



News from the Grassroots

November 2024 Issue 143



Seasons Greetings from Virginia Organizing!

As we move into the holiday season and close out 2024, we want to express our appreciation for all that you have done to build power throughout the year. We look forward to continuing to build with you in 2025!

We are meeting with legislators across Virginia



South Boston/Halifax Chapter with Senator Mulchi and Delegate Wright



Albemarle Charlottesville Chapter with Delegate Callsen

Our chapters are meeting with legislators as we head into the General Assembly session in January. Members across the state have been able to share our legislative priorities, and have gained support for our priorities from some of our legislators.

Delegate Rasoul met with members of our Environmental Justice Strategy Committee and agreed to co-patron the bill with Delegate Seibold, who already agreed to patron the bill, to provide incarcerated folks with access to adequate cooling during extreme heat.

Other legislators agreed to support multiple issues, like Delegate Milde who will support our energy and utility, child care, healthcare, and some housing priorities. Senator Mulchi also expressed interest in working with our Halifax/South Boston Chapter on Restoration of Rights and child care.

Our Richmond Chapter and Environmental Justice Strategy Committee met with Delegate Carr this month, who has been a champion for many of our priorities. She has agreed to meet with our members in Richmond on Lobby Day in January.



Richmond Chapter and Environmental Justice Strategy Committee with Delegate Carr

Similarly, Speaker of the House Delegate Don Scott's legislative aide, Kathy Nguyen, met with statewide strategy committee members and Portsmouth Chapter members on his behalf and promised that Delegate Scott would meet with them in Richmond during the General Assembly session.

"Caroling for a Cause" in Newport News



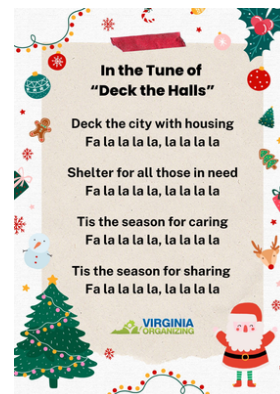
Newport News/Hampton Chapter members singing carols to the City Council.

On December 10, the Newport News/Hampton Chapter went "Caroling for a Cause" at the Newport News City Council meeting held at Christopher Newport University. Chapter members sang carols about the need for a shelter on the peninsula and called out city council to address this much-needed resource.

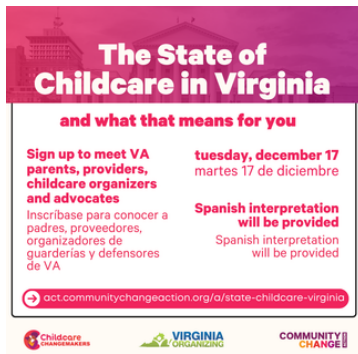
Viam Advising, a company hired by the city of Newport News to assess homelessness, spoke at a community meeting in November and stated that regional housing insecurity and homelessness will only increase over the next five years.

The chapter has urged both the Newport News and Hampton City Councils to invest in a regional shelter with wrap-around services that will act as a hand to help those in need. While the Hampton City Council has expressed support for the regional shelter, members of the Newport News City Council have been hesitant.

The peninsula region previously came together for animals and pets in need – to find them loving homes. Now, the chapter is calling on the Newport News City Council to do the same for their constituents in need.



"The State of Child Care in Virginia" Zoom Meeting Recap



"Families should be able to choose the childcare that they need based on their family's situation."

-Alex Guzman, Virginia Early Childhood Foundation.

This week, we gathered on Zoom to talk about the current state of our Virginia child care system and what we can do as parents, child care providers, and community supporters to help make it better. The meeting was hosted by Virginia Organizing and Childcare Changemakers, and was attended by Virginia Organizing chapter members, Virginia Promise Partnership, and invited guests.

Topics of the meeting included the recent state budget wins for early childhood education, how the pandemic changed the outlook of child care funding, and what proposed changes by the incoming federal administration might mean for child care and our communities.

"The tax fight is a child care fight, and a healthcare fight, and an anti-hunger fight," said AnneRose Menachery of Childcare Changemakers.

Attendees were also given the opportunity to speak in groups about their experiences with the child care system, discuss the information that was shared to the group, and explore ideas for what the child care system should look like in the future.

During the meeting, speakers emphasized the importance of partnerships in this effort more now than ever.

"When we fight together, we absolutely win...we've seen a lot of power built when we realize that there are other people out there going through the same thing," said Virginia Organizing Executive Director, Brian Johns

Tax Savvy Ways to Give and Challenge Injustice

Did you know that your contribution to making change can include non-cash donations?

If you are ready to make a difference, giving from your IRA or other non-cash donations are ways to empower people while possibly also saving a lot more on your taxes than donating cash.

Learn about more ways to give and make the most of your tax savings as we close out 2024!

[LEARN MORE >>](#)

2024 Staff Retreat

We had a great 2024 Staff Retreat planning for the upcoming year and how our communities can continue to build power together across Virginia!



Richmond Chapter "Naughty or Nice" Forum for Rental Inspection Program



The Richmond Chapter of Virginia Organizing held a successful community forum with newly elected city council members to discuss the importance of a rental inspection program on Wednesday, December 4. Virginia Organizing received verbal commitments from city council members in attendance to prioritize the program.

One Richmond tenant who spoke at the forum emphasized the need for a rental inspection program, asserting that landlords "need to be held accountable." They discussed the hypocrisy of the current system, stating, "Communities are suffering... If you don't pay your rent, you get kicked out. But what happens to these [landlords] who have you living in uninhabitable properties and they are not held liable? Something needs to be done."

The lack of accountability has ultimately bred distrust amongst tenants. "We cannot trust our landlords or the city to stay accountable for the safety of our families," said another Richmond tenant, Kim Taylor.



Almost fifty Richmond tenants, community-based organizations, and local landlords attended the forum in favor of a rental inspection program.

Newly elected Richmond city council members Andrew "Gumby" Breton, of the 1st District, and Kenya Gibson, of the 3rd District, attended the forum and publicly committed to support the rental inspection program. Virginia State Senator Ghazala Hashmi also attended in support of the program.

While not in attendance at the event, the chapter received emails of support from council members Jordan, Lynch, and Jones. The chapter received no communication from the 6th, 7th, 8th council district teams about their support for the rental inspection program.

Richmond tenant and Virginia Organizing chapter leader, Melanie Taylor-Carden, summed up the issue with the statement, "our current code enforcement is the definition of putting a Band-Aid on the issue except we don't always have a Band-Aid big enough for a fallen roof."

As a follow-up to the community forum, Kim Taylor attended a Richmond city council meeting on Monday, December 9 to deliver "nice" certificates to council members who publicly committed to support the program and "naughty" certificates to those who have not. However, Taylor was cut off when sharing the "naughty" list, as the list was deemed to be "disparaging language."

Richmond tenants have waited long enough for landlords to be held accountable for uninhabitable living conditions. A rental inspection program must be prioritized now!

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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Leader of the Month

Hannah Ainsworth - Wythe County Chapter

Hannah has been a valuable leader of the Wythe County Chapter, having committed her time and effort to chapter activities. She has provided food, door prizes, photo booth materials, and graphic design items, and has worked on tons of research for the chapter.

Our Wythe County Chapter Organizer, Glenda, said that she “could go on and on about Hannah. She is a true believer in Virginia Organizing.”

Glenda also shared that there is “not one task I request of Hannah that she doesn't do unless her work schedule prevents her,” and that there have been times when she was the only person to come out to tabling events or canvassing with her.

Hannah expressed her enjoyment of the chapter and the impact that it has had on her and the community.

“I have really enjoyed my time with Virginia Organizing. I have learned so much about state and local policies and ways our voices can help shape meaningful, positive change in our communities. It has been great connecting with folks, both locally and across the state,” said Hannah.

