



The Harrisonburg Chapter celebrated the anniversary of Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) and expanded Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) while standing in support of refugees coming to the U.S.



Members of the Fredericksburg Chapter met with Dr. Stephen Scott Baker, Superintendent of Spotsylvania County Schools, to discuss unjust and overzealous punishments in local schools known as the school-to-prison-pipeline.



Virginia Organizing in Martinsville-Henry County worked with Enroll Virginia to share information about health care enrollment on the Federal Health Insurance Marketplace.

News From the Grassroots

Danville Chief of Police and Virginia Organizing Highlight Citizen Complaint Process

On Wednesday, December 9, in front of reporters from almost every major news network in the Roanoke and Southside Virginia areas, Virginia Organizing held a joint media conference with Danville Chief of Police Philip Broadfoot to highlight the complaint process for community members in the event they feel that an officer acted inappropriately or that they were mistreated by a police officer.

Ebony Guy, a leader in the Danville Chapter of Virginia Organizing and one of the organizers of this event, saw this announcement as a sign of progress in police-community relations.

“Over the last six years, members of Virginia Organizing have been meeting with Danville City Police Chief Philip Broadfoot to discuss community and law enforcement relationships,” said Guy. “We’re pleased to announce this joint venture to ensure that citizens know how to make a complaint and what will happen once they do. This is one of many steps Virginia Organizing has taken to improve police-community relations.”

Following the most recent round of

meetings inspired by the #BlackLivesMatter movement across the country, Virginia Organizing leaders and Chief Broadfoot agreed that highlighting both the availability of complaint forms and how the complaint process worked would lay the groundwork for better community relationships, which will lead to safer communities.

“A clear and easy to use complaint process is critical for fostering citizen confidence in a police agency,” said Broadfoot. “The Danville Police Department provides complaint forms in the lobby of the department and on our website. We will also accept complaints in person or over the telephone. We encourage any citizen who believes they have been unprofessionally treated to consider these options. Complaints will be thoroughly investigated and tracked.”

The Danville Chapter also recruited the Boys and Girls Club of the Danville Area and First State Bank to serve as host sites to expand the availability of complaint forms.

Following the press conference, Virginia Organizing members canvassed the surrounding neighborhood to inform residents directly of the availability of the forms.

In the past, Virginia Organizing leaders have heard from local Danville residents that they want to trust the police but have

felt discriminated against or were racially profiled in the past, making trust difficult.

Highlighting the complaint form showed the community that the Danville police department is willing to take action to address these concerns, but it is not the only improvement the department has made recently.

Virginia Organizing leaders were also present when Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring announced a grant to the Danville police department for a pilot program to recruit new officers that are more diverse and representative of the city.

Danville Chapter leader Lashawn Farmer is cautiously optimistic about this new program.

“We have raised similar issues with Chief Broadfoot over the last few years. I am happy for this announcement but most interested in seeing outcomes and results. Given the police department’s willingness to hear from community organizations like Virginia Organizing, I am hopeful that this effort will take hold in Danville,” said Farmer.

While ongoing work will be needed to ensure fairer policing that builds community relationships in Danville, the hiring diversity program and letting citizens know how to file a complaint are a good start to improvements.

Real people. Real change.

Federal EITC and CTC Tax Credits Made Permanent

Early in December, while Congress was deciding whether or not to pass a continuing resolution to fund the government as debates around the federal budget continued, Virginia Organizing asked our leaders to call Congress and ask that they not give big tax breaks to corporations and make two tax credits that support families permanent. Unfortunately, Congress made some corporate tax breaks permanent. Fortunately, they also made the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) permanent.

According to data from the Brookings Institution analysis of Supplemental Poverty Measure Public Use Data, 160,339 Virginians were kept out of poverty because of the EITC and CTC and 94,191 Virginians were kept out of poverty from EITC alone between 2009-2011. Virginia Organizing is glad that families will receive these important tax credits and will continue to work to stop big corporations from receiving unnecessary tax breaks.

Ready for a Great New Year!

It's the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 and Virginia Organizing is asking our supporters to help us grow in the coming year and beyond. If you like reading about great victories in Virginia like supporting diversity in hiring in Harrisonburg or accessibility for the deaf community in local hospitals, will you consider making a donation? You can make a donation at <http://bit.ly/vaorgdonate> to help us reach our goals of more organizers in Virginia. If you'd like to spread out your donations over the course of a year, you can become a

monthly sustainer. To be a sustainer, please complete the form found at <http://bit.ly/vaorgsustainer> and return to Sally Bastian at bastian@virginia-organizing.org or 703 Concord Avenue, Charlottesville, VA 22903. You can also contact Sally with any questions. Our current sustainer gifts range from \$3-\$300 a month and every donation means more grassroots organizing for social justice! Thank you for your support!

Augusta Health to Improve Services for Deaf Community

When a member of the deaf community goes to the hospital and needs an interpreter, what does the law require? Not enough. Deaf people in the Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro Chapter had the choice of using hospital video interpretation equipment that did not always work because of wifi connectivity interruptions, having family members interpret sensitive medical information that may or may not make sense to the patient, or not understanding what was happening. The Chapter adopted this issue as a local campaign and got to work setting up meetings with the local hospital representative and developing a list of things they would like to see put into place.

After a meeting with Augusta Health on December 1, hospital officials determined that they would take all the steps outlined by the deaf community leaders to make interpreters more available, add flags to a chart to indicate hearing loss, update equipment, involve nursing supervisors whenever a deaf patient comes to the hospital, increase training for staff, continue to meet with Virginia Organizing, and more.

This exciting local victory was possible because community members brought an issue to their local Virginia Organizing Chapter. What a great example of creating real systemic change that has an effect on the lives of real people in the community! Great work, SAW Chapter!

Leader of the Month Neal Mullins



Neal Mullins did not know much about natural gas hydrofracking three years ago and he had never heard of Virginia Organizing. After purchasing some land and seeing signs about potential fracking in the area, he decided to attend a

Board of Supervisors meeting in Washington County where he met members of Virginia Organizing. After that meeting, he wanted to learn everything he could about this issue.

Neal started coming to Virginia Organizing meetings and learned more about the local and statewide issues the Chapter was working on.

"I'm not political, but I am really concerned with the quality of our water and what we leave our kids," said Neal.

Neal took action in his community by attending local protests, writing letters to the editor, and meeting with supervisors to discuss this issue. Since the Board of Supervisors opted to allow hydrofracking, Neal and others have committed to testing water for people to get a baseline measure of contaminants in case fracking begins in the area.

"I've been in meetings with our state delegate and members of the media," said Neal. "It is nice to have an organization that helps people know what's going on and gets us involved in our community."

Neal's passion for his community shows in his willingness to fight for a better future for all Southwest Virginians.



Thank you, Neal, for all your hard work!

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

- Virginia Organizing is still surveying small businesses in Virginia to find out what matters to local small businesses. If you or someone you know owns a small business, please ask them to fill out our survey at <http://bit.ly/VMSAsurvey>.
- The South Hampton Roads Chapter held its first Flood of Voices house party in December to connect mothers who care about climate change and those who are directly affected by local flooding.
- Virginia Organizing received local proclamations this month honoring our 20th anniversary in Pennington Gap, Richmond, and Petersburg and we anticipate more.
- The emerging Chapter in Lynchburg celebrated a local victory when the Amherst County Board of Supervisors repealed an ordinance that could have been used to discriminate against returning citizens seeking employment or business licenses.
- Virginia Organizing has several emerging Chapters gaining ground in Virginia! If you are interested in joining with New River Valley leaders, contact Andrae Hash at ahash@virginia-organizing.org; Roanoke leaders, contact Keith Johnson at keith@virginia-organizing.org; and Lynchburg leaders, contact Haley Wilson at haley@virginia-organizing.org.

www.virginia-organizing.org