



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

June 2024

Issue 138

Southeast 2024 Regional Grassroots Gathering



This month, our Newport News/Hampton Chapter, Suffolk Chapter, Norfolk Chapter, Portsmouth Chapter, and Eastern Shore Chapter held a successful Regional Grassroots Gathering in Newport News. At the gathering, each chapter highlighted chapter accomplishments and participants attended a variety of workshops that addressed ways to continue to progress the work that we are doing throughout the region.

The guest speakers for the gathering spoke on topics related to unhoused populations, empowering our communities to make our voices heard, and creatively involving members in all aspects of the community.

Dr. Lisa C. Johnson discussed the desire for many individuals in the community to support our work, but who may be hesitant because of public image. She encouraged our members to reach out to business

owners, legislators, and even those who work in sensitive occupations to collaborate in the specific ways that they can. In her remarks, she stated, "You're making the difference - together we can continue to do the same thing."



Guest Speakers (left to right) - Councilwoman Hope L. Harper of Hampton, Rev. Dr. Lisa C. Johnson of the Eastern Shore, and Dr. Darlene Sparks Washington of Portsmouth.

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Dr. Darlene Sparks Washington shared her experience working as the director of Portsmouth Volunteers for the Homeless (PVH), and focused on our ability to empower marginalized populations by making a "place at the

table for those of us who can't stand on the front line." She continued by arguing for our communities to shift our thinking about unhoused populations, emphasizing that we should not look at an unhoused individual as a "poor homeless person," but rather, regarding those who have experienced homelessness by saying, "Hey, that's a person." She encouraged the group not to "leave it up to legislators to decide...we have to know what affordable housing looks like."

Our final guest speaker of the day, Councilwoman Hope L. Harper of Hampton, called attention to the fact that affordable housing is "not a black or white issue. It is not a left or a right issue. It affects everyone." In her impassioned speech urging the audience not to waver or give up, she reminded the group that "it's going to take all of us to make a difference."



Participants in an afternoon workshop discussion

Attendees of the gathering reported positive feedback about the event, including that they enjoyed networking and building relationships, learned a lot about various issues from the speakers, and gained insight and perspective from the workshops.

One attendee shared that they appreciated knowing that "we all have something to contribute." Another attendee showed their appreciation for what our chapters are doing by stating that "there is real, active participation here at V.O., and a real willingness to help others in our communities."

Wise County Juneteenth Celebration

For the Juneteenth holiday this year, our Wise County Chapter held two community celebrations, on Friday, June 21 and Saturday, June 22. The events were free and open to the public. Attendees enjoyed complementary hotdogs and water, and food trucks were available as well.

The celebration included performances by Kelle Jolly and the Kuumba Watoto Drum and Dance Company. The Friday event featured an 18+ block party with music and dancing. The Saturday event was open to all and featured family-friendly activities.



Attendees listening to a speaker during the morning session



Welcome Our New Norfolk Organizer - Cassandra Waters

We are excited to welcome Cassandra Waters to the team! Cassandra is a native of Suffolk and Portsmouth, and she has a background in the healthcare field.

She has been a dedicated member of our Suffolk Chapter for several years, helping to build power in the community. She has a passion for working with others and empowering them to share about their experiences.

Cassandra has expressed her love for working with people and is thankful for this new "redirection" in her life. She is looking forward to creating change in the community, and we are happy to have her as our new Norfolk Organizer at Virginia Organizing!



Charlottesville United for Public Education (CUPE) | Featured Community Partner

Big improvements are coming to public education in Charlottesville. Until now, because of the way elementary education is structured in the city, many students will have attended three different schools by the time they reach high school. When a group of parents saw the negative impact that this instability had on the quality of their kids' education, they got organized and changed the system. Today, the City of Charlottesville is reconfiguring the system so that students only change schools once, in grade 6. Walker Elementary, the former grade 5-6 facility, is being closed, renovated, and repurposed.

The reconfiguration and renovation is happening thanks in part to a grassroots push by [Charlottesville United for Public Education \(CUPE\)](#), a group of parents, guardians and other caring adults dedicated to improving the quality of education for all children by centering the needs of Black, Brown, and other marginalized students. Conceived in 2021, CUPE launched in 2022 under the fiscal sponsorship of Virginia Organizing.



Sandra Aviles is the community organizer for Charlottesville United. Her passion for public education advocacy comes from her own experience as a parent of three children, the oldest of whom is currently in 10th grade. Parenting through the COVID-19 quarantine caused her to reflect on what factors helped some children thrive more than others, giving her a new

CUPE works to give parents of marginalized families the power to make sure the education system works for their children. The reconfiguration and renovation was just the first step. Charlottesville United is also advocating for the former Walker Elementary facility to be used as an early childhood education center.

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Restoration of Rights Statewide Committee Inaugural Meeting

This month, we held our first meeting for the Restoration of Rights Statewide Committee. The committee consists of Virginia Organizing chapter members from across the state who are passionate about ensuring that as many Virginians as possible have the right to vote.

During the meeting, several topics were discussed regarding how to move forward with raising awareness about restoration of rights in our communities. One committee member shared his experiences and concerns with the current process as a returning citizen, while others also shared ideas for how to appeal to multiple demographics in order to spread accurate information about restoration of rights and voting processes.

Barbara Harris, of the Virginia Organizing State Governing Board, said that it was a great thing that the meeting was full of people who are "very interested in restoration of rights and being a part of getting people to vote and putting in the work." She also noted that people brought "great ideas about things like tabling, civic outreach, [and] everybody had input...there was nobody who didn't contribute."

One of the main topics discussed in the meeting was a civic engagement plan to raise awareness regarding pre-trial and pre-conviction voting ability. Another main topic discussed was working toward encouraging the General Assembly to pass an amendment to Virginia's State Constitution, in order to change current voting rights policy.

The committee will meet once a month to collaborate on civic continued engagement strategies and work towards the encouraging the General Assembly to pass the constitutional amendment. We are excited to work on yet another meaningful statewide campaign win and make history in Virginia!

For more information about joining the committee, please contact Glenda Crockett-Eans at glcrockett-eans@virginia-organizing.org or Tony Jones at tjones@virginia-organizing.org.

2024 Grassroots Gathering Raffle Tickets & Ad Book

As we prepare for the statewide Grassroots Gathering in September, we want to remind you that tickets for our annual [Beach Week Raffle](#) are already available! The winner will receive a one-week stay in a 3-bedroom condo in Hilton Head, SC. The winner will be announced on September 21 during the Grassroots Gathering event. This is a great way to enjoy a relaxing vacation and support Virginia Organizing at the same time!

Also, if you would like to advertise in the program book we give out to all of the participants at the gathering, please [fill out this form](#).

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING 2024 BEACH RAFFLE

One week in a 3-bedroom, oceanfront condo
on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina

TICKETS:
1 FOR \$5
5 FOR \$20

Winning ticket will be drawn at the Grassroots Gathering,
September 21, 2024. Winner will receive one week at a
3-bedroom, oceanfront condo on Hilton Head Island, SC.
Week is negotiable with owners and not all weeks will be
available. Winner does not need to be present to win.



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