



# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## News from the Grassroots

September/October 2017 Issue 76

### Affordable Housing Forum in Fredericksburg

After the Fredericksburg Chapter completed its successful campaign to disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline, they began a process of discernment about what to do next. What did they want to see change in their community?



Leaders in the chapter focused on affordable housing as an issue that united a large number of them. Seniors who had lived in the area for many years were forced out of their homes by increasing real estate taxes. Low wage workers found they couldn't afford to buy any homes in the area. No one could find good rental homes or apartments they could afford.

All of the issues related to cost of living, such as lack of a living wage and high cost of health care, affected them. They chose housing because it was something the city planning commission and other local agencies could address.

The Forum created an opening where local groups and residents could understand the need for affordable housing and what the obstacles are.

"As a pastor of a local church in a working-class neighborhood," said Rev. Doug McCusker, "I see what happens when people get priced out of their apartments and homes. It is devastating to them and the community. We are at a critical juncture in the economic story of Fredericksburg. I believe it is imperative that City Council work with community groups, developers, employers, and houses of worship toward creative solutions that retain affordable housing while enabling responsible, balanced economic growth."

Panel Participants included Beth Klein from PAH, Inc., Mike Taggart from the Fall Hill Civic Association, Sarah Walsh from Rappahannock United Way, Froncé Wardlaw from Project FAITH, and Daniel Turczan from Legal Aid Works.

More than twelve Virginia Organizing leaders worked together to make the Forum possible. Duane Edwards,

a member of the State Governing Board, moderated the discussion.

The affordable housing campaign has just begun. Now the chapter will decide what to ask local decision makers to do about the problems that have been identified.

### Leader of the Month

Eric Olson-Getty came to Virginia from North Carolina in 2014. He moved for a new church—his wife is a pastor of a Mennonite congregation—but got to Harrisonburg looking for a new grassroots organization too. After being a part of Durham CAN, an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation, Eric knew that he wanted community organizing to be a part of his life in Harrisonburg.



"When I walked in the door and saw that Virginia Organizing was working on issues I cared about, it was a no-brainer and I just plugged in," said Eric.

After joining the tail end of the chapter's diversity in hiring campaign, Eric got more involved around the issues of immigration reform and policing. In these campaigns, he has worked to support communities of color—and his fellow members—as a white ally. In this role, Eric has found a place in the Harrisonburg Chapter.

"For more privileged members of chapters, take direction and don't take charge. Listen to and respect the leadership of people of color. In the Harrisonburg Chapter, I found people I could learn from and follow."

Eric sees the work of Virginia Organizing as especially timely in 2017. "I'm excited about the strengthening of community ties and bridges of solidarity," said Eric. "Given the current political context, communities are under attack and people are at risk in a way they haven't been in a while. Community organizations like Virginia Organizing are in a good position to pull people together to make a plan, make a change, and have each other's back."

Thank you, Eric, for building a more just Virginia!

## The Newest Health Care Battles

After saving the Affordable Care Act (ACA) from repeal countless times, Americans now face a new challenge to it in President Donald Trump's latest executive order. This order seeks to destroy the ACA by refusing to pay government subsidies to insurers. Without these subsidies, many people will not be able to afford the quality of plan they need.

Insurers, doctors, and hospitals have condemned the order, saying it will make markets unstable and reduce care for millions. Anthem and Optima have left Virginia's ACA Marketplace already out of fear of these losses. Insurers will be allowed to offer new plans for healthy young people outside the marketplace, raising costs for the sick even more. These plans do not have to offer many necessary medications and services, especially maternity care, birth control, and other vital benefits women need. Eighteen states are suing the Trump administration over the order.

As if that weren't enough, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to make deep cuts to Medicare and Medicaid in its 2018 budget bill. It's up to the Senate now to save these programs.

Take action to protect health care. Call Congress at (202)-224-3121 today! Tell them, "Don't cut my care to pay for tax cuts for millionaires!"

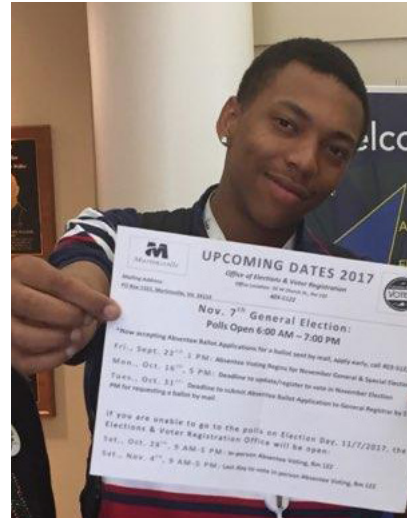


## Grassroots Gathering 2017

After this year's conference, Ebony Guy, a leader from Danville, tweeted: "I have so much love for @VAOrganizing. Here we are, representing thousands of Virginians, resisting all over the place!" If you would like to see pictures of GG2017, find them on Flickr. On our website we have videos sent to the Gathering by our Senators, Mark Warner and Tim Kaine, to encourage us in our work for justice. You can also watch inspiring videos by longtime leaders Jay Johnson and Denise Smith about Virginia Organizing's history.

## Don't Forget to Vote!

Don't forget to vote November 7! Contact your local registrar if you need information or a ride to the polls. The registrar must provide any accommodations you need if you have a disability.



## Protect DACA

On September 5, the Justice Department announced that they will no longer uphold the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. 800,000 Dreamers are depending on us to prevent them from being deported starting next year. Please tell Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform and provide a path to citizenship for all DACA recipients. Call the Congressional switchboard at (202)-224-3121.

## 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

Virginia Organizing  
703 Concord Avenue  
Charlottesville, 22903  
434-984-4655  
info@virginia-organizing.org