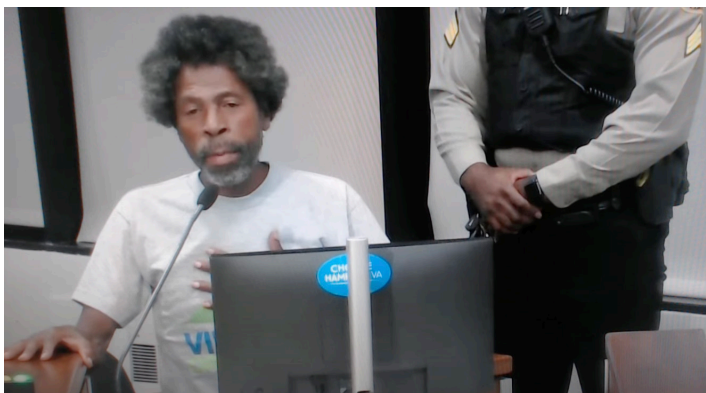




News from the Grassroots

September 2023 Issue 130



Hampton City Council Action

Andre Hammond, a member of the Newport News/Hampton Chapter, spoke at the September Hampton City Council meeting about the needs of unhoused veterans on the peninsula.

Andre is unhoused himself, but he isn't a veteran.

He said, "It strikes me as odd that these individuals have sacrificed lives and limbs to try to help and protect this country, but now they're sleeping on the sidewalk."



NRV Education Justice Forum

The New River Valley Chapter held an Education Justice Forum this month where they discussed restorative justice initiatives in Montgomery County Public Schools and how they can be involved in implementing them.

Delegate Sam Rasoul and school administrators attended along with parents interested in discussing challenges their children have encountered.



Waynesboro Housing Vigil

The Waynesboro Chapter held a community vigil to stand up for fair housing on September 9. There was an open mic for tenants to speak about problems with their rental homes. They continue to call on city council to create a rental inspection program so that tenants live in safe housing.

Andrea Jackson was interviewed by WHSV and said, "We're trying to rejuvenate and tell the city council that we haven't stopped and we're not going to stop until we get this passed."

Thanks to everyone who contributed to the vigil!



Take action

Did you know that energy efficiency could meet one third of our expected power needs by 2030? We want to improve energy efficiency especially for low-income households. It could save people 30% on their utility bills.

This #EEDay2023 on Oct. 4, let's work together to cut energy waste. Write a letter to your local paper about the importance of energy efficiency to save money, cut pollution, and create jobs. Send us a copy if you do!

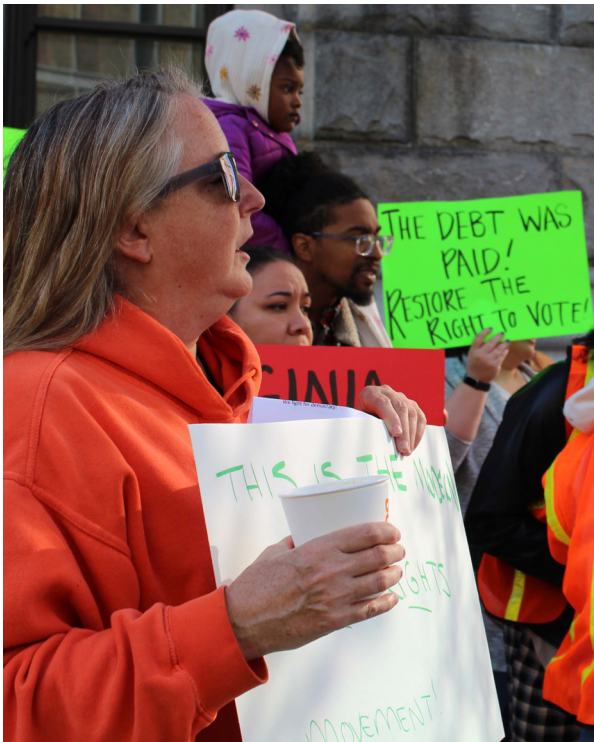


Building Campaigns

For our Community Learning and Strategy Session (CLASS) on THURSDAY, October 5 at 7 p.m. on Zoom, we will be talking about building campaigns and civic engagement.

Come learn about how local community organizing works to build power and accomplish our goals for our communities.

Closed captions, ASL, and Spanish interpretation will be provided.



Grassroots Gathering 2023

Tropical Storm Ophelia forced us to postpone GG2023 until later in November. We hope to have an even bigger march on the Governor to demand that he use a fair and efficient process for restoring voting rights and stop taking them away from people without justification.

We will let you know when we have a date, but the plan is still to march to the Governor's mansion, eat lunch together, and then have workshops. ASL and Spanish interpretation will be provided.

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

The Alyssa House Featured Community Partner

In the fight against childhood cancer, children are noncombatants.

That is the response of The Alyssa House Board Chair, Lynn Divers, to the more common conception of cancer treatment as a "battle" between the patient and the disease. Lynn's daughter, Alyssa, died in 2012 because her 10-year-old body was a battleground between osteosarcoma and the tortuous treatments used to combat it.



What got her through the agonizing two-year ordeal of treatment, the deep loss, and continued grief, was the support of her community. The provision of free housing when they had to seek treatment away from that supportive community, allowing their family to stick together, was integral. That is why Lynn, with other committed advocates, started The Alyssa House in 2016 under the fiscal sponsorship of Virginia Organizing. Like Virginia Organizing's other partner, LilyPads Housing, The Alyssa House offers a free place to stay for families traveling to Charlottesville with an immunocompromised child.

"This work is a way to honor and remember Alyssa, and also a way we pay it forward," Lynn says. "Families are in crisis when something goes wrong with their child. They need tremendous support. We received that because of community in Charlottesville, and friends of friends who stepped in when we were desperate."

Lynn's goal is to do just one thing really well, and not to let her work balloon into something unsustainable. The Alyssa House is community-based and volunteer-driven, and aims to take care of one family at a time through simple hospitality and basic mutual aid. They rely on individual volunteers to help maintain the space, and the house itself is owned by a local congregation, Sojourners United Church of Christ, and rented at a discount.

Right now their biggest immediate need is for a few more board members, particularly social workers or people connected to pediatrics at the UVA hospital. That is a connection they have lacked recently, and has resulted in short periods when the house has been vacant.

On a systemic level, Lynn imagines a future when health care is affordable, well-funded, and effective. "One day, a cancer diagnosis may mean illness but not destruction, treatment but not torture, sickness but not staggering suffering," she said in a recent social media post. Society should not be blaming individuals – especially children – for bad outcomes because they did not have a positive attitude or pray hard enough. The battle is the collective responsibility of communities and society writ large, and Lynn maintains that we have failed children by making their bodies a battleground. Her work through The Alyssa House is her way of contributing to the community support that families need to survive the fight.

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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