



VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

News from the Grassroots

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Success in the Augusta Health Campaign!

Leaders in the Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro Chapter have worked for the last two years to convince Augusta Health administrators to develop new practices so that health care will be fully accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing.



Rita Wertman (right) asks a question at the Augusta Health Information Session. Rita is a Virginia Organizing leader in the Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro Chapter. She requires American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation to access health care.

At a recent information session, the hospital unveiled their new technology and showed the community they had improved their services. According to Ronna Wertman, one of the leaders of the campaign, "All patients will be asked at pre-registration whether they require interpretation or any accommodation for their needs. A video remote interpreting unit that is innovative, hard wired, stand alone, and visible from a bed is available to patients. Live interpretation is also available."

"Disability Awareness and Sensitivity Training is required for all hospital employees every year, and after training they have to pass a test," she said. "Augusta Health now meets the gold standard of care for deaf and hard of hearing patients!"



Ronna Wertman (right) and interpreter Wendy Fletcher welcome attendees at the Augusta Health Information Center. Wendy is signing the word "information."

Virginia Organizing hopes to organize with the deaf community and other hospitals throughout Virginia to help them provide the same benefits to patients.

Leader of the Month

Nagolia "Goldie" Wells was at the very first meeting of the Portsmouth Chapter of Virginia Organizing—and she hasn't stopped since!



"Meghan, our organizer, came to one of my civic league meetings back in 2016," said Goldie. "A few of us decided to go check it out. I went to the first meeting and was hooked—it was what I needed."

Since that first meeting, Goldie has worked with parents and community members to develop the chapter's school-to-prison pipeline campaign. On August 5, they celebrated victory when the Portsmouth School Board voted to change the student code of conduct to reduce suspensions and relax harmful zero tolerance policies.

Within the chapter, Goldie has worked to keep other members engaged. By encouraging people when they want to give up, making phone calls to register people for the Grassroots Gathering, and helping develop new leaders, she has strengthened the membership of the Portsmouth Chapter.

"If you have a heart and care about people, it's a beautiful organization to be in," said Goldie. "If you don't know what to do, we'll give you the tools you need to get things done. I've seen people's lives changed." When asked what Virginia Organizing means to her, Goldie had one thing to say: "We're helping a lot of people get a real sense of power." Thank you, Goldie, for building a more just Virginia!

Take Action!

Please call your member of the U.S. House of Representatives and ask them to vote against cuts to education and health care. House operators can be reached at (202) 224-3121. To find your representative online, try <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find/>.

Success in the Portsmouth School Board Campaign

For the last 15 months, leaders in the Portsmouth Chapter have been fighting the school-to-prison pipeline by asking the Portsmouth School Board to change their code of conduct to reduce student suspensions. Student suspensions can cause children to fail in school and even lead to juvenile detention and prison. On August 5, the campaign achieved its goal! The School Board voted for a new code of conduct, which...

- creates different guidelines for elementary school children and high school students
- treats toy weapons differently from real ones, so that children are not expelled for having water pistols at school
- protects children who were fighting in self defense from being punished
- reduces zero tolerance infractions

Congratulations Portsmouth!



Grassroots Gathering 2017 Join us!

We will be making connections and building power again this year at the Grassroots Gathering. From September 29 - October 1 we will meet at beautiful Smith Mountain Lake in the 4H Center. Participants will be able to relax, have fun, and participate in workshops about transforming their communities with effective organizing. We've seen real change come from past Grassroots Gatherings and want you to be a part of the experience this fall!

To register, visit our website at www.virginia-organizing.org/grassroots2017

Immigrant Rights

The Harrisonburg Chapter met in July with Police Chief Stephen Monticelli and other officials. Chief Monticelli expressed a desire for better communication and rapport between police and the community and agreed to several of their requests...

- He agreed to speak with state legislators about the need for everyone to have drivers' licenses regardless of immigration status.
- He agreed to work with other city leaders to plan a de-tox unit that is badly needed.
- He agreed to provide the community with opportunities for police and residents to get to know each other, understand, and work together.

Staff News

Welcome to our newest organizer, Robert Kell! Robert will be taking over the organizing of the Lee County and Washington County Chapters. Robert grew up in Smyth County in the southwest and is a graduate of the University of Virginia where he first encountered political organizing. He participated in the Living Wage Campaign and Workers and Students United. Robert is one of the founders of YAP: Young Appalachian Patriots, a group dedicated to mobilizing young people in the mountains for regional prosperity and a democratic society. We are fortunate to have him join us!

Brian Johns and his family have moved to Charlottesville because Brian will be stepping into the Executive Director's shoes next January. Joe Szakos will take a six-month sabbatical in February and then return to help in whatever ways Brian and the State Governing Board want him to. Welcome back to Charlottesville, Brian!

Local Chapters and Areas Served:

Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro, Charlottesville/Albemarle County, Danville, Eastern Shore, Harrisonburg/Rockingham County, Fredericksburg, Lee County, Lynchburg, Martinsville/Henry County, New River Valley, Portsmouth, Roanoke, South Hampton Roads, Washington County

On Campus: UMW, UVA, E&H, U of R, ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU

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