



# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## News from the Grassroots

March 2024 Issue 135

### Action on Housing, Utilities, and Health Care



During the Housing Symposium in Norfolk, members made calls to Gov. Youngkin

### Take Action!

We still have time to act on our priority bills that passed in the General Assembly. The governor has until April 8 to decide on them (or they become law automatically). If you haven't already, **please take a few minutes and call Governor Youngkin's office at 804-786-2211.**

Urge him to sign the bills that matter most to you from this list:  
SB 479 (Aird) and HB 597 (Price): Expand local authority to hold landlords accountable.

HB 73 (Hope): Expunge dismissed eviction actions from tenants' records.

HB 442 (Bennett-Parker): Allow payment plans for one month's late rent.

HB 598 (Price): Allow late rent payments up to 14 days.

HB 817 (McClure): Prohibit retaliatory actions by a landlord against a tenant.

SB 422 (Ebbin) and HB 993 (Tran): Prohibit fees for maintenance/repair or fees to submit rent payments.

HB 1251 (Cousins): Limit escrow requirement for tenants' assertion cases.

HB 906 (Shin) and SB 480 (Aird): Protect families from utility shutoffs.

SB 565 (Deeds) and HB 746 (Webert): Create stronger energy efficiency targets for electric utilities to lower costs for families.

SB 274 (Deeds) and HB 570 (Delaney): Establish the Prescription Drug Affordability Board to protect Virginians from the high cost of prescription drugs.



Members all over Virginia drew attention to the link between leaky housing and climate change.

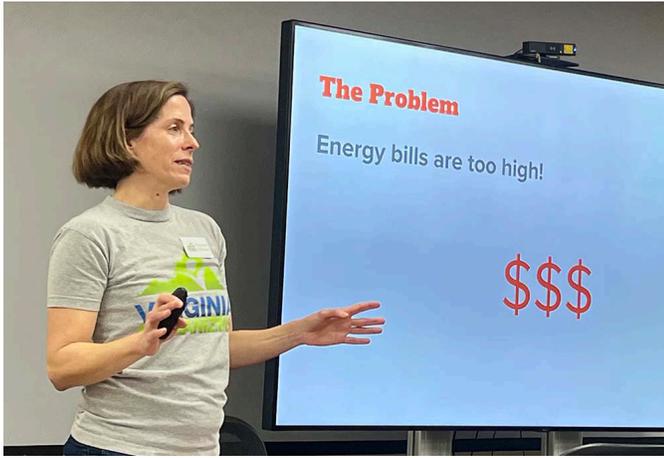


### Wythe County Utility Workshop

Members in Wytheville participated this month in a workshop on the high cost of utilities and what needs to change to bring bills down. They learned about the programs utilities offer, additional sources of help that stem from the Inflation Reduction Act, and how we can organize to expand low-income families' access to this assistance.



At the press conference in Richmond, members spoke about tenant rights.



## Take Action on Utility Shutoffs!

Thanks in part to the action you took, legislators passed HB 906 and SB 480 during this General Assembly session, stopping utilities from shutting off customers' power, gas, and water during extreme weather and public health emergencies because they couldn't afford their bills. If the governor signs these into law, fewer customers should lose access to essential utilities.

Many households in our communities face an energy affordability gap of thousands of dollars per year. Families with income up to fifty percent of the Federal Poverty Level, some 161,000 Virginia households, have energy bills totaling \$2,183 higher than they can afford each year. And they spend around 32% of their income on home energy. It is families like these who are often most at risk of service disconnection for nonpayment. Even households with higher income, up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, have unsustainable energy burdens of 7% of income and more.

But we have another opportunity to decrease shutoffs! Last year, the General Assembly passed legislation (HB 1770 and SB 1265) that allows the State Corporation Commission to adjust Dominion's and Appalachian Power's profits based on whether or not they achieve performance targets.

And we can have a say in what those performance targets should be! Tell the State Corporation Commission you want Dominion and Appalachian Power to be incentivized to reduce the number of shutoffs they make and to be penalized if they don't!

We need fewer shutoffs, because utility shutoffs harm our most vulnerable families and impact Black and Brown and low-income communities the most:

One of every four households in Virginia is energy insecure, and energy assistance programs only serve 25% of eligible households. The assistance doesn't meet the need, covering on average only 29% of heating costs.

More than a third of the households eligible for energy assistance programs contain at least one individual 60 years of age or older, leaving some of our most vulnerable residents at risk of losing life saving electric utility services.

The households most at risk of being disconnected are paying higher energy bills due to the higher energy use intensity of their older and less energy efficient homes. Nationally, they spend \$1.24 per square foot on energy, compared to the \$0.98 spent by households who are not energy insecure. Renters' costs are even higher at \$1.26 per square foot. And the lowest-income households spend the most, \$1.31 per square foot.

These energy disparities become even more apparent when looking at the energy use of households across race. Black and Brown households pay close to \$.20 more per square foot to power their homes than White households.

According to regulators, Dominion Virginia bills are set to double in the next 12 years, and Appalachian Power customers' bills have risen by an average of \$430 annually in the last year.

Again, tell the State Corporation Commission you want Dominion and Appalachian Power to be incentivized to reduce the number of shutoffs they make and to be penalized if they don't!

## Happy Birthday ACA!

The Affordable Care Act is 14 years old this month and serving a record 21.3 million Americans.

It's also Women's History Month, and a fun fact about the ACA is that it made it illegal to discriminate against women. Insurance companies can no longer charge women more than men for the same policy or treat pregnancy and the potential to get pregnant as pre-existing conditions to charge women more for insurance.

**VIRTUAL  
MOVE / WALK / RUN  
FOR WELLNESS 2024**

Move / Walk / Run for Wellness during this community event to benefit Virginia Organizing hosted by the New River Valley Chapter. Receive a walking path & trails list, and join us for a Celebration Event 1:30 p.m., April 7!  
(Register for more event details)

**March 29-April 12**  
Move / Walk / Run (any distance at any location)

\$10 Minimum Suggested Donation to Register

REGISTER TODAY! [BIT.LY/VOMWR2024](https://bit.ly/VOMWR2024)

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## Move/Walk/Run for Virginia Organizing!

The New River Valley Chapter is holding a fundraiser from March 29 - April 12 and inviting all of our supporters to join them. (You can select the chapter you want to support when you register.)

Choice of time, location, and mode of movement is entirely up to you! After you participate, share a short message and photo of your experience to encourage others in the community to join in on the fun.

Join NRV for a mid-way Community Celebration in Blacksburg at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday, April 7! (Details will be sent to all participants.) Please register below to make your donation, and know that you are helping make change in Virginia!

## 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

Virginia Organizing  
703 Concord Avenue  
Charlottesville, VA 22903  
434-984-4655  
[info@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:info@virginia-organizing.org)  
[www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org)