



Courage and Community

2021 Annual Report



VIRGINIA
ORGANIZING



Guy Molyneux



Ashley Kenneth



Anita Royston



Karen Downing



Directly affected leaders face extraordinary challenges with courage.

For instance, Andrea Jackson, the masked speaker at the Waynesboro rally on our cover this year, told her story to demand expanded federal and state funding for mental health care. She talked about her service in the U.S. military and her challenges with PTSD. Andrea wants adequate funding of residential and community mental health care in the Valley for the many people who endure without proper care.

On our back cover, members of the Suffolk Chapter posed for a group photo after lobbying for a Civilian Review Board at their city council. Several members spoke out about police mistreatment and injustice in the court system that they've experienced.

That's courage and community solidarity in action.

Leaders organized for federal funding for health care, mental health, the child tax credit, and other elements of the Build Back Better package in many areas. Board member Karen Downing from the Eastern Shore Chapter and Anita Royston of the Danville Chapter participated with partner groups in a media conference on tax reform (left).

Erika Holliday, then a leader in the Richmond Chapter, called for the Virginia Employment Commission to pay people's overdue benefits at a press conference last summer (lower left). Since then, Erika has become a new organizer in the Tri-Cities Area!

In the photo below leaders from New River Valley, Newport News, Martinsville, Richmond, and Charlottesville meet with state Senator Mamie Locke to support her Right to Vote Amendment last winter.

All of this happens because of your support! You provide the resources that create chapters where leaders meet like-minded members of their community who want to take action. Read on to discover more of what your support is creating across Virginia. Thank you for all you do for Virginia Organizing!

– Del McWhorter, Chairperson





The new Waynesboro Chapter held a rally in November for tenants' rights and affordable housing for all.



Members of the Richmond Chapter lobbied legislators for the Right to Vote Amendment at the General Assembly last winter. Every chapter sent groups to lobby legislators in person or in meetings online.



Eastern Shore and Norfolk Chapters rallied for better health care, including mental health treatment instead of criminalization, lower medicine costs, and protection of Medicaid and Medicare funding (left and above).

Chapters have mostly been holding their regular meetings on Zoom. To protect vulnerable members but meet in person for a change, the Newport News Chapter held a meeting on a tennis court one night!





The Norfolk Chapter held a media conference and rally outside the headquarters of Hampton Roads Transit (HRT) last summer. They called for major improvements in the Paratransit system because riders with disabilities were left stranded, kept waiting for hours, pressured to accept rides outside of the normal time window, and sometimes taken to the wrong locations because of a faulty GPS system. This year, HRT announced that they would address all of these issues.

In Richmond (right), members held a press conference with the Health Brigade and Rep. Abigail Spanberger about the high cost of prescription medicine in order to call for the passage of the Elijah Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act. Dr. Joe Fields-Johnson, a member of the Richmond Chapter, spoke about the harm done to his patients by skyrocketing medication costs.



Below, staff members participated in our first ever anti-patriarchy workshop in December, facilitated by the Wildfire Project.



Virginia Organizing's Leaders in Action

- This year we all celebrated the victory when the Virginia State Air Pollution Control Board denied a permit for a compressor station in Pittsylvania County that would have been part of the Mountain Valley Pipeline. Chapter leaders in Danville and Martinsville/Henry County spoke, wrote letters to the editor, and organized actions in support of these efforts.
- Norfolk leaders got the city health department to offer COVID vaccines to everyone incarcerated in the local jail.
- The Richmond Area Chapter developed a local Student, Parent, and Caregivers' Bill of Rights with input from families and allies.
- The Shenandoah Valley chapters worked together to defeat a \$40 million plan to expand the Middle River Regional Jail.
- The Portsmouth Chapter led a local campaign to put a mindfulness program into Portsmouth Public Schools, and there is now a pilot program in an elementary school.
- The New River Valley and Norfolk Chapters convinced local school boards to create new memorandums of understanding for their SROs. When police officers in schools are brought into ordinary student discipline, students of color, non-gender-conforming girls, and students with disabilities are suspended or sent to juvenile detention at high rates. The new rules for SROs require them to stay out of student discipline except when people's safety is at risk.
- The Norfolk Chapter campaigned to improve paratransit for thousands of local residents with disabilities. They held a media conference and met with the administrators of Hampton Roads Transit (HRT). Improvements have been announced in 2022, but the chapter will continue to hold HRT accountable.
- We held online learning series early in the year during the General Assembly session and in the fall during our virtual Grassroots Gathering.
- The Eastern Shore Chapter held forums attended by hundreds of local residents to put pressure on broadband providers and state government to make high quality internet access available to everyone, not only those who live in wealthy communities. Virginia has now committed funds to reach universal coverage on the Eastern Shore and state-wide by 2024.
- We held online events with Senator Tim Kaine and Reps. Don McEachin, Bobby Scott, and Abigail Spanberger on prescription drugs, health care, and environmental justice.
- The Suffolk Chapter continued their work for criminal justice reform. They lobbied city council for a permanent police chief and a Citizen Review Board (CRB) to hold police accountable.
- The Fredericksburg Chapter met with the city police chief, who is going to start a pilot program to bring mental health professionals along on police calls.
- Newport News began a new campaign to push the city to provide shelter and housing for the growing numbers of unhoused people in the area.
- The emerging Wythe County Chapter held their first interest meeting!

118

letters to the
editor and op-eds

1092

new skills learned by
leaders

1186

one-to-one meetings

310

new members
recruited

2603

people attended
forums, workshops, and
rallies

33

meetings with
legislators and other
decision-makers

219

mentions in the media

66

forums and workshops

The Harrisonburg/Rockingham County Chapter, with help from leaders throughout the Shenandoah Valley and coalition partners, led the fight against the Middle River Regional Jail expansion.





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/Hampton
 Norfolk
 Portsmouth
 Richmond Area
 Suffolk
 Tri-Cities Area
 Washington County
 Waynesboro
 Wythe County

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