontractor that provides the service) to make changes so that people with disabilities have the transportation they deserve.

## Featured Community Partner: Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments

by Eric Olson-Getty, Director of Programs

Sometime in the last two years, as the COVID-19 pandemic has swept over the world again and again, you may have read or heard that health care workers sometimes refer to themselves as the "last line of defense" against the virus. This is in contrast to our more normal perception of nurses as being on the "front lines," which naturally arises from the fact that they have the most direct contact with acutely ill patients. When a health care worker correctively tells us that they are, in fact, the "last line," they mean that they only encounter a COVID patient after all other preventive measures have failed to prevent infection. It is a charge to the rest of us, who live upstream from the hospitals and clinics, to take appropriate measures to minimize the likelihood that we'll become someone's patient.



For Katie Huffling, Director of the Alliance of Nurses for Healthy Environments (ANHE), the same principle applies in any public health crisis. Katie's background is as a nurse midwife, and for several years she worked in the "last line" in a hospital outside Washington, D.C. The practice served a patient population that was predominantly low-income people of color, many of whom were undocumented and uninsured. A large percentage of her patients were exposed to toxins in their environment as a matter of course in their daily lives, and that had negative health impacts on pregnancy and childhood development.

Katie wanted to do more than treat patients who were already sick and experiencing poor outcomes. She wanted to address the underlying environmental conditions that were turning people into patients in the first place, so she joined with like-minded nurses from across the US to launch ANHE in 2008. The practitioners she works with are people who wanted to do systemic environmental work, but found themselves isolated in silos that limited their impact. ANHE provides groups with a network, leveraging funding to make collective efforts that ensure the voice of nurses are at the center of environmental policy debates and research.

Before the pandemic put an end to in-person contacts Katie spent a lot of time in D.C. doing coalition-building work, work that has become long hours on Zoom. Those efforts have made a difference. Recently the state of Maryland passed a ban on fracking, an accomplishment that ANHE shared with coalition partners. "I broke down in tears when they announced the news," Katie says.

Katie says that the future promises to be intense with the climate crisis forcing communities to make transitions to a new economy. "We have to hold our regulatory system accountable, because there is always a tension between industries wanting to push the limits and the need to put community health first," she says.

ANHE relies largely on foundation grants, but that often limits the scope of issues they can work on. For example, Katie says, "we would love to do more work on clean water, as well as food and agriculture and toxic chemicals." These are issues ANHE sees as critical public health risks, but there is currently little funding available to address them. In practice, funders who are heavily focused on climate issues do not regard these as climate-related.

Looking to the future, Katie hopes to see more funds become available to build a broader systemic response to the many environmental challenges that negatively impact communities. In the meantime, she reminds us that it is critical that people in this work support each other and take care of ourselves. "We need to model a culture of taking time for yourself to recharge." That is a reminder to all of us who are working long hours to build a better world: the personal is political, so we can't heal the world without tending to our own healing.

## 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 Area, Suffolk, Tri-Cities Area, Washington County, Waynesboro, Wytheville

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