



News from the Grassroots

July 2023 Issue 128

Introducing our new Southside Organizer - Gayland Oliver!

Gayland grew up in Greensboro, North Carolina where he learned community organizing from his mother at an early age, as he accompanied her throughout the community to register voters and encourage them to get out and vote. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Recreational Administration at North Carolina A&T and his Master's in Business Administration from the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

Gayland has many accomplishments as an organizer in his community.

- As a student volunteer at the local NAACP branch in Greensboro, he had the honor of registering over 700 student voters.
- He is founder of the first urban farm in Greensboro. That land continues to yield fresh fruit and vegetables, to assist in combatting food insecurity in what might be considered a food desert.
- He has guided thousands of returning citizens through the process of expunging their records so that they can fulfill their career goals after incarceration.

Welcome, Gayland! We're proud that you have joined Virginia Organizing.

Mental Health Forums

Fredericksburg and Suffolk Chapters will be holding community events on mental health soon. They want police chiefs and other local officials to hear from those who have experienced mental health crises about how responses can be helpful or cause harm. Fredericksburg's forum will be Saturday, July 29 at 2 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Fredericksburg. The Suffolk summit will be near the end of August, details to follow.

As summer intern Anyue Ai wrote in a recent LTE in Suffolk, "Mental health is not just about how you feel. It is about how we feel. Our mental health is our community health. As we grapple with the ongoing crises of homelessness, community violence, environmental disaster, and more within Suffolk, it is becoming clear that systemic issues have sweeping effects on our emotional and psychological wellbeing. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic alone has caused youth and adults alike to report dramatic increases in anxiety, depression, and loneliness. And far too often, the mental trauma that results from societal issues only furthers those exact same issues."

To get involved in the Suffolk Mental Health Summit, contact organizer Tony Jones at tjones@virginia-organizing.org. If you have questions about the Fredericksburg forum, contact organizer Jorge Mendez at jorge@virginia-organizing.org.

MENTAL HEALTH & POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY PETITION

- Have you or a loved one had a mental health issue that went unaddressed?
- The Suffolk Chapter of Virginia Organizing is hosting a mental health summit at the end of August open to all.
- Help us organize the summit to meet the needs of our city!
- There is a crisis of police abuse of power towards residents, especially people of color and low-income folks.
- Help us pressure city council to establish a Civilian Review Board for meaningful civilian oversight.



We invite you to get involved in our movements for mental health equity and police accountability. Attend our monthly Zoom meetings on the last Thursday at 6pm!



Or contact Tony
tjones@virginia-organizing.org



Virginia Organizing is a non-partisan statewide grassroots organization founded in 1995, dedicated to promoting social and economic justice for all Virginians.

VACOLAO | Featured Community Partner

For Beatriz Ambermann of the Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations (VACOLAO), organizing for political power is about connection and community across time and space. Since 2001, VACOLAO has been leading successful campaigns to change the lived reality of Latinx communities across Virginia, achieving important wins such as the state's adoption of driver privilege cards, in-state tuition for students regardless of documentation status, Medicaid coverage for oral health services, and the creation of the Virginia Latino Advisory Board by Governor Mark Warner.



To guide her work and her vision of the future, Beatriz looks to the example of her ancestors, who lived lives of connectedness and care in their communities.

"My great-grandmother used to wake up early every morning to prepare food to feed the migrants who were coming through her rural village," she says. "My parents would collect blankets and toys to distribute to the community. My husband is a retired doctor who served people who were homeless and uninsured."

From her ancestors, Beatriz has learned to both adapt to the issues and circumstances that impact the Latinx community in the here and now, and to build coalitions for long-term change. While VACOLAO is rooted in the Latinx community, they collaborate with everyone, understanding that a culture of competition and scarcity only benefits those in power who seek to divide communities from one another.

"It is a distraction," she says. "The system wants us to be in competition with each other, so it tells us that our neighbor is the 'other.'"

A critical component of VACOLAO's work is building community by connecting people to their culture. In 2023 they are working with partners to host cultural events, one of which will include the Mexican Ambassador and the Mexican Cultural Institute. Beatriz herself used to dance with a Mexican performing troupe, and through that experience she learned the value of teamwork.

"There are times to take solos and shine, but the majority of the time you are focusing on everybody else," she says. She understands her experience as a dancer to be analogous to the way VACOLAO connects with Latinx leaders across the state in common work. "You have to put ego aside and work for the common good, the well-being of the entire community. That is much more satisfying and effective!"

Beatriz believes that creating spaces for communication and dialogue around common needs and desires can break down barriers. "We all want to live in peaceful communities, we want well-paying jobs, to be healthy, to have good schools. We have to engage in constructive conversations and find ways to interact and know one another."

She is inspired when she sees young people stepping up and learning to take leadership in the community. VACOLAO hosted an Advocacy Day during the last General Assembly session that brought out nearly 100 people, a majority of whom were young. For Beatriz, it is critical that the wisdom of her ancestors continue

to guide the movement going forward, and the organizing energy that she is seeing among the youth gives her hope.



Together we can create a more just and equitable Virginia

Registration is now open for Grassroots Gathering 2023 on September 23 in Richmond! We're so happy that we will be able to meet in person this year.

We will gather at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Richmond, participate in an action at the Governor's mansion, eat lunch together, and then have workshops. ASL and Spanish interpretation will be provided.

Register today!

<https://virginia-organizing.org/grassroots-gathering-registration/>

If you're not able to attend, help us bring the biggest action to the mansion Governor Youngkin has ever seen. Donate at the bottom of the registration page to cover transportation, meals, and lodgings for other members.

If you would like to advertise in the program book we give out to all of the participants at the gathering, fill out the form on our website. We will also tag and thank our sponsors on social media, share websites, and more.

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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