



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

May 2024 Issue 137

Norfolk Housing Press Conference



Over Memorial Day weekend, our Norfolk Chapter took action toward promoting affordable housing. Following the Norfolk City Council's decision to establish a housing trust fund, chapter and community members gathered to call for the city to follow through in contributing to the fund in order to provide better housing conditions throughout Norfolk.

Passing cars responded to prompts to "honk for affordable housing," as well as chants that advocated for affordable housing. Several community leaders spoke about their experiences as residents, landlords, religious leaders, and community advocates.

"Everyone should have a place to live," said Kim Williams of Catholic Worker.

Hosted by Virginia Organizing State Governing Board Member, Patrice Smallwood, the speakers addressed the lack of attention to low-income housing facilities, conditions for the unhoused, and the necessity for improved inspection procedures to ensure quality conditions.

Rev. Dr. Crawley-Ricks of New Macedonia UCC declared, "We the haves need to help those who have not. And so we know parents who are working four jobs just to pay for lunch for their children and live in places that we wouldn't even live... No one wants to live there - we want affordable housing for the City of Norfolk citizens."

Other speakers included Grey Persons and Jesse Monroe of Hope House Foundation, as well as resident and landlord, Jeff Smallwood.



Waynesboro Housing Actions

Members of our Waynesboro Chapter have been taking action toward fair housing! At the end of April, the chapter held its annual chapter meeting to recognize the many wins of last year and reaffirm the work for 2024. One of those commitments was to urge the city council to implement better tenant protections and hire a full-time rental inspector to ensure fair housing conditions for all residents.

To put pressure on the city council, chapter members and local residents presented personal testimonies about their experiences with poor housing conditions. The chapter also demonstrated this resolve by "yarn-bombing" the trees and city hall building, adorning them with hand-crafted and housing-themed yarn creations. The chapter also held a "Rent n Vent" forum so that community members could come together to talk about the housing issues they face.

General Assembly Budget Wins!

We are celebrating several statewide wins this month! When the General Assembly's compromise budget was signed by the governor, it implemented funding for several areas that we have been advocating for through multiple campaigns.

First, the new budget allocated a total of \$1.1 billion for early childhood care and education (ECCE). The funds are to go toward the Child Care Subsidy Program (CCSP), Mixed Delivery, and Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI). The funds are to be spread over two years, with over \$336 million designated for FY25 and \$461 million for FY26. These funds are good news for families, and they acknowledge the role of early childhood care as a vital form of education.

Other noteworthy victories from the budget are the allocation of \$50 million for broadband deployment, making high-speed internet accessible to rural areas of the state, and \$2.5 billion for K-12 education. The budget also left out the governor's expansion of sales tax, which we opposed.





Meeting with the Mayor of Big Stone Gap

At the end of April, our Wise County chapter met with the Mayor Gary Johnson of Big Stone Gap, VA to discuss town issues and solutions. This action was one of the first steps in a chapter campaign to have conversations with local leaders regarding concerns about small nuclear reactors (SMRs) and gauge the possibility of passing resolutions against them. One of the chapter's other goals is to raise awareness about SMRs and the impact that they could have on the natural environment and tourism in the area.



Day Without Child Care 2024

We were thrilled to participate in the annual Day Without Child Care event again this year, alongside our partners, Community Change and Virginia Promise Partnership. For this year's activities, our Newport News/Hampton Chapter hosted an in-person recognition of the need for better funding and awareness of the needs that parents and childcare providers face every day. Our event was one of 80 events across the nation, and Virginia Organizing was also represented at the live virtual event later that evening.

Torch Bearer Award



Early this month, our organization was honored by the Sri Chinmoy Oneness Home Peace Run for the work all of you do for justice in Virginia.

Our very own Rosemary and Constanze were in attendance to receive the Torch Bearer Award. Other recipients of the award included The Equity Center - UVA, Do Good Cville, and the International Rescue Committee in Charlottesville.

Supreme Court CFPB Ruling

Another win for Virginians that we are recognizing this month is the Supreme Court decision to uphold that the funding for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) is constitutional. This decision allows the agency to continue holding predatory lenders accountable, and promoting economic and racial justice.

Virginia Organizing has advocated for the work of the CFPB to protect citizens from predatory lending for over two decades.

Our Chairperson, Lily Hungarland said, "Virginia Organizing has supported the CFPB since it was created in 2010 because we recognize the need for a government watchdog against predatory lenders. The CFPB has done a great job of protecting Virginians from exploitation and abuse by finance companies."

Regional Grassroots Gatherings

REGIONAL GRASSROOTS GATHERINGS

JUNE 15 SOUTHEAST REGION
Hampton, VA

JUNE 22 CENTRAL REGION
Charlottesville, VA

TBD SOUTHWEST REGION
Wythe County, VA

STAY TUNED FOR DETAILS

Our Regional Grassroots Gatherings are just around the corner! We want to invite you to join us at the event that is happening closest to you!

At these gatherings, you will hear from local leaders, learn from guest speakers who are making an impact in our communities, and attend workshops that are geared toward empowering us to take action in many ways to make change in our regions. The events are free and lunch will be provided.

Keep an eye out for more specific details about your local Regional Grassroots Gathering in the coming weeks!

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
www.virginia-organizing.org