



The South Hampton Roads Chapter held a restoration of civil rights clinic on February 3 to help returning citizens gain access to rights like voting, serving on a jury, and serving in public office.



Leaders in the Harrisonburg Chapter held a "Know Your Rights" workshop for immigrants in their community. The workshop covered civil rights in the event of an immigration enforcement raid in the area.



The Fredericksburg Chapter delivered a Valentine's Day wreath to Virginia Speaker of the House of Delegates Bill Howell's office asking him to "show some love" to constituents without access to health insurance by expanding Medicaid.

News From the Grassroots

Mothers and Others Organizing on Climate Change Issues

Virginia Organizing has teamed up with Mothers Out Front, an organization working to raise awareness among parents, particularly moms, who may be concerned about how climate change will affect future generations. The South Hampton Roads Chapter has been organizing house parties with Mothers Out Front to facilitate these conversations with those directly affected by local flooding.

"I am excited to facilitate these conversations because I believe that once people are given the information on the risks of flooding and dangers of sea level rise in South Hampton Roads, they will be compelled to take action," said Virginia Organizing leader Peggy Caverly. "Our message is simple, but urgent—we need to raise awareness of the danger our area residents are in so we can focus on creating plans and solutions in the event of a disaster."

The Chapter's Environmental Justice Team met in mid-February to discuss the progress of the house parties.

"Each party that we hold, we are seeing new people get excited about what they can do to help their community now and

in the future," said Caverly. "The women that have been coming to the house parties really want to make a difference now and for posterity."

The house party model for discussing climate change came from the idea that people feel more comfortable discussing complicated issues in a home space than they would in a big meeting space. Those who come to the house parties are also able to ask questions without the pressure of public speaking. A conversational format helps everyone feel relaxed and allows for more productive discussion and brainstorming new ideas.

"I co-facilitated a house party recently and I was absolutely thrilled at how the relaxed atmosphere combined with information got the mothers involved and ready to take action on climate change," said South Hampton Roads Environmental Justice Team member Carolyn Caywood. "The house parties are real grassroots organizing to build the widespread movement it will take to make change. One image that stays with me is an image of a seesaw with the financial weight of the fossil fuel industry counterbalanced by ordinary folks gathered together to make change."

Mothers Out Front chose to engage moms specifically because of the common threads across motherhood. Moms will do anything to protect their

children and understand that the choices moms make now influence the future of their children and grandchildren. Not all participants in the house parties are mothers, but all are women who have children they love in their lives.

Mothers are also major decision-makers in households. Consumer studies have consistently shown that moms make most purchasing choices for their families and are often the ones actually making the purchase.

Purchasing and consumer behavior matters because it means that moms have power to make changes that will affect their families and other families. For example, when a mother attends a house party and learns about climate change, she may choose more eco-friendly products or packaging to lessen her carbon footprint. When the primary household purchaser makes those conscious decisions for her family, manufacturers are more likely to respond to the demand for green products created using clean energy.

While house parties are a more relaxed style of engagement, the result is powerful—groups of women, organized, to form a movement to stop the harmful effects of climate change by changing current practices and supporting more sustainability for the long run. That's something all of us can support!

Real people. Real change.

Barbara Kingsolver Coming to Charlottesville

Critically acclaimed author Barbara Kingsolver is coming to the Paramount Theater in Charlottesville on Friday, April 22 at 7 p.m. for an Earth Day conversation. All proceeds from this event will benefit Virginia Organizing. Barbara Kingsolver was named one of the most important writers of the 20th Century by Writers Digest and received the National Humanities Medal, the highest honor for service through the arts, in 2000. She has authored many works, including *The Poisonwood Bible* (1998), *Prodigal Summer* (2000), *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (2007), and many other award-winning publications.

Tickets are available at <http://bit.ly/kingsolverearthday>. Students may purchase a discounted ticket. If you would like to attend, but cannot afford a ticket, or if you would like to donate a ticket for someone who cannot afford one, please contact Michele Mattioli at 434-984-4655 ext. 223.

Standing in the Way

Virginia Organizing is committed to work for Medicaid expansion until every eligible Virginian has access to this program that our tax dollars are supporting. The lack of health insurance for women is especially troubling. No person in Virginia without children (or pregnant) is currently eligible for Medicaid. But there are many mothers carrying the load of being a single parent without the security of health insurance to care for themselves.

Our current system demands that women work a job to receive assistance, but many jobs pay too much for an adult to qualify under current Medicaid restrictions and too little to qualify for subsidies under the

Affordable Care Act. As a result, women are missing annual health screenings that can prevent heart disease, stroke, cancer, and other deadly and expensive conditions.

When we fly in an airplane, we are always told that in an emergency we should put the oxygen mask on ourselves before we help those around us. Women without health insurance are flying without access to oxygen masks and are forced to make difficult decisions between their own health care needs and other family necessities.

The Fredericksburg Chapter delivered a Valentine's wreath to Virginia Speaker of the House of Delegates Bill Howell's district office to remind him of the 2,000 people just in his district who are eligible for expansion. But Speaker Howell's obstruction of Medicaid expansion has further reaching consequences for all Virginians. Will you take action? Read below for more information.

February Action Step

Call Speaker of the House of Delegates Bill Howell at (804) 698-1028 and tell him: "I want you to stand with women by expanding access to health care. Virginians, especially Virginia's women, need real health insurance, not charity care. I support Medicaid expansion."

Still Collecting Photo Petitions

Do you want the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) to issue strong regulations for predatory lenders? Take a photo of yourself (or friends) holding a sign with your first name, last initial, and city, and ask them to #StopTheDebtTrap! Send your photo to amanda@virginia-organizing.org.

Leader of the Month Ronna Wertmann



Born to deaf parents, Ronna Wertmann has been a bridge between deaf and hearing communities all her life. When her mom was in the hospital without access to appropriate interpretation

services, Ronna got busy to make sure others in the deaf community would not have that same experience.

After months of calls and getting no answers to her questions, she was at a loss for what to do next. Ronna learned of a Virginia bill concerning the issue of access to effective communication in hospitals. She wrote to her state senator for his support. The bill passed, but she was concerned about how it would go into effect.

One day a friend brought a petition to church with the Virginia Organizing logo on it. That sparked a discussion and Ronna started attending the local SAW Chapter meetings with as many people as she could invite to find more ways to raise awareness.

In very little time, Ronna and other members of the deaf community—as members of Virginia Organizing—were making progress. She was invited to stakeholder meetings on the new law. This led to Chapter members meeting with administrators at Augusta Health. Two weeks after that meeting, Augusta Health gave them a firm list of steps to improve access to services.

"All of this is so much more than I could have imagined," said Ronna. "I learned so much about the power of community organizing through this process! Virginia Organizing really does encourage and believe in the participation of people directly affected and I'm glad our local Chapter took this issue on."


Thank you, Ronna, for raising your voice and organizing locally!

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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Local Chapters and Areas Served

Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro
Charlottesville/Albemarle County
Danville
Harrisonburg/Rockingham County
Fredericksburg
Lee County
Lynchburg
Martinsville/Henry County
New River Valley
Roanoke
South Hampton Roads
Washington County
On Campus: UMW, VSU, CNU, UVA, E&H,
U of R, ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU

 www.facebook.com/virginiaorganizing
@VAOrganizing

News in Brief

- Augusta Health continues to report to the Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro Chapter on progress made in updating accessibility and access for deaf and hard of hearing patients. They are making positive changes!
- The South Hampton Roads Chapter continued the "Children for Change" campaign this month to engage young people in community organizing.
- Virginia Organizing held a restoration of rights training for Fluvanna residents interested in helping returning citizens restore their civil rights. After leaders were trained, they held a clinic to help local residents apply to restore their rights.
- The Charlottesville Chapter is selling raffle tickets for a week in Hilton Head, South Carolina! Contact your local organizer or call 434-984-4655 ext. 222 for tickets. For more information, see our flyer at <http://bit.ly/hiltonheadraffle>
- Virginia Organizing released the Alliance for a Just Society's report, "Patchwork of Paychecks" to highlight the need for living wage and access to Medicaid expansion. Portsmouth resident Shelia Carter was featured in this report. You can find more information about this at <http://thejobgap.org>.

www.virginia-organizing.org