



Leaders of the Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro Chapter spoke at the Staunton City Council meeting to encourage the city to "ban the box" (the criminal history question) on all public job applications.



There was standing room only in the Charlottesville office for the 20th anniversary open house! Visitors learned about Virginia Organizing history, shared stories and snacks, and donated anniversary presents.



Debra Grant of the South Hampton Roads Chapter participates in a protest against the lawsuit brought against Virginia in the uranium mining ban. Her sign reads: "We like our bay and ocean uranium free."

News From the Grassroots

Virginia Organizing Adds 'Women's Issues' to List of Priorities

Virginia Organizing kicked off the "Stand with Women" campaign across the Commonwealth with a series of local women's roundtables in Danville, Waynesboro, Petersburg, and Blacksburg. The roundtable discussions are designed to empower women to speak out on issues that are important to them, cross racial and cultural lines to address struggles specific to women of color, and promote women's leadership in organizing for action on these issues.

Throughout its 20-year history, Virginia Organizing has always placed emphasis on diversity and encouraged participation and leadership from women. The recent campaign is an effort to ensure that low-income women and women of color are being heard in discussions about women's issues in Virginia.

"As we know, sometimes women's issues are framed from the perspective of white women," said Virginia Organizing Chairperson Sandra A. Cook. "Virginia Organizing's goal is to do what we always do —empower people who have been oppressed to organize for change. With the 'Stand with Women' campaign, our focus is on making sure the voices of all women, especially low-income women and women of color, are heard and valued in discussions on women's issues."

In recent years, political attacks on women's health have increased at the state and federal levels. The passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act in 2010 was a victory for women, since insurers would no longer be able to charge higher premiums for women, health care plans would need to include birth control and preventive care like annual cervical cancer screenings at no cost to the insured, and low-income women would be able to qualify for Medicaid under the expansion of the program. The U.S. Supreme Court and Virginia's General Assembly undid some of these victories in the years that followed.

Since 2012, corporations have won the right to discriminate against women by not offering birth control in employee health plans, Virginia (and other states) have left hundreds of thousands of women out of the health care system entirely by refusing to expand Medicaid, laws have been passed to restrict access to women's health centers that provide reproductive choice, and the rhetoric against women's full access to health care is only increasing.

Virginia Organizing is fighting back through grassroots community organizing efforts that place an emphasis on local people taking action in their districts. As part of the "Stand with Women" campaign, Virginia Organizing supporters called on Virginia Delegate Terry Kilgore to stand with women and expand Medicaid. Delegate Kilgore represents Southwest Virginia, where a hospital closed in

part due to lack of Medicaid expansion, which further restricts access to health care.

"The women's roundtables and actions like calling Virginia Delegate Terry Kilgore give us an opportunity to talk about these issues from the perspective of women who are often left out of the conversation," Rosa Leyva from Weyers Cave.

Economic inequality is directly tied to health care access. But women's issues have further reaching consequences than health care, which is why Virginia Organizing's "Stand with Women" campaign aims to address broader concerns that affect women. Virginia Organizing supports abolishing maternity and family leave penalties at work, raising wages and providing equal pay for equal work, fair and equal reproductive rights for women, and investing in women and families with affordable child care, education, job training, and retirement security for a better future.

A woman who is already struggling to financially provide for herself or her family will be more severely economically affected by adding child care costs, lost income from missed work (since the U.S. does not have a paid maternal leave policy in place), hospital bills from delivery, potential developmental delays and costs associated with increased care for children whose mothers did not have access to prenatal care, and more. Virginia Organizing wants to change that.

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Real people. Real change.

Women's Issues, Cont'd

"Women are already struggling with lower wages than our male counterparts," said Virginia Organizing Petersburg Chapter leader Eva Greenwood. "We have to fight for access to jobs, we have to fight to make a fair wage, we have to fight to have any semblance of economic security. People always throw out that women make '77 cents for every dollar a man makes' but that's not true for women of color. We make far less than that."

Through the "Stand with Women" campaign, Virginia Organizing will continue to organize women-only, women-led roundtables and meetings in Fredericksburg, Petersburg, Charlottesville, and other towns across the state. These meetings will help identify what issues are most pressing to the women most commonly left out of the political decision making process and then empower those folks to work on campaigns to address those issues. Virginia Organizing will coordinate these efforts with other organizations.

Virginia Organizing will also continue to ask local, state, and federal elected officials to stand with women by supporting policies that positively affect women and expanding Medicaid at the state level.

Danville Chapter Celebrates Vote to Remove Confederate Flag

The Danville Chapter worked with other groups over the last year to get the Confederate flag removed from city-owned property. Initial efforts were not successful due to confusion about a state law by city officials, but Chapter leaders did not want to quit. After the South Carolina massacre in an African American church, renewed calls to take down the flag came from all across the U.S. In August,

Virginia Organizing supporters made dozens of phone calls to Danville City Council, distributed flyers in the community, and issued a media release. Their efforts paid off. City Council voted to remove the flag from city property!

20th Anniversary Book Released, Will Be Available at Grassroots Gathering

What does it take to build a successful, diverse, powerful grassroots organization in a state that was once home to the Capital of the Confederacy? Virginia Organizing has been working for 20 years to build power and create changes all across Virginia — starting in the region farthest from Richmond to empower directly affected people whose voices are often drowned out by systemic oppression and left out of traditional political power structures. From a local campaign in 1998 to diversify an all-white jury pool in Lee County to the arrests in 2014 of Virginia Organizing leaders demanding immigration reform in Washington, D.C., *Building Power, Changing Lives: The Story of Virginia Organizing* tells the story of how our growing organization is persistently working for long-term, sustainable change in Virginia.

The book is available for purchase now at <http://bit.ly/vaorgbook>. All proceeds from purchases made through Virginia Organizing will benefit the organization. You can also purchase the book at our annual Grassroots Gathering, October 9-11. Books are \$15 if picked up and \$20 if mailed.

Virginia Organizing will also hold a big statewide celebration at the annual Grassroots Gathering in Blackstone, Va. on October 10 at the Blackstone Conference and Retreat Center. Registration is still open! Visit gg2015.eventbrite.com or contact your local organizer to register.

Leader of the Month Camil Davis



Camil Davis has been a Petersburg Chapter leader for almost a year. She is actively involved in the local food desert campaign and has a passion for getting people active in her community.

"Petersburg is a food desert, which means we have little to no access to fresh and healthy foods in our community," said Camil. "We are a high poverty area, but we still need to be able to access good food. I'm working with Virginia Organizing to help change this."

Camil enjoys talking to people and connecting with community members who are directly affected by issues. She appreciates that Virginia Organizing is focused on the grassroots level for change. "So many people start at the top, but change occurs in the community," Camil said.

Camil also wants to see more people in her community get active. She believes, "the more hands we have, the more we can get done. The more power we have, the more likely we are to make changes."

"Virginia Organizing really does make a difference in people's lives by involving the entire Chapter in the process," said Camil. "I am proud to be a part of an organization that has been around for 20 years and I'm excited to see what growth and change is in store for the future of Virginia Organizing!"

Thank you, Camil, for your leadership in your local Chapter and your great work with Virginia Organizing!

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
Richmond
Roanoke
South Hampton Roads
Tri-Cities/Petersburg
Washington County
On Campus: UMW, VSU, CNU, UVA, E&H,
U of R, ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU

News in Brief

- Starting in October, state employees will be eligible to make donations through payroll withholding in the Commonwealth Campaign! Virginia Organizing's code is 3168. These donations help us expand our grassroots organizing capacity. Please contact Sally Bastian at 434-984-4655 ext. 229 or bastian@virginia-organizing.org with questions. Thanks for your support!
- The Fredericksburg and Petersburg Chapters teamed up to host their first regional leadership training!
- The Lynchburg Chapter is forming! Contact Haley Wilson at haley@virginia-organizing.org for more information if you are interested in being a part of this Chapter.
- South Hampton Roads Chapter leaders attended dozens of community events to register voters and get information out to those who need their civil rights restored to vote.
- Virginia Organizing raised thousands of dollars during The Amazing Raise this year! Thanks to everyone who donated or helped spread the word.

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