



## News from the Grassroots

December 2021 Issue 109

### Environmental Justice for Virginia Petition

Tell Governor-elect Glenn Youngkin to keep Virginia in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative and expand funding for environmental justice communities. It's time to repair the harm that has been done by pollution. We can't afford to wait.

Hundreds of members have signed, and we will be sharing the petition with the governor soon. Please sign here: <https://virginia-organizing.org/environmental-justice-for-virginia-petition/>



### Legislative Priorities 2022

#### Equitable School Funding

We support the Fund Our Schools priorities for 2022, including:

Fully fund the revised Standards of Quality, including the Equity Fund

Lift the cap on support staff, which limits funding for school support positions like counselors, social workers, psychologists, and nurses

Oppose repurposing of K-12 public schools funding for voucher and tax credit programs

Increase funding for teacher and staff pay and school infrastructure

#### Housing

We support legislation to expand tenant rights and increase the availability of housing for people with low incomes, including:

Find a state housing trust fund, which would be used to create new units of low income housing, provide supportive housing, and prevent homelessness

Establish rent supplement and rental assistance programs to support truly affordable housing and prevent eviction

Eliminate rental application fees

#### Mental Health

We support more investments in mental health treatment, including paid sick days for all workers and redirecting resources from the criminal justice system to community-based care.

Virginia Organizing also supports efforts to make our state income tax structure more progressive, pass the Right to Vote constitutional amendment, protect residents from utility disconnections, expand health care access, and promote environmental justice.

### Meetings with Legislators

Chapters all over Virginia have met in-district with their state senators and delegates to share our legislative priorities for 2022.

Want to get involved? Email [info@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:info@virginia-organizing.org) and let us know. We can connect you with a local chapter.

In January chapter members will all be meeting with legislators during the General Assembly session.



Leaders from the Danville and Martinsville/Henry County chapters met with Delegate Danny Marshall on December 16.

## Featured Community Partner | POWHR

It's a place where great beauty and ugliness collide. It's a landscape of forests and mountains that is home to human and more-than-human creatures who have held it as sacred for centuries. Now a corporation, backed by government and supposed regulatory agencies, has decided that they need to move fracked gas from one place to another, so they are taking the land, poisoning the water and soil, tearing up the forests and game habitat, destabilizing the mountainsides, and exposing everyone to the dangers of accidents and spills.



But thanks to community-based groups like Protect Our Water, Heritage, Rights (POWHR), they are getting resistance, and it is fierce. POWHR is a coalition of groups rooted in counties and towns along the route of the Mountain Valley Pipeline (MVP) in West Virginia and Virginia. They work together to "protect the water, local ecology, heritage, land rights, and human rights of individuals, communities, and regions from harms caused by the expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure." POWHR has had a Joint Plan of Work with Virginia Organizing since its inception in 2015, and the coalition includes other Virginia Organizing programs, including Preserve Giles County and Preserve Montgomery County VA.

POWHR Coordinator Grace Tuttle grew up visiting her family in Appalachia, and now lives in the region herself, on family land tucked in the Allegheny Mountains of Western Virginia. She's driven by love for the region she calls home and by anger that the area is perceived and treated as forlorn and disposable. That means resisting the "national pattern of mischaracterizing and broad-brush treatment that Appalachia is all too used to receiving," and being committed to working with people who don't fit our common perception of who environmental justice organizers are. She says that she found her way to organizing through her love of gardening and her love of water from her time as a member of the women's rowing team at UVA. "Growing and stewarding plants brought me into a relationship with the earth, and has lit a fire under me to protect it," she says.

Anyone who has followed the MVP headlines over the past week will understand how communities and organizers often experience whiplash as fortunes ebb and flow, as victory and defeat follow on each other's heels. News of the defeat of the MVP Southgate extension's proposed Lambert Compressor Station buoyed hopes as hundreds gathered in Richmond on December 11th for the Violation Vigil, an outdoor event organized by ARTivism Virginia, POWHR and coalition partners. As 300 activists and water protectors read out a litany of environmental and safety violations committed by MVP from the stage, Tuttle said that the implications of the

Lambert victory were still unclear, but that the victory is a huge testament to black and Indigenous-led environmental justice organizing.

Just days later the Virginia State Water Control Board approved a crucial stream crossing permit, dealing the communities along the route a disheartening blow. At moments like these Tuttle stresses that it is important not to give in to nihilism in the face of dire climate predictions and the seeming inevitability that projects like MVP will win. Tuttle says that relationships have helped her through the dark times. "I am inspired by others' work and resilience and refusal to give up," she says.

Just as the fortunes of the resistance effort change day to day, so does the daily work. "There really isn't a



typical day at POWHR," Tuttle says. "One day... we might be out near the path of the pipeline monitoring for environmental violations. Another day I might be writing a grant proposal, drafting a newsletter, or preparing for public participation in the next hearing or comment period.

One of my absolute favorite parts of the job is equipping our member groups with the information they need to deliver testimony in regulatory proceedings, and then watching them deliver those comments and cheering them on."

Tuttle says that, in order for the pipeline fight to succeed, POWHR needs the voices, input, and involvement of community members from across the region. "Tell us how we can be serving you and how to be better Appalachian leaders in protecting water, creatures, and communities. I need my wider community to take care of themselves so that we can be in this fight for the lifetimes of work it will surely take, and to do so by using your skills and contributing where you feel a mix of passion and duty. Join the movement, in whatever way you can."

## 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

Virginia Organizing  
703 Concord Avenue  
Charlottesville, VA 22903  
434-984-4655  
[info@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:info@virginia-organizing.org)  
[www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org)