



# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## News from the Grassroots

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### Fredericksburg Chapter Supports Cleaning Workers

On March 22, 14 cleaning workers spoke out for the first time about the unjust working conditions they face in the Stafford County Schools at the school board meeting. The schools contract out their cleaning staff from a company called ABM Building Value.

Members of the Fredericksburg Chapter, who have been involved in the organizing effort from the beginning, attended to stand in solidarity with them. After they spoke, members of the school board also expressed support.

**Melady Rosa de Aguilar, who worked for more than three years cleaning Stafford Schools for ABM Building Value said,**

"At Brooke Point High School I worked for four months last year. I damaged my spine moving heavy furniture and pulling out huge, heavy garbage bags. I had to take four weeks off work to recover, although I still have discomfort. That time I didn't go to work they didn't pay me, and they didn't cover my medical care either. I make \$10.75 an hour."

**Antonia Ortez, 5 years working cleaning Stafford Schools for ABM Building Value, said,**

"In the worst moment of the Covid19 pandemic, and during all this time, we have been required to clean and disinfect places where infected people have left. We said that we were afraid to enter those places and we needed protection. They told us to just put on our masks and gloves and go inside to disinfect. I have bought the masks all the time because they have never given us masks.

"For a long time, I was earning \$8.50 an hour, and from the previous year they increased it to \$11.50. I have been through a lot of discrimination, mistreatment, and marginalization. On some occasions I have worked extra and have not been paid.

"I am concerned about the health of students, teachers, school employees, and ourselves."

**Blanca Smith, 6 years working cleaning Stafford Schools for ABM Building Value said,**

"The bosses told me, in the most difficult time of COVID19, that if I got infected they would not pay me.

"It is also unfair that in several schools a single person has the responsibility of cleaning the entire school.

"I have been working for ABM for more than 6 years and I earn \$13.00 per hour, but the work overload I have is overwhelming."

**Mabel Rivas, more than 10 years with ABM, said,**

"I have been working cleaning Stafford schools for more than 10 years. Most of this time I have had a salary of \$8.25 per hour, and until August last year the contracting company that provides this service to schools, ABM Building Value, increased my salary to \$10.75, and in November they increased to \$12.00. I am a single mother, I have no job benefits, and to stay in my job I have had to endure abuse, discrimination, verbally mistreated from some of my supervisors and managers, and have had to work overtime without receiving pay for these extra hours.

"I have worked in schools where the company barely hires three people to clean the entire school, and in most schools where I have

dedicated my work there are shortages of workers so the company overloads us with large areas to clean, we also have to work overtime and they do not provide us with the necessary equipment such as proper vacuum cleaners, for example. During the winter, when it is not possible to leave the houses due to the snow, we do not receive pay.

"For a long, long time I was assigned to clean a large and difficult work area at Brooke Point High School alone where it is necessary to have at least three people cleaning the place. I never had complaints about the work I did alone.

"I am suffering from health problems for a few years due to the high workload, my legs and knees are damaged by blows and pulls that I have had to suffer while I work moving furniture and heavy equipment and have suffered damage to my back and column. In the last School where I have been assigned there is a shortage of cleaning workers and again have damaged my legs and spine because I worked for almost three hours with a vacuum carried on my back".



**Ricardo Ventura, almost 8 years with ABM, said,**

"We strive to do a good job cleaning schools for children, teachers and employees, but we are treated unfairly. We get abused from ABM, overworked, we're not protected, we don't have benefits. During the pandemic we have worked without protection. If we get sick we don't have coverage and the wages are very low. Very often I work up to 16 hours a day.

"When one of our colleagues misses work, I am sent to cover those areas in other places and schools. I have worked for ABM for almost eight years and my salary is \$11.50 per hour"

**Edwin Turcios, 16 years with ABM, said,**

"I get up very early to work and I finish quite late at night, sometimes until midnight. In my job, although it is not my responsibility, I cover different schools. When someone misses work I cover their cleaning areas. That happens to all of us who work with ABM, but they overload me even more. Why have I been working for ABM in these conditions for 16 years? I have family, children to take food to.

"This injustice has to end."

## Waynesboro Leaders Speak out for Tenants' Rights

The Waynesboro Chapter gave public comments at the March 28 city council meeting. Chapter members asked city council to support Waynesboro renters in two main ways:

1. Create an easy-to-use tenant complaint line for renters to file complaints against non-responsive and predatory landlords.
2. Create a rental inspection program to require landlords to keep their properties in safe and quality conditions.

Chapter leader and local case manager Adrienne Young said, "Over the past year I have been made aware of mushrooms growing out of the ceiling of an apartment. I have seen active mold growing out of vents in apartments."

Philip Sorrells shared about his personal experience. "I recently had to move out of Waynesboro because the conditions of my apartment were so terrible...Before moving into that apartment I was homeless for almost five years. I was desperate to get off the streets when I moved into the apartment in 2018. I didn't know how bad the conditions were in the apartment until I signed the lease and moved in."



### Celebrating Michele

On March 29, we celebrated the career and retirement of Michele Mattioli. After 22 years of helping Virginia Organizing grow and build relationships and support other groups, many people wanted to tell her how much they love her and respect her work. Thank you, Michele! We'll miss you, but we're happy to see you heading off for new adventures.



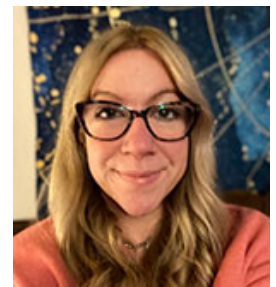
## Take action!

Contact your state legislators! Virginia's tax code is upside down. Working parents with lower incomes pay more in taxes compared to high-income earners.

Tell the General Assembly to pass a refundable Earned Income Tax Credit and target one-time tax rebates to families so they can make ends meet.

## A message from our new development director Sunny Hawkins:

As a dedicated supporter of Virginia Organizing, you help to build power with other members of our communities to address a variety of issues that affect our lives. Now that it's tax season, I'm excited to share a couple of tax-savvy ways to give to Virginia Organizing:



1. Donating Stocks: When you donate appreciated stocks, you avoid paying the capital gains tax. You are also eligible to take a charitable deduction for the entire donation amount if you itemize deductions. Using this online tool, it only takes a couple of minutes to access account information to share with a broker or fill out the forms online to complete the gift electronically.

2. Giving from your IRA: If you are 70.5 or older and have a traditional IRA, you can use this online tool to learn more and donate from your account. In many cases, IRA giving is 100% tax-free for eligible donors. And if you're 72 or older, an IRA gift can also count towards your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD).

I hope you consider these simple ways to take a stand for everyone's well-being in Virginia.

If you have any questions or concerns, do not hesitate to reach out to me at [shawkins@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:shawkins@virginia-organizing.org).

## 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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