



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

July 2022 Issue 116



Photo credit: Billy Schuerman/The Virginian-Pilot/TNS

Speaking out about Black Women’s Health Care and Reproductive Rights

Barbara Jefferson Harris, a leader in the Norfolk Chapter and Virginia Organizing’s State Governing Board treasurer, courageously told her story to Suzannah Perry of the Virginian-Pilot for an important article about Black women’s reproductive rights and health care.

From the article: “Reflecting on the progress between her mother’s forced sterilization and the Dobbs decision, Harris has hope for a more equitable future. But that future will not come without consequences—especially for the Black women and poor women for whom reproductive health-care has always been less equitable.

“It’s gonna be just as hard to get back to where we’ve just been tossed from, as it was to get there in the beginning with Roe versus Wade,” Harris said. ‘It’s gonna be a nightmare for a lot of women.’”

You can read the article for free on Yahoo News: <https://news.yahoo.com/black-women-hampton-roads-barriers-152400009.html>



Tax Billionaires Action

The Charlottesville Chapter held a demonstration on July 14 in front of the Free Speech Wall in Charlottesville. Leaders called for Congress to make billionaires and large corporations pay their fair share of taxes.

“It is very unpatriotic,” Susan Perry said, “for billionaire companies that have benefited from the opportunities of our country to not take part in taxes that the everyday citizen is penalized for not paying.”

Waynesboro Hosts Summer of Democracy

“If you do not know if your rights have been restored or if you don’t know if you are registered please come by and check. No one is going to judge you for anything that you have done in the past. We all have pasts,” leader Andrea Jackson said. “We just want to make sure everybody feels included in this society and this democracy.”



The Waynesboro Chapter will offer help to anyone who needs to get their rights restored or register to vote at the city farmer’s market through October.

New Organizers!

Rachel Hefner | Richmond Area

Rachel has planned to become an organizer since college. After a year of internship with Virginia Organizing, she is now the Richmond Chapter's organizer!



"This is the model that makes the most sense. It lives into my professional and personal values of change-making. We have the values we're working for in the world," she says.

Terran Young | Wise County

Terran has lived most of her life in Wise County. For the last four years she was a reporter for the Post and the Coalfield Progress.



She chose to work for Virginia Organizing because, she says, "I've been an organizer for a long time. I like doing work that I see making a difference. I like to build leadership and show people the power they have because someone did that for me."

Read more about Rachel and Terran on our website: <https://virginia-organizing.org/staff/>

Featured Partner | Dreamers' Mothers in Action

What would you be willing to do to get the attention of the most powerful people on the planet? How far would you be willing to go to stand up for your friends, family, and community?

How much are you willing to risk to see justice realized for people whose lives are constantly devalued by our political systems?



In November of 2014, Lenka Mendoza of Dreamer Mothers in Action (DMIA) showed the world her answer to these questions by fasting for 18-days in the cold and the rain in front of the White House, demanding that President Obama sign an executive order providing legal status for the parents of Dreamers (undocumented migrants who entered the US as minors and who are given legal status under the Dream Act). She got the President's attention, and she won. Temporarily. The order was blocked by the courts and ultimately rescinded by the next administration. Still, very few people in Lenka's position can say they had the ear of the President of the United States for any length of time.

Lenka is an undocumented immigrant from Peru, and in

2014 she had been living in Virginia for 13 years, working 13-15-hour days with no holidays as a hotel domestic worker to support her family. When her two sons grew to be teenagers she realized they couldn't attend college because of their immigration status. She saw fellow parishioners at her church ripped away from their families by the immigration system. She knew other domestic workers like herself who suffered harsh working conditions and abuses by employers. At each turn, the injustices she experienced and witnessed turned her towards activism. Her first desire was that no one else suffer the same experience.

Lenka founded DMIA (one of Virginia Organizing's partner groups) to empower her community through collective action on the issues that directly affect their lives. By coming together to fight against injustice, community members learn that they are not alone, that they have rights, that they can have an impact, and that they don't have to passively accept the traumas and injustices they experience. They learn through collective action that they are powerful.

Lenka says that they don't have to win every campaign to learn this. Even when they lose, "people know they can make change and have lost a lot of their fear. It makes them stronger," she says. "They've been able to participate in something bigger than themselves."

DMIA helped win the right to drivers licenses for undocumented immigrants in Virginia, and helped end the 287(g) program in Prince William County. They have organized domestic workers to win workplace protections and pay raises while educating workers about employment law. To build the movement they teach leadership classes to ensure there are people in the community to sustain the work long-term.

The future of DMIA's work needs to be intersectional, Lenka says. She sees that a lot of the issues her community faces overlap with other groups, issues like mental health, education, housing, and safe neighborhoods. "Black and Brown communities have been separated, but they'd be more powerful together," she says. She hopes to build organizing partnerships with other groups because there is so much work to be done, and we all need to step up together to do it.

For Lenka, it seems like the work won't be done anytime soon. "The minute you close one thing, another thing comes up," she says. "It's like a secret level that appears at the end of a video game just when you think you won!"

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, Washington County, Waynesboro, Wise County, Wythe County

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