



# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## News from the Grassroots

November 2021 Issue 108

### Affordable, Safe Housing Rally

The Waynesboro Chapter launched their housing campaign in a rally on Saturday, November 13. Akhil Ganesh of the Staunton News Leader writes,

"For Phillip Sorrells, it was the bugs swarming his apartment every day, in every imaginable way. It was the black mold that he sprayed down with bleach every day to manage the flareups of his asthma. Most importantly, it was the lack of help he received from his landlord.

"Danielle Henderson was threatened with eviction without going through a standard process over a broken garbage disposal and a burst pipe. One of Emily Smarte's landlords demanded she pay for carpet repairs in order to renew her lease. Wyvern Sleepyspring can hardly keep track of her landlords because of how often they've changed without her knowing.

While their issues ranged from health to financial concerns, there was a common thread amongst the concerned citizens who gathered on North Main Street on a November Saturday afternoon: substandard housing conditions and predatory landlords."



### Take action!

Build Back Better passed the House of Representatives! Thank you for your calls and emails to your legislators. On to the Senate! But first, please contact your member of Congress and tell them what you think of how they voted. Reps. Elaine Luria, Don McEachin, Bobby Scott, Abigail Spanberger, Donald Beyer, Gerry Connolly, and Jennifer Wexton all voted for the legislation. Reps. Ben Cline, Bob Good, Morgan Griffith, and Robert Wittman voted against it.

**The Congressional switchboard:  
202-224-3121.**

### We're looking for a Development Director - spread the word!

The ideal Development Director will be driven by a commitment to Virginia Organizing's vision for a more just Virginia. Is this you? Do you believe that people who are most directly affected by public issues should have a seat at the table?

We are looking for an energetic, experienced fundraiser who wants to see more organizers in communities across Virginia and who works diligently to raise the funds to make that happen.

Virginia Organizing is hiring!

## DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

For more information,  
see [www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org)



## Welcome to Peter Finn, the new Charlottesville Organizer!

Peter grew up in Richmond, but lived in Charlottesville when he was a student at UVA. After graduation, he worked for a number of years as a community organizer and then as a union organizer in Connecticut and California. He's excited to come home to Virginia and "give back to the community that gave so much to me."



Peter appreciates Virginia Organizing's integrity. "We make internal and external efforts to represent the principles we stand on," he says. "It's one thing for an organization to have a message, but it's so much better if we also make sure that internally we're doing things right."

His passion for community organizing comes directly from his own experience of injustice. Peter has been pulled over by police and searched for no reason many times in his life. "The fact that when I get into my car I have to prepare for the possibility that I will be stopped is always on my mind," he says. He wants to change the discriminatory practices of law enforcement.

Peter also cares about students having the attention they need in school. "There should be more of a close relationship between staff and students," he says. "I want to see all children receive the kind of instruction they need in school." 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.

## Featured Community Partner: AMMD Pine Grove Project

The AMMD Pine Grove Project is a historic preservation initiative with a mission to "protect, restore, and repurpose the historic Rosenwald Pine Grove Elementary School" located in rural Cumberland County, VA.

The initials "AMMD" refer to the Agee-Miller-Mayo Family Association, an African American family with generations of history connected to the school, which opened in 1917 through the combined efforts of Cumberland County's Black community and the influence and support of Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute and philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. Pine Grove Elementary School eventually closed after over 40 years of educating local children, but former teachers and pupils continue to live in the area and return to visit for community events.

One of those community events took place on October 30, but the gathering was about much more than celebrating the past. It was also a time to focus on a major threat to the present-day community: the siting of a large landfill just up the road from the school. The work to shore up and renovate the school has now merged with the hard fight ahead to preserve and protect the land, water, and air for the people who live nearby and downstream in the James River watershed.

One astonishing fact is that the landfill is not even meant to serve the local community: it is intended to be a dump site for waste the State of Virginia plans to import from surrounding states.

Attendees to the event were a cross-section of the community drawn together by the imperative to "take care of each other," as one resident said before detailing a litany of alarming statistics about the likely impact of the landfill. Between the musical ice-breaker and the Pine Grove history Jeopardy game were presentations by professors from UVA Public Health, UVA Law Clinic, and UVA Preservation and Planning, among others. Students and professors presented on the Green Ridge Landfill Health Impact Assessment that is in progress.

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"Our UVA and other community partners are much more than academics," says Muriel Branch, the director of the program. "They are passionate advocates for environmental justice and for protecting and preserving the history of the Pine Grove freedmen-built community."

Care for the land, water, air, and the life around us can begin with the ways we nurture the places we inhabit in the here and now. The Pine Grove community is in a position to fight the degradation of its rural land because of its deep roots in that place: the graves of formerly enslaved people are hidden somewhere in the woods out back, yet to be re-found. Their descendants are the core of the extended community that is coming together to bring this place back to life today.

It is a community that is truly fighting to honor its ancestors.

## From Executive Director Brian Johns on Giving Tuesday:



Today I'm feeling thankful for the work of thousands of you.

I'm thankful for our **chapter leaders** who dedicate so much of their time to making Virginia a better place to live for everyone.

I'm thankful for our **State Governing Board**, a group of experienced longtime chapter leaders who understand how to bring people together and find strategic ways to win issue campaigns.

I'm thankful for **our organizers, the administrative staff, interns, and the many devoted volunteers** who hand-write thank you cards and help us send mass mailings and enter data.

I'm thankful for **everyone who takes action!** If you called a decision-maker this year, attended a rally or a workshop, or helped a chapter organize, you are making a difference in everyone's quality of life.

Finally, I'm thankful for **our donors**. Without you we couldn't reach all of the people who contribute to this powerful movement for justice and equity for everyone. Giving Tuesday brought us many new supporters, and I want to welcome you!

Thank you for your work and your generosity!

## 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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