

VIRGINIA **ORGANIZING**

News from the Grassroots

November 2023 Issue 132

Richmond Housing Rally

On November 18, the Richmond Chapter rallied about housing conditions in HUD properties. HUD pays private corporations to manage these apartments but does little to make sure they maintain them.

During Forestbrooke Apartments' recent inspection, in the 23 units inspected (out of 158) there were 36 health and safety violations, seven of which were deemed life threatening. Only a few of the violations were deemed mandatory to repair, though, and the management company was not penalized in any way for their neglect.

Stephanie Robertson, a leader in the chapter, said, "I'm tired of the mold. I'm tired of the rust...It's time we stand up and do something about it...Without us nothing works."



LaChere Griffin-Denton holds a sign that reads, "Disenfranchisement is the New Jim Crow!"

March on the Mansion

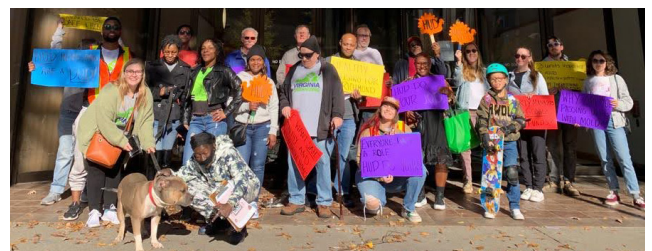
On November 4, about 95 members of Virginia Organizing marched from the Grassroots Gathering to the Capitol/Governor's mansion to demand that Governor Youngkin restore voting rights.

For many years, we've worked to expand civil rights in Virginia. Our first campaign in Lee County changed the jury selection process to a lottery, which meant that Black citizens began to be called to jury service for the first time.

Since then we have registered voters, held candidate forums, published voter guides, and helped returning citizens apply to get their rights back. Most of all, we've worked with governors of both parties to make the application process easier and more automatic.

The process improved steadily until Governor Youngkin secretly began to undermine it. In October it was revealed that he had also wrongly disenfranchised 3,400 people.

We called on him to restore the process that Governor Northam used and give up his voter suppression tactics immediately.





Dismantling Racism in Southwest Virginia

We held a Dismantling Racism Workshop in Wytheville this month. Members from the New River Valley, Wise County, and Halifax County also participated.

During our one day DR workshops, participants discuss our theory of what systemic racism is, share stories with each other about their life experiences, and develop local action plans to bring back to our chapters and communities.

Paméla Frank Houndjo | Assistant Director of Finance and Administration

Paméla joined Virginia Organizing in the summer of 2023. She has a Bachelor of Science in Leadership Studies from Averett University and an Associate in Accounting from PVCC. She's currently working on an MBA in Economics and Certificate in HR.

She has served many roles in the community assisting people with filing taxes, completing the requirements for citizenship, registering new voters, caring for the elderly, and more with groups such as the Food Bank, Salvation Army, and Virginia Film Festival.



Currently, Paméla is a member of the Steering Committee of the Residents for Respectful Research, an initiative of the Public Housing Association of Residents and the Equity Center at UVA in partnership with the Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia. Additionally, she serves as Community representative on the UVA IRB-SBS.

She is a proud mother and fluent speaker of five languages, including English and French.

"This position combines both my passions, people and numbers, because I get to do community work and accounting," Paméla says. "Virginia Organizing aligns with my IRB work protecting vulnerable communities."

Thank you for your generosity!

We are so grateful for the donations we received this month for Giving Tuesday.

People contribute to our work in many ways. We love our volunteers who stuff envelopes, write thank you cards, and even tend the garden.

The core of our work is done by the members of our 16 chapter areas.

Our State Governing Board, made up of longtime chapter leaders, make the big decisions about strategy along with staff and members of strategy committees.

Without our donors, though, none of this great work could happen. If you haven't made your donation yet, please give today.

Nora Scott | Waynesboro Organizer

Nora grew up in Nelson County and is self-taught. They enjoy studying the intersections of relational dialectics, historical materialism, and gender.

"A big part of my politics surrounding advocacy is rooted in the fact that I am an ordinary person. I'm the imaginary statistic in the room. I'm poor. I'm black. I'm queer. When I come into these spaces where policy and theoretical paths forward are being combed over, most of the time I'm one of the only ones in the room whose future rights and safety are on the table."



Nora is also passionate about disability rights, not only because they are disabled and have had to navigate the world picking up their own coping tools along the way, but also because they grew up being part of the queer and disabled community. They've seen what it looks like when people don't receive the recognition and access they need.

"You can tell the kind of person someone would be if they had been given the right tools and the right knowledge. That's why it's important to me to make sure the next generation is given some kind of support, some kind of nurture." they said.

Nora lived in Waynesboro from 2018 – 2021, when they joined Virginia Organizing as a chapter member who was directly affected by the lack of decent, affordable housing in the city. "Having Virginia Organizing to go to, people to talk with about my experience, helped me get through that period."

As an organizer, Nora hopes to provide that space for members, space where people can ask out loud the big questions they're already asking themselves internally so that they can come to understand the root causes behind issues affecting them and take action.

Local Chapters and Areas Served:

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

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