

Southern Worker Justice

Newsletter of the Southern Worker Justice Campaign

southernworkerjustice.org

City Workers' Mass Education Campaign Secures New Pro-Collective Bargaining Majority on Virginia Beach City Council



Members of the Virginia Beach City Workers Union and community allies rally on September 17, 2022

Throughout the entire summer and fall of 2022 city workers and community allies across Virginia Beach participated in a mass community and worker education campaign, resulting in a new majority of City Council members who have committed to support collective bargaining for municipal workers.

All told, over 13,000 workers and community members were talked to through mass community and workplace canvassing, literature distribution, distributing yard signs and speaking at churches.

Workers took turns speaking nearly every week at a different Black church or religious organization to educate community about the history of the Jim Crow era ban on collective bargaining and the modern day struggles of the Black-majority city workers including low wages, unsafe working conditions and lack of a

voice on the job. Workers talked with church and religious organizations including Ebenezer Baptist Church, Mt. Olive Baptist Church, Enoch Baptist Church, Kingdom Reign Church, Catholic Sowers for Justice, Hampton Roads Minister's Conference, Virginia Beach Interdenominational Ministerial Alliance, Coastal Virginia Unitarian Universalists and the Interfaith Alliance at the Beach.

On September 17, the Southern Worker Justice Campaign hosted a major rally in the historic Black community of SeaTak. Important faith, community and worker leaders spoke out about the need for a city council that supports collective bargaining. Candidates from all districts were in attendance at the rally. Workers testified about dangerous understaffing and impacts of low wages on their families.

Virginia Beach City Workers, Community & Faith Allies Speak Out for Collective Bargaining

(Pictures and quotes from September 17 rally)



"Our powers united we can win a new majority on the Virginia Beach City Council that supports fairness, dignity, living wages and a voice at the table for city workers through our union. The city has a chance to make history with this election."

- **Terry Green**, Utility Mechanic II, Water Distribution
Chair person of the Virginia Beach City Workers Union, UE Local 111



"Collective bargaining would give us workers a seat at the table to finally get the justice that we deserve. Black workers in this city have struggled for too long. The city runs because we do. The time is now for us to get justice!"

- **Devon Conley**, Heavy Equipment Operator 3, Stormwater department
Vice Chair, VB City Workers Union, UE Local 111



"The global pandemic and now this economic situation have put city workers in a tough bind. All of our crews are short on staff and we are working more and more to fill in for vacant positions. It is us, Black workers, on the front lines that are experiencing the bulk of these unfair conditions. Now it's time to organize for change!"

- **Renee Woodhouse**, Utility Mechanic I, Water Meters



"Every day, tens of thousands of blue-collar public sector workers help our Virginia communities have clean drinking water, dispose of our trash, keep sewage and stormwater from overflowing, keep our parks and beaches beautiful, care for those who need special mental and medical care, and more. Now these city workers are asking for a voice in their democracy on the job every day via collective bargaining."

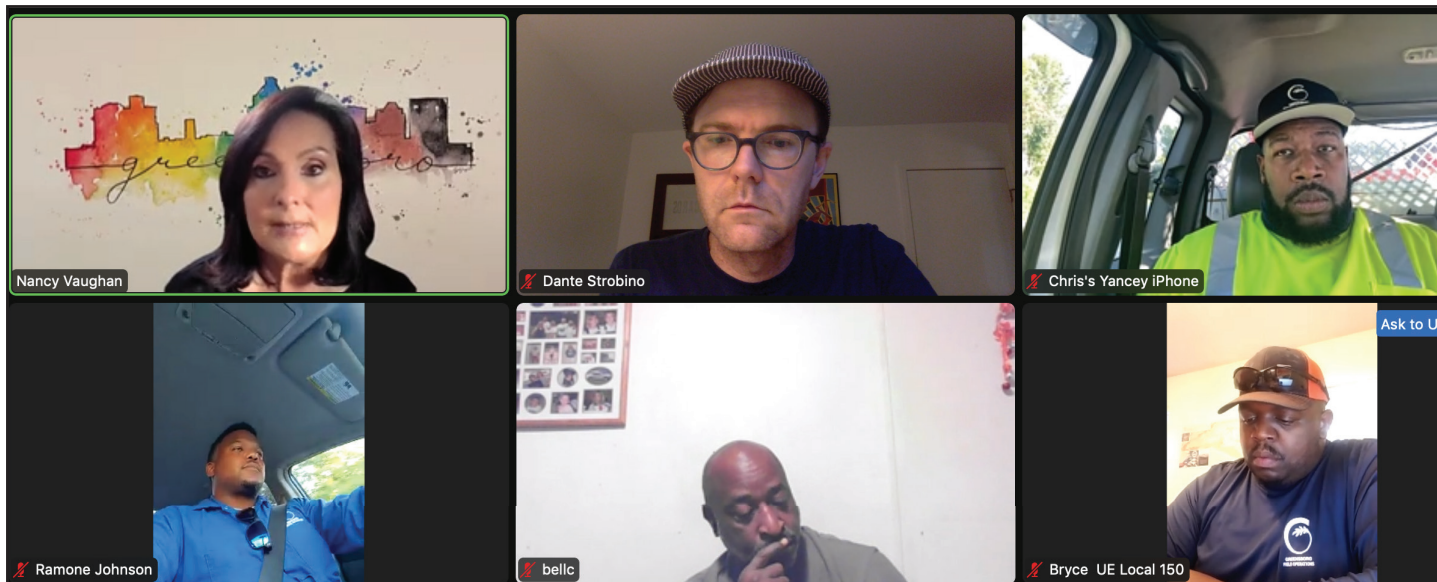
- **Reverend Dr. James Allen**,
President, Virginia Beach Interdenominational Minister's Conference



"This upcoming municipal election will be critical to correct the historical racial injustices in this city. Supporting city workers' right to collective bargaining is an essential part of that reckoning."

- **Minister Gary McCollum**,
Due the Right Things & Hampton Roads Minister's Conference

Greensboro City Workers Advance Critical Policy Change - Civil Service Board



Pictured above: Worker leaders of Greensboro City Workers Union meet with Mayor Vaughan on October 14, 2022

Greensboro City Workers Union leaders are within very close sight of a major victory - establishing a Civil Service Board that protects all city employees against unfair termination, demotion and suspension. Workers have been collecting documentation showing the disproportionate impact of dismissals and suspensions on Black workers. In fact, 5 out of the last 6 workers that reported being terminated to the union were all Black workers.

On October 14, key worker leaders of the union met with Greensboro Mayor Nancy Vaughan to build support for this critical policy. After the meeting, Mayor Vaughan pledged support for establishing a Civil Service Board and firmly acknowledged how it was a racial justice issue.

Greensboro City Worker Union members have been working on this issue since 2019, when the campaign got stalled because of the pandemic, with the need to focus on immediate workplace safety issues. Since that time, the union has met with leaders of the Greensboro Professional Firefighters Association. In order for the city to implement such a change, it would require a change of the City's charter, which would require approval from the conservative dominated NC General Assembly. However, together with the firefighters, city worker union members were able

to successfully gain support from a key legislative committee. Ironically, this bill would have passed and city would have implemented this policy in November if it were not for one of the union's biggest allies.

City workers have launched a broad education campaign to advance this further with their co-workers, community and elected officials and are confident this will become public policy in the months to come.

What is a Civil Service Board??

Civil Service boards have a long history of operating at federal, state, and local levels of government. They currently exist in Raleigh, Charlotte, Asheville and Wilmington, but often only cover Police and Fire.

They assure that personnel are recruited through open competition, hired and promoted on the basis of merit, and are demoted, suspended, or discharged only for cause. Currently, public employees in the City of Greensboro are classified as "At-Will" employees. This employee classification status is in the extreme minority in the context of national industry standards for public workers. We believe national statistics will suggest the vast majority of public employees in the United States enjoy proprietary rights in relation to their employment.

Durham City Workers Move Forward Policy Campaign for Job Security



Throughout 2022 Durham City Worker Union leaders have been pressing city officials to improve the out-dated city Grievance Procedure. Workers organized many worker educational events to engage them about the racial discriminatory impacts of the current policy.

City worker leaders, with the support of the Durham Workers Rights Commission, established quarterly meetings with City Manager Wanda Page, most recently meeting with her on October 7. It was originally promised that a new policy would be out in August, however the city stalled the implementation due to the resignation of the City's Human Resources manager, after pressure from the union.

Workers also met with Mayor Elaine O'Neal (pictured above) to build her support and to explain the three-year long campaign to win strong job protections with a new Grievance Procedure.



Pictured above: New crop of Charlotte city worker leaders after completing series of three trainings

Workers from Across North Carolina and Virginia Attend Leadership Trainings



Pictured above: Workers attend leadership trainings on August 21-22, 2022 (left) and July 9 (right)

Over 95 workers attend trainings

An initial training on Saturday, July 9 was attended by over 25 workers from across North Carolina and Virginia at the historic Black freedom facility, Franklinton Center at Bricks in Whitakers, NC.

Then, over the weekend of August 21-22, over 70 workers from across North Carolina and Virginia attended a leadership training conference hosted by the Southern Worker Justice Campaign.

Workers from Virginia Beach, Kinston, Goldsboro, Wilson, Greensboro, Charlotte, Raleigh, Durham and Butner, NC attended the training to build their skills.

The July training focused on:

- Strengthening Democracy and Communications
- Building a healthy stewards network
- New employee education

The August training focused on:

- Organizing Conversation 101
- New member orientation/overview
- Investigating Grievances

- Media communications/Putting out press release
- Know your rights (leafletting, protesting, civil matters)

Stewards are the front line eyes and ears of the union, and its backbone too! Stewards help listen to workers everyday concerns. Stewards study policy and state laws to know how to support co-workers in need. Stewards are constantly updating members about union activities. Stewards join workers to stand up to the boss when injustices are done.

For every supervisor, we need at least one strong steward. If management is meeting all the time to plan our work. If they are the only ones keeping documentation, then we are never going to be able to win fairness. We have to be just as organized as management to change workplace culture. We can do it! The union has the tools. We just need your involvement!

Meet our Staff!



Chris Hollis
Field Organizer
Virginia and North Carolina



Kass Ottley
Field Organizer
Cities of Charlotte and Greensboro



Charles Brown
Project Organizer
City of Virginia Beach



DaNisha Rogers
Project Organizer
Eastern North Carolina



Askari Young
Project Organizer
Eastern North Carolina



Ken Ngwa
Communications Organizer
Virginia and North Carolina

Many Thanks to our Funders!



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