

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

April 2023 Issue 125

Restoration of Rights Action

- Board member Duane Edwards spoke at the Bell Tower in Richmond earlier this month alongside leaders of other organizations and state legislators to denounce Gov. Youngkin's damage to civil rights progress in Virginia.
- The media conference was covered by many news outlets. Duane and Barbara Harris also published an op-ed in the **Virginia Mercury** to call for the restoration process previous governors used to be brought back immediately.
- Virginia Organizing is non-partisan, but no matter what side of the aisle you're on, Virginia needs to stand up and stop this policy that moves us backwards.

Watch the video on our YouTube channel: [VOPVideo](#)



Waynesboro Housing Campaign Update

Waynesboro Chapter members visited city council to urge them (again) to adopt a Rental Inspection Program to protect tenant rights and keep rental housing in the city from deteriorating. The leaders were frustrated that after months of waiting for a decision, the city manager now says he is "still evaluating the data on whether or not a rental inspection program is necessary."

Nora Scott told Council, "Is my lived experience and that of countless other residents not enough data to prove this is an urgent need?"

Power Analysis Preparations

Last week the Wythe County Chapter held their annual meeting at the Open Door Cafe in Wytheville. They're hard at work developing a campaign for a warming/cooling shelter for the unhoused in their community.

Annual meetings continue this week. At their annual meetings chapters take stock of their year's work in order to report their accomplishments to the State Governing Board.

On the weekend of April 28, leaders, staff, and the board met in Harrisonburg for our yearly Power Analysis, to help the board determine what next year's strategy will be.



Duane speaking at the media conference with leaders of other groups and legislators (photo credit: Graham Moomaw, **Virginia Mercury**)

Take Action

Please contact Kay Coles James, the Secretary of the Commonwealth, and ask her to reverse the change in policy for restoring civil rights to people who have been released from prison. Previous administrations worked to make the process faster and easier for everyone, but the Youngkin administration has eliminated those improvements. They have only restored the rights of a few thousand people.

Please call the secretary at **804-786-2441** and tell her not to go backwards. The governor should not be hand-picking voters. The process should be made as automatic and transparent as possible.



Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action

Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action | Featured Community Partner

When you're taking on a crisis as comprehensive as climate change, almost any thread you pull will lead back to it. For Dr. Jerome Paulson, his thread was lead poisoning among his patients.

Dr. Paulson is a retired pediatrician who helped found Virginia Clinicians for Climate Action (VCCA), which has a joint plan of work with Virginia Organizing. His journey into climate justice work began during his residency at Johns Hopkins and Mt. Sinai hospitals in Baltimore, when he was treating children affected by lead paint. Children from marginalized BIPOC neighborhoods were living in unsafe, substandard housing that was making them sick. When Paulson accepted a faculty position at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland he saw the same issue there, and again when he moved to George Washington Children's Hospital in Washington, DC. By this time he had learned about additional toxins that were affecting children, and his understanding began to broaden.

For Dr. Paulson, the repetition revealed a pattern: being poor and Black made it more likely you were going to be poisoned by your housing, and this was true no matter where in the US you were. What was an environmental health issue was in fact an environmental justice issue. Environmental health and justice are inseparable, and as a physician Paulson felt he needed to come at the issue systemically. That included the ways the changing climate disproportionately impacts marginalized communities – an analysis that includes but goes beyond toxics.

After doing a rotation as the Chair of the American Academy of Pediatrics Council on Environmental Health, he decided to put focused energy on climate change. A colleague asked him to collaborate in the formation of what became VCCA. Modeled after a similar organization in Ohio, VCCA launched in 2018, and brings together concerned professionals from every branch and professional level of medicine, from nurses to pharmacists to doctors to medical students.

"We have a tripartite mission," Paulson explains. "We educate health professionals about climate change and human health, we educate the general public, and we engage in advocacy at the General Assembly and the executive branch in Richmond."

Much of VCCA's work is advocacy for state-level policy change. The organization is part of a nationwide coalition that now includes clinicians' groups in 25 other states. "We have found that state-level organizing is strategic because a lot of policy is decided by states. Utility regulation is one example," Paulson says.

Now that he is retired Dr. Paulson is able to put more focus on volunteering, which includes his role with VCCA. Much of his energy and inspiration comes from the students he has worked with on climate issues.

"We need to build multi-generational systems," because "I see no end in my lifetime to the need for more climate solutions," he says. For Paulson, it is gratifying to see clinicians he knew as students working on climate issues as professionals and teaching their successors. VCCA is making a tremendous impact in educational settings as they mentor students into the work, and so the work that VCCA does has taken on a momentum of its own as people carry it forward.

The biggest struggle right now is representation. "We want to be

more representative of directly affected communities, but people of color are underrepresented in the medical field. We want to make those connections," he says. To do that, VCCA wants to connect with more groups who are doing environmental justice and community organizing work.

"We want to work with any individuals or groups who have questions about climate and health, who want to learn about that topic to inform their work," Paulson adds. "If you know of health professionals in your community who are interested in this work, please connect us!"



2023 Power Analysis

The annual Power Analysis conference was held in person this year for the first time since 2019! We were all happy to be together again at Massanutten Springs.

40 members of the State Governing Board, staff, and leaders from most chapters learned about how power works in Virginia. Then we discussed which issues matter most to our members and what work can help us build power and win in 2024.

Civic engagement, restoration of rights, reproductive justice, gun violence, and most of all the housing crisis were some of the issues we studied.

On Sunday, the board held their daylong annual meeting where they considered reports from all of the annual meetings and the Power Analysis and took first steps toward new goals and strategies for the coming year.

Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg Area, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Newport News/Hampton, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Pulaski, Richmond Area, Suffolk, Waynesboro, Wise County, Wythe County

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