

## News from the Grassroots

January 2025

Issue 145

### Virginia General Assembly Chapter Visits



Martinsville Chapter members with Senator William Stanley, Jr. and Delegate Eric Phillips



Halifax/South Boston Chapter with Senator Tammy Brankley Mulchi



Wythe County Chapter leaders with Delegate Jonathan Arnold



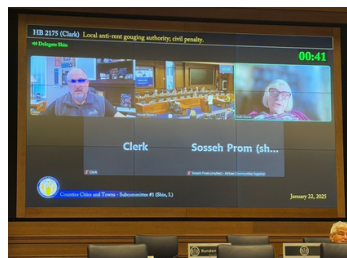
Virginia Organizing and Virginia Promise Partnership members meeting with Delegate Hillary Pugh Kent



Abidiya Simms testifying in support of HB 2195



Members of Virginia Organizing, New Virginia Majority, CASA, and the Richmond Legal Aid Justice Center



Housing Strategy Committee member, Ruth Grene, testifying in support of HB 2175



Environmental Justice Strategy Committee member, Kimberly Dyke-Harsley, testifying in support of HB 1894

Several of our chapters have been represented at the General Assembly session so far, including Martinsville, Wythe County, Richmond, and Halifax/South Boston. Our members met with legislators, shared our legislative priorities, and testified before committees in support of specific bills.

Not only have our chapters been holding individual meetings with legislators, but we have also been participating in lobby days with other partner groups targeting specific issues like child care, housing, and tenant rights.

We are also celebrating the success of the constitutional amendments ([SJ 247](#), [SJ 248](#), and [SJ 249](#)) that were passed and are starting to plan for next session. We will need to help get legislators who will support these amendments in 2026 elected this fall!

### Delivering Greeting Cards to Legislators at the General Assembly



During the first full week of the 2025 Virginia General Assembly session, we handed out greeting cards to all the state legislators. The cards presented stories from constituents across the state, centering on the issues of mold in rental properties, extreme heat in prisons, and high utility bills. These issues corresponded with bills that the organization is supporting during the session.

Jessica from Charlottesville shared, "My apartment had so much mold the white curtains appeared black. I have chronic asthma, so I had to choose between my health and having a house. So, I ended up homeless."

The cards urged our state representatives to vote for bills that will allow Virginians to "have safe and healthy housing." Several of the greeting card recipients expressed delight in receiving the cards and commended VO for delivering priorities in such a creative way.

#### Stories from Virginians

##### Heat in Prisons

"I've been in places like Greenville, Nottoway, and Mecklenburg that have been so hot you thought you saw the devil in the corner." **-Darnell, Richmond**

"For approximately five hours a day we may, if allowed out of the cell, get to simply be without the inhuman exposure of extreme heat." **-Eunette, Greenville Correctional**

##### Utility Bills Way Too High!

"One time I paid about \$400 one month! My partner went around the house trying to fix things to keep the air in. Sometimes I use the space heater so I don't have to use the heat. Wintertime is rough with Dominion!" **-Aqafia, Portsmouth**

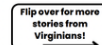
"As an older adult, I have received bills as high as \$800. While I am on the AFCD average monthly payment plan, the \$328 is still TOO high for a fixed income senior!" **-Louise, Wytheville**



As the New Year arrives, we are asking you to vote so that everyone thrives!

This year we are asking you to make a resolution to support legislation that addresses heat in prisons, keeps utilities and rent costs low, and enables the study of mold so all Virginians can have safe and healthy housing!

-Virginia Organizing



##### Mold in Rental Properties

"My apartment had so much mold the white curtains appeared black. I have chronic asthma, so I had to choose between my health and having a house, so I ended up homeless." **-Jessica, Charlottesville**

"I live in income-based housing and have fought tooth and nail for my landlord to fix the mold in my home for my three boys. My couches, shoes, anything with fabric is COVERED in mold and I can't stop it from growing. My youngest has chronic bronchitis and we all struggle with breathing issues." **-Abidiya, Richmond**

"Within two weeks we noticed there was no A/C in over 100 degree weather, infestation of roaches, mold, unsecured door, broken windows, the list goes on and it was ignored by my landlord over and over again. My youngest daughter is experiencing health problems since that apartment." **-Amijya, Hampton**

Please email [info@virginia-organizing.org](mailto:info@virginia-organizing.org) with any questions or if you wish to speak with constituents about these issues!

### Richmond Protest for Housing and Response to Water Crisis

Our Richmond Chapter and other members of the Richmond Housing Collective protested at City Hall in response to the Richmond water crisis this month. The chapter showed up in numbers to urge the mayor to declare a state of emergency and temporarily stop evictions and allocate funds for rent relief. The collective stated that suspending eviction-related cases would "give residents time to make up lost income due to the water issues."

Read more about the protest [here](#).

# Wythe County MLK Day Program and March



In honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day this month, our Wythe County Chapter held a MLK Day program and march in Wytheville. With a great turnout, the program featured music and a keynote address by Roger "Marijuana Martyr" Davis, before the group marched through the streets in honor of the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

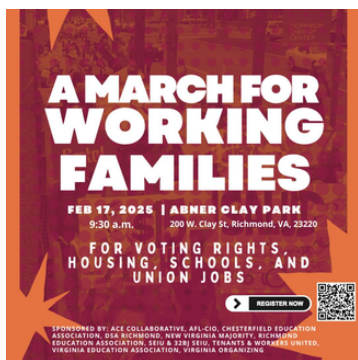
Chapter leader, Kerry Eans, [shared with WDBJ7](#) that this year's program was "one of the best ones we've ever had... [Davis] brought a bigger meaning to what Dr. King stood for and what he was trying to do and what he was recognized for."



## 30th Anniversary of Virginia Organizing!

We are excited to announce that 2025 is the 30th year of Virginia Organizing! With all of you, we have been building power for three decades - and we couldn't be happier about it! Stay tuned for information about how we will be celebrating and ways to get involved! Your continued support and contributions make a huge difference in Virginia.

## March for Housing, Voting Rights, and Labor Rights on February 17



Click [here](#) for more information about the event.



# Featured Community Partner | Ranked Choice Virginia (RCV)



If you are one of the many who is fed-up with the toxic state of democracy in the United States, you might be interested in supporting a movement that seeks to restore some sanity to electoral discourse through a simple reform in the way we vote: ranked choice voting. Instead of reducing every race to a binary choice that might feel like a choice between two evils who are not responsive to your community's interests, ranked choice allows for diversity to flourish on the ballot, and incentivizes collaboration rather than polarization.

Here in Virginia, Ranked Choice Virginia (RCV), which has a joint plan of work with Virginia Organizing, is leading the charge, with former Delegate Sally Hudson at the helm.

"I served four years in the General Assembly and encountered countless voters who were frustrated if not downright depressed about the state of American democracy," Hudson says. "Lots of people feel like their vote doesn't really matter - and they're not always wrong. Our current pick-one, winner-take-all elections mean voters get fewer options and less power at the ballot box, but it doesn't have to be that way."

What is ranked choice voting? It is exactly what it sounds like: instead of voting for just one candidate, voters are presented with a list of candidates and asked to rank them according to preference. To win a race, a candidate must amass a majority of votes, and ranked choice ballots provide an instant run-off mechanism in the event that no single candidate gets more than 50% of the votes on the first round. In the run-off, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated, and their supporters' votes are transferred to their second choice. This procedure is repeated until a winner is determined.

This method allows for diversity on the ballot by giving third-party candidates a chance to be considered on their own merits rather than merely as spoilers to the dominant two political parties. According to the Ranked Choice Voting website, "this encourages candidates to embrace what they have in common and draw distinctions on substantive issues," thus mitigating political polarization and encouraging coalition building. To learn more about how ranked choice voting works (including helpful diagrams) visit [RCV's website](#).

RCV was established in 2021 after the passage of Virginia's first ranked choice legislation. They have successfully implemented ranked choice voting in Arlington County in 2023, and will bring ranked choice to the City of Charlottesville elections in 2025. With campaigns active in Albemarle County, Fairfax City, and Newport News, Hudson believes Virginia is on the same trajectory that brought ballot reform all the way to state and federal elections in Maine and Alaska.



"The strongest ranked choice voting movements start at the local level," she says. "In Maine, Portland residents started using ranked choice to elect their mayor in 2011, and by 2018 Mainers were using it to pick members of Congress. Virginia is now in those early stages." Beyond these two states, over 50 cities across the US use ranked choice to pick elected officials. Hudson says that now is the perfect time to be in touch with your local representatives about adopting ranked choice voting in your community. You can get started by signing RCV's [petition](#), and they will follow up to connect you with other supporters in your area.

## 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

### Kathy Logan - Danville Chapter

Kathy Logan is a member of our Danville Chapter and has participated in a number of workshops, chapter activities, meetings, and events. She is also the secretary of the chapter and provides food during chapter meetings.



"I make sure everyone gets to our meeting and I fix a home cooked meal," said Kathy.

Not only has Kathy participated in chapter-specific activities, she has also [spoken with the Danville Register & Bee](#) on behalf of Virginia Organizing about affordable housing needs.

Congratulations, Kathy! Thank you for all you do to build power with us!

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