

*In the Spirit of
Gabriel & Nan,
Nat Turner,
Solomon Northup,
Madison Washington,
John Brown,
Mary Bowser,
Elizabeth Van Lew,
John Mitchell Jr.,
Barbara Johns,
Oliver Hill & all who
struggle for Justice.*

D The Virginia **DEFENDER**

FREE

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By Ana Edwards & Phil Wilayto

After more than 20 years of confrontational struggle between the community and Richmond's city government and business elite, many people are asking what's happening with Shockoe Bottom, the long-neglected downtown district that once was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

Well, things are definitely happening, but the City, as well as the leaders of the uniquely opaque National Slavery Museum Foundation (see story on page 8), are doing precious little to share their plans with the public.

So here's the scoop, as much as we know it at this point.

After Mayor Levar Stoney finally announced his support for the community-generated plan for a nine-acre Shockoe Bottom Memorial Park, his administration put together something called the Shockoe Alliance that was supposed to help the City come up with a more detailed plan to reclaim and property memorialize the site.

Initially, that body was top-heavy with city officials. Then the composition was changed to bring in what government planning folks like to call "stakeholders" - people or institutions with a vested interest in the issue. So some city officials were removed and new members were recruited - mostly

See SHOCKOE on Page 8

What's happening with SHOCKOE BOTTOM?



Community members attending the 2022 Juneteenth celebration sponsored by the Elegba Folklore Society June 26 at the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground leave offerings for the ancestors.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of God." — Jesus Christ



BEAT THE HEAT

WHERE TO COOL DOWN IN RICHMOND

Cooling Stations Locations

The City of Richmond has two cooling station locations for residents seeking relief from the heat during the day:

The following locations are open Monday through Saturday - June 7th to September 30th from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.:

- **SOCIAL SERVICES MARSHALL PLAZA BUILDING**
900 E. Marshall Street | Richmond, VA
- **SOUTHSIDE COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTER**
4100 Hull Street | Richmond, VA

The following location is open on Sundays from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.:

- **CITY HALL**
900 E. Broad Street | Richmond, VA

- All visitors must wear face coverings while in the building and maintain a safe physical distance of six feet from others.
- Seating will be arranged for the appropriate social distancing. Pets, with the exception of service animals, are not permitted.
- For more information regarding cooling assistance services, contact the Department of Social Services Fuel Assistance Office at (804) 646-7046.
- Elderly residents with cooling related issues contact Adult Services at (804) 646-7367.
- In the event of a heat related emergency, please call 911.

Please be reminded that Richmond Public Libraries are open Monday – Saturday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Do you want to fight for Freedom, Justice & Equality? JOIN THE DEFENDERS!

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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sacredgroundproject.net
odessasolidaritycampaign.org

The Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality is an all-volunteer organization of Virginians working for the survival of our communities through education and social justice projects.

We started out in June 2002. Many of us had relatives in the Richmond City Jail or state prisons and were concerned about the physical conditions of these institutions.

As we worked around these issues, we learned more and more about the connections between jails, jobs, poverty, racism, sexism, class, war and political representation. We began

to organize around these issues as well.

We now sponsor the Virginia Defender quarterly newspaper and the Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project and are affiliated with the Virginia Prison Justice Network, which we co-founded.

If you agree with the principles below and want to work to make these ideals a reality, we invite you to join us. Together, we can make a real difference in the life of our communities.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe in Freedom

We believe that all people must be free to develop to their full potential as human beings. We must be free from hunger, from preventable diseases, from homelessness, from ignorance. We must be free to work and to provide for ourselves and our families. We must be free to pursue our education and to develop ourselves culturally and spiritually. We must be free from fear of the arbitrary use of police power and from the physical and cultural attacks of white-

supremacist organizations. Women must be free from physical, cultural and emotional oppression. Children must be free from dangers like lead poisoning, asthma and sexual exploitation. Our youths must be free both from police harassment and the mindless violence of the streets. We must all be free from unjust wars fought in the interest of the wealthy few at the expense of the struggling many.

We believe in Justice

We believe that every human being has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And we believe that these rights are meaningless unless we also have the right to a job at a living wage, to decent housing, to adequate health care, to a meaningful education. We believe that all people have the right to stand equally before the law, to equal and fair treatment by the police, by the court system and in jails and prisons. And we believe that the death penalty is the ultimate exercise in injustice.

We believe in Equality

We live in the richest country in the world.

But it's a country that owes its tremendous wealth to the barbaric oppression of Black labor on a historic scale, the theft of American Indian and Mexican lands, the cruel exploitation of Asian labor and the labor of waves of poor European immigrants.

This country does not belong to the wealthy few who have claimed it for their own. As human beings, we all have an equal right to its resources. As descendants of those whose blood, sweat and tears paid cruelly for its development, we have a right to collective reparations. And as people who struggle every day with ongoing inequality, we have the right to affirmative action.

We believe that for any one of us to be free, we must all be free. We believe that for any one of us to have justice, we must all have justice. We believe that equality for anyone is impossible without equality for everyone.

As members of The Defenders, we pledge ourselves to defend our community, its men, its women and especially its children, from all forms of oppression.

We pledge to fight for a world where all people can live in dignity, freedom and peace.

community news

RRFP: Making sure women in need have access to abortions

By Delaney Jooris

Years ago, a small group of volunteers was handed a \$20 bill from a passerby. The gentleman was hoping to buy the group some lunch as a thank you for their work escorting patients to their appointments at a facility offering abortion services. What he didn't know was that this 20 dollars was the first of many donations that would directly fund abortions in Virginia and kickstart the organization of the Richmond Reproductive Freedom Project.

RRFP has been funding abortions in Virginia for almost 20 years. In addition to helping people finance their abortions by paying clinics directly, RRFP provides "practical support," such as rides to appointments and funds for childcare. The number of people RRFP helps out, and how much they can give each person, depends on the amount of donations they receive. They only stop taking calls once their budget has been depleted.

Since the reversal of Roe v. Wade, donations have increased and RRFP has been able to open its phone lines more often. Before the reversal, they helped around 30 people twice a month. Now they help around 30 people weekly. Despite this, the demand still outweighs the resources, as it always has.

In an interview with the Defender, Ayé Johnson, a project staff member, and Nikita Mayfield, an Advisory Board member, said that the overturn of Roe hasn't greatly affected the organization's operations. RRFP is still funding abortions, just as it was before the reversal. They emphasized the expertise and resourcefulness of their team, born within a web of well-established community organizations in the city.

Further, they said they weren't too concerned about support for the cause thinning out with the next news cycle.

"I don't believe we're worried about sustainability," Johnson said. "We've been funding abortions for 20 years, no matter what the administration was, how positive or negative the policies were, and we will be funding abortions once this administration leaves."

"I think Virginia is one of those states that's ... I think we're kind of purple," May-



Photos by Ayame Bryant, left, and Christine Hoppe, right/.

Women and their allies take to the streets to condemn the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to overturn Roe v. Wade. At left, a march in Richmond. At right, a Great Speak Out rally June 26 at Norfolk's Lafayette Park.

Roe v. Wade overturn spurs anger & action in Va.

By Ayame Rogers

On the evening of May 2, a draft opinion written by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito and leaked to the public suggested that the court would overturn Roe v. Wade. Alito wrote, "Roe was egregiously wrong from the start."

The next day, rallies erupted across the country, proclaiming "Bans off our bodies!" People were determined to ensure that the 50-year-old law legalizing a woman's right to reproductive freedom remained upheld.

However, on June 24, the court issued its formal decision and overturned Roe v. Wade, threatening the right to self-define families and risking the bodily autonomy of anyone who has a uterus.

Thirteen states with "trigger laws" already were set to ban abortions. Going forward,

field said. "The laws have been open for us, but it's still been some restrictions for people who are most impacted by racist systems at the margins of society."

Johnson and Mayfield say there are two highly valuable resources for abortion funds at any time, no matter the political climate. The first is time: They ask people considering getting involved to commit for the "long haul."

The second is money. As Johnson put it, "You cannot be an abortion fund without funds."

about half the states are expected to impose some form of restriction.

It's important to know that abortions are still legal in Virginia during the first and second trimesters of pregnancy, through 26 weeks. Organizations like Planned Parenthood, along with abortion fund providers like the Richmond Reproductive Freedom Project and the Blue Ridge Abortion Fund, make the procedure affordable and accessible.

On Virginia's political front, Democrats hold a slight (21-19) majority in the state senate, while Republicans control the House of Delegates (52-48), as well as the statewide offices of governor, lieutenant governor and attorney general. That means that if just one Democrat votes to limit or ban abortions, causing a tie, Republican Lt. Gov. Winsome Sears, a staunch abortion opponent, would cast the deciding vote.

The Supreme Court's ruling has radicalized people across Virginia to take action. Women and their allies have rallied together, determined that "We won't go back!"

In Richmond, several events were organized by Planned Parenthood. A candlelight vigil also was held by local groups Catch the Fire and RVAFeminism to give space for emotions and to honor those who fought for abortion rights in 1973. These events emphasized the struggle of both women and LGBTQ+ folks in the right to a safe abortion.

Several rallies have numbered close to 1,000, followed by crowds parading on Broad Street. The primary call to action has been to "Vote Blue" in the next election cycle and to contact legislators. There also have been calls to organize, while raising awareness to intersectionality in women's rights.

These organizations deserve your support to help ensure that everyone in Virginia has the resources to make free decisions about their own reproductive lives.

RICHMOND REPRODUCTIVE FREEDOM PROJECT
rrfp.net

BLUE RIDGE ABORTION FUND
blueridgeabortionfund.org

HAMPTON ROADS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE LEAGUE
hrrjl.com

community news



Photo by Whitney Moore

Members and allies of Feed the Streets RVA volunteer their time to prepare items for their first Hygiene Pantry, which offers needed everyday products free to the community.

In a time of need, Feed the Streets RVA serves the community

By Whitney Moore

Feed the Streets RVA is a nonprofit organization that provides food and other essentials to the Richmond community. With eight members on the executive board, it was started by a close group of friends who all shared a passion for giving back.

“We love the work and do it because we are passionate about it,” stated Alexis Stevens, the organization’s public relations representative, during an interview with The Virginia Defender.

Feed the Streets RVA supports the local community with multiple events each month, such as Cookouts for A Cause; Angel Tree drives; Hygiene Pantries; Cool Down (distributing water and other essentials during the summer); City Kids (mentoring youth); providing meals for the holidays; and helping people pay their bills during the pandemic.

“Our name says everything,” stated Stevens. “We started in 2016, hitting the streets to provide people with essentials and grew from there. We’re here for anyone in need, in any way. If we don’t have the resources, then we can connect you to the right people.”

On April 30, Feed the Streets RVA unveiled its first Hygiene Pantry, located behind Mount Olivet Church in the 1200 block of 25th Street in Church Hill, across from a recently renovated basketball court.

“It was a huge hit, and the plan is to have four locations by the end of the year,” Ste-

vens said.

The pantry is decorated in pink and blue colors, with a written invitation to “Take what you need, leave what you can.” The pantry is filled with items such as feminine products, deodorant, toothbrushes, toothpaste, body wash, shampoo and conditioner. Everything is completely free and open to anyone in need. People can take individual items or a hygiene kit at their discretion.

On Saturday, June 25, volunteers, including members of the Virginia Defenders, joined the staff of Feed the Streets RVA for their Hygiene Pantry “Refill Day.” Some people gathered around tables and put together hygiene kits, lunches and snack packs, while others assisted with collecting the donations that were being dropped off.

Two hundred and fifty “grab-and-go” bags were made, along with 50 lunches for the houseless community and snack bags for RISE For Youth’s leadership program. Words of inspiration and encouragement were written on the bags in hopes of bringing a smile to someone’s day.

To request assistance, check out programs and events, schedule donation drop offs and sign up to volunteer, contact Feed the Streets RVA on the website:

<https://feedthestreetsrva.org>.

Regardless of one’s situation or income level, Feed the Streets RVA is out there making sure our Richmond community has access to the essentials that many take for granted.



Photo by Ana Edwards

Flanked by his father and mother, Jerry Chambers Jr. tells a Richmond rally May 1 of his experience at the hands of racists in Powhatan County.

Community demands justice in Powhatan hate crime

Staff Report

Close to 200 people gathered May 1 outside Richmond’s United Nations Church on Cowardin Avenue to support a Black teenager who says he was the victim of a vicious hate crime - one that was then covered up by the Powhatan County police force.

Back on Sept. 12, 2020, Jerry Chambers Jr. was at a party in the county when he became unconscious. While he was out, according to a story in the Richmond Times-Dispatch, “The N-word was written in all caps behind his right ear. A swastika was drawn on his jawline. ‘White Lives MATTER’ lined his head in black marker next to ‘F- — BLM.’”

“White partygoers snapped photos of a dildo pressed up against his face. Then when he woke up to use the bathroom, they draped the 16-year-old Black teenager with a Confederate flag and captured that, too, before circulating the pictures on social media.”

As of the rally, none of the alleged perpetrators had been brought to justice.

“How would you feel if you were physically abused with a sex toy?” Chambers asked the crowd at the rally. “How would you feel if you were surrounded by guns all night while also being the only Black man in the room? How much more do I have to express for law enforcement to do anything about it?”

Two days after the incident, Chambers reported the incident to the Powhatan Sheriff’s Office. According to the RTD, the office stated

that “it encouraged the family to meet with the chief prosecutor the next day, but the parents didn’t show up.”

However, “An April 18, 2022, email supplied by the family showed Chambers ... was not eligible for statewide victim support because the state had ‘not received the police report from Powhatan, the jurisdiction in which the crime occurred and was reported.’”

Now, according to the newspaper, county law enforcement is claiming that “the one-year statute of limitations for prosecuting individuals for misdemeanor assault had expired, which means no arrest can be made.”

However, a special prosecutor from the Petersburg Commonwealth’s Attorney’s office has now been assigned to the case, which also is being investigated by the FBI; the federal statute of limitations for prosecuting hate crimes is seven years.

In addition to members of the youth’s family, other speakers at the Richmond rally included Jacob Blake Sr., the father of the man who was left partially paralyzed in August 2020 after being shot seven times by a white police officer in Kenosha, Wis.; former Richmond City Councilmember Sa’ad El-Amin; and King Salim Khalfani, a former executive director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP and now a Criminal Justice Organizer with the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy.

Rally organizers announced that another gathering on the issue would take place later that week at the Powhatan County Courthouse.

community news

news u can use

Free 24/7 medical advice from a nurse

It's three in the morning, your child wakes up and says they don't feel well and you don't know what to do? Consult a Nurse is a free, 24/7 service that provides professional advice on health issues. 833-866-6727.

988 is now the 911 for mental health support

Feeling overwhelmed? Maybe even suicidal? Now help is just a three-digit call away. Thanks to federal funding, people in need of mental health support can call 988, the new number that connects the caller to the National Suicide Prevention Hotline. The old number for that service - 800-273-8255 - will still work, but the idea is that a three-digit number will be easier to remember. 988. It just might help.

IRS Mileage rates went up July 1

In recognition of the rising cost of gasoline, the IRS has raised the standard mileage rate for the final six months of 2022. According to its website, taxpayers may use the optional standard mileage rates to calculate the deductible costs of operating an automobile for business and certain other purposes. The standard mileage rate for business travel now is 62.5 cents per mile, up 4 cents from the rate effective at the start of the year. The new rate for deductible medical or moving expenses (available for active-duty members of the military) is now 22 cents, up 4 cents. The changes also are important for self-employed contractors who charge customers for mileage. Note: New rates will likely be announced for 2023, if not before. To be sure of current rates, consult the IRS website at: [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov).



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Richmond Free Press photojournalists Sandra Sellars and Regina Boone.

Branch exhibit showcases art as social protest

By Phil Wilayto

If you're one of those people who think museums have to be boring, you need to drop by the Branch Museum and check out its new exhibit, (RE)FRAMING PROTEST - design + hope.

During the Black Lives Matter protests that swept Richmond in 2020, two familiar figures were Regina H. Boone and Sandra Sellars, accomplished photojournalists with the Richmond Free Press, Virginia's premier Black-owned and -oriented weekly newspaper.

With sharp eyes and a passion for justice, these two women documented the various art forms that artists, professional and otherwise, used to express their outrage, anger, defiance, hope and life of community.

They took literally thousands of images, 89 of which were chosen for this collection.

The exhibit will be on display through Sept. 11.

The Branch Museum of Architecture and Design is located at 2501 Monument Ave. in Richmond. For more information: Phone: 804-655-6055. Email: frontdesk@branchmuseum.org. Web: branchmuseum.org.

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The historic USO and Beaux Twenty building is now a new community center in the Heights section of Petersburg. Photo by Phil Wilayto

Petersburg gets a new community center

By Phil Wilayto

Thanks to the hard work of a dedicated group of community advocates, Petersburg now has a new community center, one geared toward helping strong people survive difficult times.

The Community Resiliency Hub is located in the historic and now economically depressed neighborhood called The Heights. Once a vibrant area anchored by home-owning African-American professionals, the area now is known more for vacant lots and abandoned buildings.

The new center, a partnership between the advocacy organization United Parents Against Lead and the Virginia Environmental Justice Coalition, is housed in a historic building originally constructed in 1941 to serve as a USO for

"Colored" troops during the time of Jim Crow segregation. The building later was used as a popular social club known as Beaux Twenty, which operated there until around 2018. UPAL has been restoring the building, keeping many of its historic architectural details.

UPAL is no stranger to Petersburg. The nonprofit organization has worked there since 2004, implementing a HUD-funded Lead Elimination Action Plan project that has resulted in testing and lead remediation of 80 homes. Additionally, UPAL has been collaborating with many community partners throughout the city.

Next time you're in the area, drop by 464 Byrne St. in Petersburg and see for yourself what's happening at the new Community Resiliency Hub.

For more information, contact UPAL at 804-308-1518 or upal@juno.com.

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our working lives



Richmond city workers and supporters cheer the vote by city council to approve collective bargaining rights for public sector workers. Photo by Kat McNeal

Richmond wins public sector bargaining!

By Kat McNeal

After more than seven months of work and advocacy by city workers, city council members and unions, Richmond City Council on July 25 unanimously passed a public sector collective bargaining ordinance. Richmond is now the fifth locality in the state to adopt such an ordinance and the first outside Northern Virginia.

Public sector workers in Virginia always have had the right to join unions and professional associations, as a matter of the Constitutionally-protected right to free association. But the primary benefit of workplace organizing is the ability to collectively bargain. Collective bargaining is a formal process in which unionized workers, represented by a negotiating team, meet with representatives of their employer to press for their interests. They can negotiate pay, benefits, workplace conditions and other issues of concern. The process results in a legally binding contract.

That's an area where public employees in Virginia have had trouble. State employees haven't been allowed to engage in collective bargaining since 1946, and employees of local governments lost the ability in the 1970s. At that time, 19 local governments and school boards had collective bargaining agreements with their unionized employees. Gov. L. Douglas Wilder signed a law in 1993 that codified the prohibitions.

In 2020, the General Assembly passed a bill that changed things, once again allowing local governments and school boards the authority to choose to negotiate with employee unions.

Richmond's new rule (full text: bit.ly/3RM9ttJ) is a variation of the draft first proposed last December by Councilmember Reva Trammel (8th District). Kristen Nye (4th District) signed on as cosponsor early in the process. Mayor Levar Stoney, whose office around the same time proposed a substantially weaker ordinance, withdrew his own legislation and signed on to the council paper as a patron.

The ordinance stipulates that the City

will deal with its workers in five bargaining units, each of which can be represented by a separate union. Those units will consist of city employees in the broad categories of police; fire and emergency services; labor and trades; professional; and administrative/technical. Eligibility for membership in a bargaining unit can't require a worker to join a union.

Like the bargaining rule passed by the Richmond School Board last year, the ordinance echoes the state law's ban on strikes.

The legislation has received strong support from city workers and organized labor. True to form, the city council meetings saw a crowd of some 120 supporters, many in organizational T-shirts showing their allegiance to a variety of unions: American Federation of Government Employees, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 666, Richmond Education Association and United Campus Workers.

The largest contingent wore the electric purple T-shirts of the Service Employees International Union. SEIU Local 512, which represents public employees in Fairfax and Loudoun counties as well as home healthcare workers throughout the state, has been campaigning since January to organize city workers. The local was one of four unions that worked closely with council members and the city attorney on the ordinance. The others were the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Local 322, Richmond Coalition of Police and Richmond Firefighters Association IAFF Local L-0955.

These central players were far from the only organizations present. The meeting's public comment period drew messages of support from the Richmond Branch NAACP, Democratic Socialists of America, Virginia AFL-CIO and the Falls of the James Group of the Sierra Club's Virginia Chapter.

The council decision marks a major victory for workers in the state's capital, one that may soon be repeated across the Commonwealth. Charlottesville, Virginia Beach and Norfolk are all seeing local campaigns for their own public sector collective bargaining ordinances.

Starbucks update

By Kat McNeal

Seattle-based Starbucks is the largest coffee shop chain and the third-largest fast-food chain in the United States, with more than 15,000 stores around the country. About 8,900 of those stores are directly owned by the corporation, with the other 6,000 franchise locations.

Last summer, a total of zero corporate stores were unionized. Then, in December, one store in Buffalo voted to be represented by Philadelphia-based SEIU affiliate Workers United, and it was off to the races. On July 22, the University Circle store in Cleveland, Ohio, voted to unionize, making it the 200th shop to organize.

Here in Virginia, we have 10 unionized Starbucks: five in the Richmond area and one each in Fairfax, Falls Church, Leesburg, Roanoke and Newport News.

Predictably, this has been a contentious process: Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz is a notoriously anti-labor figure and hasn't shied away from sharing his opinion of unions as meddling third parties that can't improve conditions for workers. The company hired the "labor management relations" firm Littler Mendelson,

the largest labor and employment law firm in the U.S., with a history of advising companies like Amazon, Nissan and Delta Airlines on how to oppose unionization campaigns. Starbucks also launched an anti-union website.

According to a June press release, Workers United estimated that it had filed approximately 180 Unfair Labor Practice charges with the National Labor Relations Board on behalf of its Starbucks members. Significantly, the company has closed or is closing three unionized stores, one in New York – the first one to vote to unionize – and two in Washington state. The company says the closures are just matters of regular business decision making, while workers call them retaliation for organizing.

The organizing campaign obviously has legs and the union is working to make sure it has teeth, too: Starbucks Workers United is raising a strike fund to support workers who have to take to the picket line. The fund was established in June with a \$1 million commitment from parent org Workers United – and just in time. On July 18 the newly-organized Commonwealth Avenue store in Boston, Mass., went out on strike.

Starbucks workers interested in organizing their shops can contact the union at:

<https://sbworkersunited.org>



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Jermaine Doss waits - & waits - for Justice

By Phil Wilayto

The first line in a story published July 25 in The Virginian Pilot really caught my eye:

"A Norfolk man convicted of murder following a trial that hinged on testimony from a coerced witness and a disgraced former Norfolk police detective was exonerated this month."

At first I thought the story was about Jermaine Doss, a Norfolk man the Defenders have been supporting for more than a dozen years. Jermaine also was convicted of murder on the basis of testimony by a confessed killer who later swore that he was coerced into testifying.

And the detective in the case? The same "disgraced former Norfolk police detective," Robert Glenn Ford.

The Pilot story actually was about another man, Gilbert Merritt III, who was cleared after he had served more than two-thirds of a 30-year sentence. He already had been pardoned by former Gov. Ralph Northam and had been released from prison, but, with the help of the Innocence Project at the University of Virginia's Law School, was able to win full exoneration, meaning that his record has been wiped clean.

According to the news story, "Ford was the lead detective on the case — roughly a decade before he was sentenced in 2011 to 12 1/2 years in prison for his conviction on two counts of extortion and one count of lying to the FBI. The jury in Ford's trial found he took thousands of dollars in bribes from people facing criminal charges in exchange for favorable treatment in their court cases."

The Pilot also reported that the Innocence Project "... has freed two other people convicted on cases for which Ford was the lead detective."

Jermaine Doss was convicted in 2000 of murder in the death of a white businessman, James M. Webb. The actual confessed killer in the case, Nathaniel McGee, at first refused to testify against Doss. Then he did testify, claiming that Jermaine had hired him to kill Webb, but then recanted that testimony at another court hearing, saying he had only implicated Doss because prosecutors and police had told him that otherwise he could face the death penalty for the murder.

McGee, the self-confessed killer, is scheduled to be released from prison in 2025.

Jermaine, who has always maintained his innocence, received a sentence of life-plus-34-years.

Commenting on the Merritt case, Innocence Project Associate Director Juliet Hatchett was quoted as saying, "... this is important because it's another exposure of public corruption at the hands of Detective Ford, and it's another chapter in what has been a pretty devastating tale for the city of Norfolk."

Back when Robert McDonnell was governor, the Defenders helped Jermaine Doss write a request for a governor's pardon. That petition sat at the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office and then the Parole Board for a solid eight years. Finally, after a telephone conversation this writer had with Gov. Northam, a decision was made: The pardon was denied.

Despite that bitter disappointment, there is still hope. Jermaine had his third parole hearing on July 18. His family and supporters, including this writer, will be meeting with the Parole Board by Zoom on Sept. 14. A board decision is expected to be issued some time after that.

Jermaine has been in prison for 23 years, but only recently was allowed to be considered for parole. His is one of the so-called

Fishback cases, in which for five years juries were not told that parole had been abolished in Virginia and so continued to recommend long sentences on the assumption that the convicted person would not be serving the entire sentence. A court suit filed by a prisoner named Richard Fishback opened the door for hundreds of prisoners to be eligible for parole hearings.

But now the tragedy continues. Jermaine had been desperately hoping to be granted parole in time for him to visit his father, who had been gravely ill for some time. Now, as we're preparing to send the Defender newspaper to press, the Doss family is preparing to go to a funeral.

Jermaine's father, Ray Doss, a Vietnam veteran and longtime government worker, passed last week from multiple health ailments. Jermaine's mother, Willie Mae Doss, also has been admitted to the hospital.

Jermaine has been told he will be able to remotely watch two hours of his father's wake, but will not be allowed to attend the funeral the following day. The family plans to



Jermaine Doss Photo courtesy the Doss family

video the ceremony and send him a copy.

A petition asking for a pardon or parole for Jermaine Doss is posted on Change.org and has gathered more than 6,000 signatures. To add your name, please log onto change.org and type "Jermaine Doss" into the search field.

One way or another, we have to believe that justice will be won.

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reclaiming our sacred ground

Join us for the 20th ANNUAL GABRIEL GATHERING

**Monday, Oct. 10, 2022
Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground**

Sponsored by the

**Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project
of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality**

Oct. 10 will be the 222 anniversary of the execution of the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel at the African Burial Ground. Each year we gather there on that date to pay homage to those who gave their lives in the struggle against slavery and renew our dedication to winning a world with Freedom, Justice and Equality for All.

This year we will be collaborating with Reclaiming the Monument, the organization that projected images of Black historical and political figures onto the Lee statue during the Black Lives Matter Rebellion of 2020. Their new project, Recontextualizing Richmond, involves projecting images at five events, including the Gabriel Gathering.

For more information as it develops:

sacredgroundproject.net

SHOCKOE continued from page 1
business owners, but also a few community activists and historical preservationists.

Anyway, over a period of about two years, the alliance members made suggestions to the City's planning department for something called a Small Area Plan. In this case it was a plan for Shockoe Bottom that would be incorporated into the City's larger plan, called Richmond 300, which is supposed to guide the city's development through the 300th anniversary of its founding in 1737.

The Small Area Plan then went through a month of public input, mostly through the City's website, and was updated in October 2021 based on that feedback. The plan was sent back to the City's Department of Planning and Development for review and more revisions.

The October version of the plan, called the "Pre Plan," along with a full list of Shockoe Alliance members, is posted on the City website at: rva.gov/planning-development-review/shockoe-small-area-plan.

Going forward, the newly revised plan is supposed to come back to the Alliance

and then put up for a second round of public input. As of yet, there is no public timeline for that input.

But, as everyone who knows anything about politics knows, the real question is this: Is the City putting any real money into the project?

The answer is yes, which is what makes us hopeful that something will actually happen.

However, the process remains much less than transparent, with a minimum of public input and no indication so far that the Black community as a whole will benefit in any meaningful way from the development of one of the most sacred sites in U.S. Black history.

And those are the issues we'll examine in the next edition of The Virginia Defender.

In the meantime, we can all be encouraged that (1) the Virginia Commonwealth University parking lot that once desecrated the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground is long gone; (2) despite the best efforts of former Mayor Dwight Jones and the business elite organization Venture Richmond, there is no baseball stadium in Shockoe Bottom; and (3) there are concrete plans in the works for a roughly 10-block Heritage Campus that will include the African

Questions for the National Slavery Museum Foundation

By Phil Wilayto

After more than 20 years of sustained community struggle, Richmond city government finally has publicly committed to memorializing Shockoe Bottom, the downtown district that once was the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade.

The Defenders are proud to have played a leading role in this struggle. Going forward, we see our role as promoting three things: transparency, community input and ensuring that financial benefits from the project primarily go to the descendant community.

On July 20, we emailed a series of questions to Virginia state Delegate Delores McQuinn, who heads up the National Slavery Museum Foundation, which has taken on the task of creating a national slavery museum on the site of the Devil's Half-Acre (Lumpkin's jail) in Shockoe Bottom. The museum was originally projected to cost \$100 million in public and private funds, but that figure has since ballooned to up to \$220 million. (The reason: After several years and millions of dollars spent on design work, someone apparently remembered that the site is located in a flood plain.)

We emailed Delegate McQuinn again on July 25, but by presstime the following day still had not received any response.

These are the questions we asked of Delegate McQuinn:

- Does the National Slavery Museum Foundation have a website or any other online presence?
- Does the foundation have a board of directors? If so, who are the members?

Burial Ground, the Devil's Half-Acre (site of Lumpkin's jail) and enough land east of the CSX railroad tracks to ensure that there won't be any more profit-chasing schemes to build something very big and very inappropriate on the sacred ground of Shockoe Bottom.

Stay tuned - and stay alert.

• Does the foundation have a director? If so, who is it?

• What is the current estimate for the cost of designing and building the museum?

• What is the current estimate for the annual cost of operating the museum?

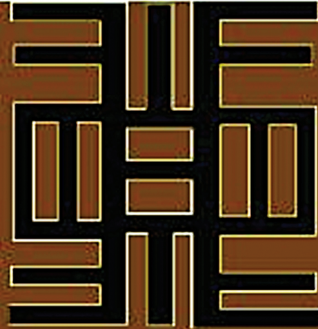
• How much money has the foundation raised to date? What amount has been allocated by the City of Richmond? By the state of Virginia? How much has been raised from private sources?

• What expenses has the foundation paid for to date? How much, and to what entities or individuals?

• What is the timeline for creating the museum?

• Are any public meetings about the museum scheduled at this time?

If we receive a response after the press deadline, we will post it on the newspaper website: virginiadefender.org.



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ground
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reclaiming our sacred ground



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Addressing the life and legacy of Emily Winfree, from left: Joseph S.H. Rogers, VMHC's Manager of Partnerships and Community Engagement; author Jan Meck; Winfree descendant Kimberly Mitchell; and Richmond historian Ana Edwards.

The Life & Legacy of Emily Winfree

By Ana Edwards

Winfree Cottage has rested on blocks next to the Lumpkin's Jail Archaeological Site in Shockoe Bottom since 2007.

Until this year, an interpretive sign in the style of those of the "Richmond Slave Trail" carried the only account of the cottage's history: The two-room house was owned by Emily Winfree, a woman enslaved and impregnated multiple times by David Winfree of Chesterfield County. Her freedom came from the 13th amendment in 1865 and David's death in 1866.

This June 16, the Virginia Museum of History and Culture hosted a book talk with Jan Meck, museum docent and co-author, with Virginia Refo, of "The Life & Legacy of Emily Winfree: From Enslavement to Carnegie Hall."

Meck's presentation was followed by a panel discussion facilitated by Joseph

S.H. Rogers, the museum's Manager of Partnerships and Community Engagement. The panelists were Winfree descendant Kimberly Mitchell, Richmond historian Ana Edwards and city planner Kim Chen.

When asked by Rogers why she "took on this project," Meck replied that she'd read plenty of books about heroes "like Gabriel, Nat Turner and Madison Washington ..." but "nothing had been written about just somebody like Emily - somebody who just persevered and survived. She didn't have a book, she didn't have anything and yet she represented the majority."

Mrs. Winfree, as she referred to herself, never learned to read or write and struggled through poverty to become the mother and ancestor of generations of educators and scholars, including a pianist who played Carnegie Hall.

At long last, some recognition for the Shockoe Hill Burying Ground

By Ana Edwards

The Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground, a long-abused and then forgotten cemetery owned by the city of Richmond that may have contained the burial sites of as many as 22,000 free and enslaved Black people, finally has received a modicum of recognition.

On the sunny afternoon of Sunday, June 12, the Swansboro Elementary School choir sang for the unveiling ceremony of a new Virginia State Historic Highway marker installed at 1305 N. 5th St. The signage marks the original 2-acre plot that grew to more than 31 acres of what may have been the largest 19th-century municipal cemetery for free and enslaved Black people in the entire country.

The cemetery was closed in 1879, after which the land was desecrated by private and municipal projects, including the 5th Street viaduct, Interstate 64 and the railroad.

Close to 100 people attended the unveiling ceremony, which was emceed by Sacred Ground Project Chair Ana Edwards. Speakers included Mayor Levar Stoney; City Councilmember Ellen Robertson; representatives from U.S. Sen. Mark Warner's office and the Department of Historic Resources; and Lenora McQueen, whose fourth-great-grandmother was buried at the site and who has played the major role in convincing the City to recognize the importance of the burial ground.

The site was added this past March to the Virginia Landmark Register and in June to the National Register of Historic Places.



Photo by Kwame Binta

A Virginia state historic highway marker now stands at the site of the Shockoe Hill African Burying Ground.



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Davis in recline - How low the high and mighty have fallen. This statue of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, formerly of Richmond's Monument Avenue, adjusts to its new historical position, lying flat on its back on display at the Valentine Museum. The paint-splattered statue was taken down by protesters during the anti-racist rebellion of 2020 and will be on display at the museum for at least six months while on loan from the Black History Museum & Cultural Center of Virginia.

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cops, courts & prisons



Top photos by Phil Wilayto; bottom photo courtesy Virginia Voices of the Voiceless

Prison justice organizations have responded strongly to Gov. Youngkin's attack on earned credits with protests around the state. Above, a rally July 8 at Echo Lake Park in Henrico County. Below, a rally July 25 at Capitol Square in Richmond.

Prison justice organizations fight to defend Second Chances

Special to The Virginia Defender from
Angela Adinolfi
of Virginia Voices of the Voiceless

The Rally Against the Earned Sentence Credit Revocation amendment by Gov. Youngkin was a success! The one hour was used well with many great speakers.

The event organizers were The Humanization Project and Virginia Voice for the Voiceless.

The event kicked off with introductory words by Angela Adinolfi from Virginia Voices of the Voiceless. The fact still remains that Gov. Youngkin amended a law (Earned Sentence Credit) that was passed in 2020. The fact still remains that thousands were informed of a release date and then hundreds were later told they would in fact not be released.

Gov. Youngkin's amendment not only affected them, but thousands who would have seen years shaved off their sentence due to good behavior, programming, and rehabilitation.

Angela was followed by Savannah of The Humanization Project. There also was Santia Nance and Pauletta James of Sistas in Prison Reform. Santia's fiancé, Q Patterson, (Brilliance Behind Bars) spoke with fervor, as did Pauletta James, who spoke passionately about her husband's change and the need for Second Chances.

You also had Amber Stevens of Incarcerated Lives Matter Virginia; Shawn Weneta of the Virginia ACLU; Candidate for Delegate for the 79th District Richard Walker; and House Democratic Leader Delegate Don Scott, the House patron of the earned credit bill. All gave POW-

ERFUL speeches! Delegate Don Scott also spoke on being disappointed in the turnout... "There's over 25,000 prisoners incarcerated and over 60,000 on probation - this place should be packed!" Delegate Scott scoffed at the beginning of his remarks.

WE AGREE 100%!!! Delegate Scott had me questioning if enough is being done. The message, passion, and commitment is there, but how do we get more DOC families involved??? This will be a major strategy topic in the coming weeks as we prepare for events in Martinsville 7/29, Norfolk 8/28, and Richmond 10/8. How do we maximize our potential?

More rally/event info coming soon.

All in all, the rally/protest was another step of action for change! We were updated on the lawsuit being prepared by Attorney Elliott Harding in Charlottesville. Attorney Harding feels extremely confident to submit the suit in the coming weeks. A fast resolution could be in a few weeks, or it could take months to receive a decision.

One thing we do have is the forces of TRUTH on our side and the right side of history! Gov. Youngkin denied release dates that were earned. Virginia has been top 5 (currently #1) in Recidivism for years... Nobody's coming back! If that's the case, then why are second chances so hard to get?

THE KEY NOW IS OUR VOTES! No more complaining - this is an action based movement. With that said, we gotta get more people to come out.

In the meantime please stay inspired and change is coming!

How Dillwyn dealt with - & didn't deal with - a COVID outbreak

By Hassan Raashann Shabazz

Editor's Note: On July 18, Hassan Raashann Shabazz was released from the Dillwyn Correctional Center in Buckingham County, Virginia. He had spent 23 years behind bars. The following is Part One of a two-part essay he sent the Defender before he was released. We will publish Part Two in the Autumn issue.

Part One: May 27, 2022

It pains me to see that after 23 years of thinking that I have seen all that there is to see behind the walls of the Department of Corrections, the VDOC makes another insane move.

As I write this, I am sitting in a Covid quarantine unit at Dillwyn Correctional Center, waiting for the next jaw-dropping event to occur, but I cannot remain silent as prisoner's lives are being treated like we are not human beings.

I am utterly disgusted that while Covid is making its move to infiltrate the prison system again with hot spots at Dillwyn and Fluvanna, there are members of the legislature who are attempting to hijack the one thing that would create a little more space in the system; the new good time law HB5148. As I watch myself and everyone around me fall ill, I can't help but think about just how little our lives matter to those lawmakers.

I contracted a variant of COVID-19 after an outbreak occurred on/or about May 9 in the housing units that housed kitchen workers, and those workers had to quarantine. This left the administration with no choice but to draft workers from the re-entry dorm, where I was the Senior Coordinator in the Community. I was informed that the administration told those drafted that if they refused they would receive a disciplinary charge.

Needless to say, these members of my community went to work for 16 hours on May 10, and they woke up feeling ill the next day. To add insult to injury, on that day the administration decided to start a full-scale shutdown. My dorm was the first. We verbally protested this because of the Red Zones which had been created in the Gymnasium and Department of Corrections Education (DCE) area.

The administration went on to shake the entire compound down over the next week

with cases popping up the whole time. During this time, they were only testing the unvaccinated. I did not test positive until May 24. Now I am being housed in a Red Zone unit with 76 other prisoners, 36 of whom had started their 10-day quarantine six days before the rest of us started ours. Now the administration plans to move those 36 guys back to the gym, where they will have to sleep on the floor and use one shower, toilet, and bathroom until all pods turn green. This is inhumane!

All of this has happened, undoubtedly, due to the failure to test staff due to employment shortages at the facility, as officers are not tested unless they believe they have been exposed. Once it is within the facility, there is cross-contamination as officers make security rounds in red and yellow zone units, and then go into green zones due to staff shortages.

What also causes the spreading is the way the tests are conducted. Firstly, tests are only given to the unvaccinated prisoners until one of them tests positive or someone falls ill. Then staff will test the entire dormitory. This makes absolutely no sense, as taking the vaccine does not keep you from contracting the virus, nor spreading it to others.

Secondly, when staff comes in to give the rapid test, they use the same gloves to handle all tests and swabs from multiple individuals. This is totally different from how the CDC protocols were followed by the National Guard when I was tested previously. In between every swab and test, they changed gloves and used hand sanitizer.

Finally and most importantly, the swabs are self-administered, whereas staff allows the prisoner to swab himself, which has allowed for many to fake the test so that they don't have to quarantine. The National Guard did not allow self-swabbing. The self-swabbing results in those infected remaining in a green or yellow zone, even though they are sick. Therefore, I know that the numbers reported do not reflect how many people are actually positive.

I have watched the inability to handle Covid in the Department of Corrections to the extent of contracting Covid twice and watching five of my fellow prisoners die due to the in-

See DILLWYN on Page 11

cops, courts & prisons



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Alicia Nelson and her father, Christopher Nelson, stand outside the John Marshall Courts Building after charges against her were dropped on June 3.

Assault charge against Alecia Nelson dropped! Now - what about the cop?

By Phil Wilayto

The charge of felony assault on a police officer has been dropped in the case of Alecia Nelson, a Black woman who on March 7 was injured while being arrested by a white Richmond police officer after being falsely accused of shoplifting at the Family Dollar store on Westover Hills Boulevard on Richmond's South Side. A June 3 hearing in Richmond General District Court was to set a date for a trial, which now will not take place.

As of this writing, it is not known if the officer, Graham Lang, a 21-year veteran of the Richmond force, has been disciplined for his actions in the incident.

At the hearing, the prosecutor asked that the assault charge, which carries a mandatory six months sentence, be withdrawn - but that would have left the Commonwealth's Attorney's office with the option of bringing the charge back at a later time.

Nelson's attorney, David Whaley, a Richmond attorney who took the case at no cost, argued that the charge should be completely dropped, since the possibility of having it brought back would make it hard for Nelson either to be

reinstated at her old job or find a new one.

Since her arrest, Nelson has been on unpaid administrative leave from her position as a teacher's assistant at Westover Elementary School. She had stopped at the nearby Family Dollar to buy snacks for her daughter's third-grade class at the school. Although she was arrested for assault, she was never charged with shoplifting.

In an interview July 25 with The Virginia Defender, Nelson said she had contacted the school's [principal on June 22 to ask about either getting her old job back or something similar. SH said the principal said she would consult with Human Resources, but as of July 25 Nelson had not yet heard anything more.

After her ordeal on March 7, Nelson filed a complaint with the Internal Affairs office of the Richmond Police Department. On July 25 she said she has yet to hear anything about her complaint.

Nelson was accompanied at the June 2 hearing by her father, Christopher Nelson, and two members of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality who also attended the previous hearing. Other members had attended a protest held March 12 outside the Family Dollar.

"I'd like to ask the police officer one thing,"

her father said after the hearing, "and that's how would he feel if this happened to his daughter?"

"I'm just relieved that this is over," Ms. Nelson told the Defender. "I just hope and pray that this doesn't happen to anyone else."

A story on the case by Whitney Moore appeared in the Spring 2022 edition of The Virginia Defender.

F.O.E. honors returning community members

By Christa Ellison
& Hassan Shabazz

On July 22, Freedom Over Everything (F.O.E) hosted an event at the Richmond Center for Common Ground, Democracy Center, where 13 returning citizens were acknowledged for their accomplishments in the fields of politics, entrepreneurship, authorship, fashion, community activism, peer support and youth mentorship. Volunteers and supporters were all in attendance.

The focus was to unite the following groups: Freedom Over Everything, Community Unity in Action, Community United Focus, Your Worth the Fight, the Virginia Prison Justice Network, Freedom Unlimited, Total Reality Approach Process and others, to form an iron fist against injustice in Virginia.

DILLWYN

continued from page 10

ability to socially distance. As we see the hot spots of Fluvanna and Dillwyn go full-blown with the infected, there must be something done before it reaches other facilities in Virginia.

It is for this reason that I am requesting that Gov. Youngkin reimplement the Covid Early Release Program first done by his predecessor, Ralph Northam, and/or speed up the process of good-time calculations through Executive Order to create more space in the prison system for all those at risk.

It is my plea that the current plot to revoke HB5148 by those in the vein of Sen. Robert Bell be stopped immediately if they have at least one human bone in their bodies. People are suffering on the inside with no way to escape a disease that very well could be a death sentence, even though we were not sentenced to one. SOS...

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In our opinion

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We're proudly all-volunteer, but that also means that our folks - more than two dozen - come and go as life changes. Right now we're short a few people for some of the paper routes.

For 18 years the Defender has played a leading role in reclaiming and properly memorializing Richmond's Shockoe Bottom, once the epicenter of the U.S. domestic slave trade. We're the only newspaper we know of in Virginia that carries letters from prisoners. We're the only newspaper that has a Labor page instead of a Business page. We regularly carry antiwar news with information that directly contradicts the line coming out of Washington. We cover community struggles, expose police crimes, support the work of other organizations and do it all because we believe in Freedom, Justice and Equality.

It's a truism that "Information is Power." Help bring Power to the People - help us distribute The Virginia Defender!

Thanks,

Your humble editor

Letters to the Editor

JPay asked to advocate for its customers

[Editor's note: The following letter was originally sent to JPay, a private company that sells email and other services to incarcerated individuals in the U.S. prison system. The author asked that we reprint it here.]

Dear JPay,

I have been a loyal consumer of your products and services for years. Throughout those years I have been promised many things. Streaming/downloading movies, phone service and video visitation, but none of this has come to pass. If anything, jpay has taken a step backwards.

1.) The calendar app is gone. 2.) Email 'draft' feature is gone. 3.) similar album feature doesn't function. 4.) miscellaneous album category, with the books, speeches, etc., is not functioning. 5.) Khan academy hasn't been updated in years. 6.) rising fees for our friends and family to access your services. 7.) older albums, especially hip hop are not available.

There are other issues but I believe you get the point. Your company has been allowed to monopolize the state of Virginia. We have no other options. The least jpay can do is lobby the executives of this state and cut through the red tape of the Virginia Dept of Corr.

"Security" is the so-called rationale for why prisoners of this great state cannot have what prisoners of other states enjoy every day. There is no legitimate security interest in why Director H. Clarke and A. David Robinson refuse to allow us certain features and services of jpay.

Virginia prisoners' families are paying the same high fees without us receiving the same benefits and services. There are hundreds of thousands of dollars to be made monthly, millions to be made annually, if we are allowed more services.

Our state has a pro-business, Republican as Governor. Please contact his office and speak on our behalf. We have contributed millions of dollars of our tax-paying friends' and families' money to your corporation. Please advocate for us in return.

Respectfully submitted,

Phillip Daniel
RIVER NORTH CORR. CENTER



This is Creighton Court, one of Richmond's Big Six public housing communities. It had 504 apartments. They're being demolished this summer to make way for what Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority says will be "mixed-income" housing. But RRHA and Mayor Stoney refuse to commit to "one-to-one replacement," in which a new low-rent housing unit would be built for every one that's torn down. So, in the end, there will be fewer places to live that poor people can afford. And the silence is deafening.

Photo by Phil Wilayto

Pass the PUMP Act now!

I am appalled at the United States' lack of support for working families, lack of emergency planning and the failure to protect the food supply. Supporting, protecting, and promoting the first food, human milk, must be a priority.

How has this country become so reliant on breastmilk substitutes (BMS)? Whether parents are breastfeeding or dependent on

BMS, the ability to safely feed our babies is in a state of crisis. Education about basic human survival is needed. Everyone should know how to establish and maintain a human milk supply, how to build breastmilk production and that relaxation is possible. Relaxation is the process by which a parent re-establishes lactation after having stopped for some time (weeks or months). Families can learn more about this process on the

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LETTERS

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CDC website (<https://www.cdc.gov/>)

The over reliance on a for-profit sector that cannot safely and consistently provide an essential product like BMS is a predictable consequence of this society; one that doesn't support working families and mothers who choose to breastfeed.

As frequently pointed out by mainstream media outlets, breastfeeding can be challenging. Families need support, including public policies like paid family and medical leave and workplace lactation protections, ensuring breast or chest feeding can continue after returning to work.

Many families are desperate and anxious as a result of the current infant feeding crisis. We need to do everything we can to protect and strengthen infant food security, including ensuring access to lactation support, supplies, and accommodations, pasteurized human donor milk, and infant formula. Workplace lactation accommodations are critical as most families start off breastfeeding (91.7 percent in Virginia) and many parents would like to continue but can't, due to employment demands and lack of access.

The United States Senate needs to vote on the PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act so that providing human milk is a viable option for more families. This bipartisan bill passed the full House and Senate committee with overwhelming support, but has been waiting for a Senate vote for nearly a year, all while millions of working parents struggle to feed their babies!

The PUMP Act would close the gap in existing law that leaves one in four working people of childbearing age without the time and space needed to express milk during the work period. Without break time and space to express milk, far too many families are unable to provide human milk after returning to work.

We need urgent action to pass the PUMP Act now! Doing so will help build resilience and foster better health for our community!

Jarene Fleming, IBCLC RLC

Ms. Fleming is the State Breastfeeding Coordinator for the Virginia Department of Health, Office of Family Health Services, Division of Community Nutrition.

B-ham prisoners are suffering

[Editor's note: This statement was originally posted July 23, 2022, by nevercrossapicketline in Writings from Uhuru.]

Have you ever opened the door to a hot oven and felt dizzy and overwhelmed from the intensity of the heat hitting you in the face? That is how it feels for people incarcerated at Buckingham Correctional Center (BCC) every summer, but especially during the current heat wave that's sweeping the country.

But get this: Prison staff at BCC do not

experience excessive heat conditions, because the areas in which they work and frequent — the control booths, school areas, medical department, education department, administration offices, etc. — are all equipped with air conditioning (AC).

While the US and other parts of the world, like Western Europe, are experiencing unprecedented deadly heat waves, people trapped in prisons, jails, and detention centers not equipped with AC in the areas where they are housed are suffering exponentially from these sweltering conditions.

For instance, if it is 100 degrees for those of you on the outside, the temperature is always several degrees higher for those of us confined in housing units not equipped with AC. With the lack of AC; poor ventilation; substandard medical care; unsafe drinking water; big slabs of concrete that trap heat; antiquated sewage systems that regularly back up and spew raw sewage in the cells and housing units; and the persistence of COVID-19, which is still spreading and infecting people at BCC, all of these conditions on top of record high temperatures create unbearable conditions that are tantamount to the kind of cruel and unusual punishment prohibited by the eighth amendment to the US constitution. Sick and elderly people confined under these conditions suffer the most.

So, is there a need for an intersecting movement for prison abolition? The short answer is "Yes," because when environmentalists talk about how climate change is caused by the burning of fossil fuels, and how the impact of this is felt most by people in third world countries least responsible for climate pollution, the ways in which climate change impacts people in confinement are often left out of conversations about climate justice. This is a blind spot that is causing incarcerated and detained people to die in silence and invisibility.

Of course, I believe prisons in general should be abolished and demolished, but right now, due to the immediacy of the current situation, we need prison abolitionists and climate justice activists to unite, and once united, collectively raise your voices to bring awareness to this issue and demand that Virginia governor Glen Youngkin, VADOC director Harold W. Clarke, and Virginia Secretary of Public Safety Robert Mosie shut down all prisons, jails, and detention centers in Virginia (including, but not limited to, BCC and Augusta Correctional Center) not equipped with AC in the areas where incarcerated and detained people are housed.

This is needed to prevent the needless suffering and death of human beings amid record high temperatures due to climate change.

Uhuru B. Rowe

BUCKINGHAM CORR. CENTER

The situation regarding the right to abortion in Poland

By Ewa Groszewska

The right to abortion was granted to women in Poland in 1956. At that time it concerned only medical reasons or a difficult financial situation. In later years, the abortion was performed at the woman's request.

After the change of the political and economic system in 1989, Solidarity (Solidarność) MPs [members of the parliament] associated with the Catholic Church began work on limiting this right. Abortion was to be allowed only when the woman's life was at risk, if there were fetal defects or if the pregnancy was a consequence of a crime.

This was met with resistance from women and the collection of signatures on a petition to stop this change. In 1996, some leftist MPs tried to change the law to make abortion legal because of social reasons, but without success.

In 2007, there were attempts made to include "life protection" in the Constitution of Poland. In 2016, the citizen committee "Stop Abortion" submitted half-a-million signatures to the Marshal of Parliament with the goal of banning all abortions. The project included imprisonment for the mother, doctor and abortion assistants.

At the same time, another citizens' initiative, called "Save Women," presented 215,000 signatures under a project of legalizing abortion at a woman's request. The Polish Parliament rejected this project, but decided to consider the project of "Stop Abortion." This decision caused massive demonstrations in big cities and small towns. Many women who declared a Catholic identity also took part in the protests.

In 2020, the Constitutional Court issued a ruling that stated that permitting abortion in the case of damage to the fetus (what had been possible at that time) was inconsistent with the Constitution. Due to the protests that started after this declaration, the Tribunal has refrained from publishing the ruling. This took place on Jan. 27, 2021. Several legal institutions question the ruling's legality, such as the Association of Polish Judges and the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights.

After the Constitutional Tribunal issued this ruling, doctors say they are afraid of making decisions on abortion for women whose lives are in danger. They argue that it is a big risk and a bureaucratic procedure to justify and explain each case, because each time the prosecutor may intervene.

Currently, abortion is criminalized. For example, an activist from the Abortion Dream Team, Justyna Wydrzyńska, who helped a

woman obtain abortion pills in 2020, has been charged by a prosecutor and faces up to three years in prison. This activist has support from human rights organizations like Amnesty International.



The potests from 2016 and 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic had the hope of creating a social movement from leftwingers and liberals, but unfortunately did not succeed. In Poland, there are several organizations for legalizing abortion or helping to make it abroad. However, spontaneous protests against tightening abortion rights have died down, and the feminist movement is virtually non-existent.

Organizational structures and a culture of protest have not developed in Poland, and this applies to all social issues. The neo-liberal "opposition" media helped mobilize the abortion protests and played a role in organizing them, but the protest leaders created by the media are wealthy politicians or businesswomen connected with influential developer capital. This is the reason why women of the popular classes did not feel represented by them.

Moreover, many poor people in Poland feel a great aversion to neoliberal circles, which have now supported the protests - but still do not support the full right to abortion at the request of a woman. It results from their contempt for the poor. The paradox is that poor people, including women who support the right to abortion, believe that in social matters they are supported by the government, which at the same time introduces the draconian anti-abortion law.

The Parliamentary left organization Together (Razem) supports the full right to abortion, but its representatives speak the language of middle-class problems on a daily basis. Currently, Together agrees with the government in everything related to the war in Ukraine and completely loses sense and legitimacy also among some left-wing people. Thus, a genuine movement for women's rights may arise in parallel with the emergence of a clear class narrative of the left in public space.

Ewa Groszewska is a longtime social justice activist in Poland.

international & antiwar news



Virginia activists protest March 13 outside NATO Command in Norfolk to demand: “No to War with Russia! No to Sanctions! No to NATO! No to the Wars at Home & Abroad!” The action was co-sponsored by the Hampton Roads Coalition for Peace & Planet and the Virginia Defenders. Members of Norfolk Catholic Worker also participated. Photo by Phil Wilayto

The provocations behind the ‘unprovoked’ war

Editor's note: This opinion piece originally was published in the Richmond Times-Dispatch - print edition on Sunday, July 24, 2022; online edition July 23 at <https://richmond.com>

By Phil Wilayto

Back in 1949, the United States, Canada and 10 Western European countries formed a military alliance called the North Atlantic Treaty organization, or NATO. Washington had decided that the Soviet Union, its wartime ally — the one that had broken the back of the Nazi war machine — now was its peacetime enemy.

By 1990, the Soviet Union and most of its socialist allies were collapsing, the result of internal contradictions and outside pressures. The U.S. was promoting the reunification of Germany — a move opposed by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, who still remembered how his country had lost 20 million people to the Nazi invasion, and was not real excited about the prospect of a revitalized Germany.

So U.S. Secretary of State James Baker offered a deal: If Gorbachev agreed to a united Germany, NATO, which by that time had grown from its original 12 members to 16, would promise not to advance one inch eastward. Gorbachev agreed.

Today, each of the 14 new NATO member countries has been to the east. Of the seven

countries bordering Russia's western flank, Estonia, Latvia and Norway already are NATO members. Finland, Georgia and Ukraine have asked to join.

Once that process is completed, Russia's only western border ally would be Belarus. Every other bordering country would be committed by Article 5 of the NATO Charter to come to each other's defense in the event of a military confrontation.

And this should worry Russia, why?

- In 1999, NATO carried out a 78-day air campaign in Yugoslavia that involved 400 aircraft, 5,000 personnel and the use of cancer-causing depleted uranium munitions.

- From 2003 to 2014, NATO led the Western military effort in the U.S. war in Afghanistan, a disaster for both the U.S. and the Afghans.

- After the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 — the one based on the lie about weapons of mass destruction — NATO trained, mentored and assisted the U.S.-dominated Iraqi Security Forces. That mission continues to this day.

- In 2011, NATO led a massive bombing campaign against Libya, once the most prosperous country in all of Africa, reducing it to a failed state and haven for extremists who since have expanded their operations throughout most of West Africa.

For the sake of argument, let's leave aside the question of whether any of these NATO

wars were justified. Instead, let's look at the relative balance of forces between Russia, the U.S. and NATO.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Russia's military expenditure in 2021 was \$65.9 billion. The United States' was \$801 billion — more than 12 times that of Russia.

For NATO, the combined military expenditures of all 30 member countries in 2021 was an estimated \$1.2 trillion — more than 18 times that of Russia. And even though Russia and NATO have rough parity when it comes to nuclear weapons, it's just possible that the steady eastward expansion of a steadily growing and hostile NATO might have raised some legitimate security concerns in Russia.

Then, there's the matter of U.S. support for the anti-Russian Ukrainian coup of 2014. This began as peaceful protests against then-President Viktor Yanukovich for his opposition to closer economic ties with Western Europe. It morphed into a violent uprising in which openly neo-Nazi organizations played a major role.

The U.S. support was not in dispute. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., had traveled to give encouraging speeches to the protesters. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland handed out pastries to the crowds. More importantly, she later openly bragged that the U.S. had spent \$5 billion promoting “pro-democracy” groups in the country.

The coup changed Ukraine in fundamental ways. The new government banned the use of the Russian language for official business, even though 17% of the population was ethnic Russian and some 30% spoke Russian as a first language.

Statues honoring Ukrainian fascists like Stepan Bandera, who had collaborated with the Nazi occupation, were erected while memorials to Soviet war heroes were taken down. The neo-Nazi organizations were free to roam the streets, attacking anyone opposed to the coup. Those acts of violence included the May 2014 Odessa Massacre, where dozens of people were murdered in the Black Sea port city.

Meanwhile, Ukraine began to operate as a NATO member in everything but name, including carrying out joint military exercises right up to Russia's border.

None of this is meant to endorse Russia's war. But since the Biden administration already has given Ukraine \$5.3 billion in military aid, it might be a good idea to view the war in a historical context.

And if we do that, “unprovoked” might not be the first word that comes to mind.

Phil Wilayto is editor of The Virginia Defender and coordinator of the Odessa Solidarity Campaign. Contact him at: virginiadefendernews@gmail.com

Statement of Solidarity with Boston Anti-Zionists

**Issued July 11, 2022,
by the Antiwar Committee of the
Virginia Defenders for Freedom,
Justice & Equality**

The Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality is issuing this statement in solidarity with The Mapping Project and the members of Boston BDS who are under attack for exposing companies that support the Zionist Occupation of Palestine.

On June 3, 2022, The Mapping Project was launched on the Internet exposing Boston-based organizations complicit in imperialism, militarism, the prison-industrial complex, Zionism and the displacement of people domestically and abroad.

These entities were depicted on a map with explanations about their roles in carrying out and maintaining colonialism and U.S. hegemony. The map depicts the overlap of Zionism, Western imperialism and their intersections in structural networks of oppression.

Among the entities are universities, police departments, army bases and weapons manufacturing companies that are complicit in U.S. imperialism abroad. The entities contained within the map can be found here.

The Mapping Project was first publicized by BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) Boston. Since then, the initiative and the local BDS organizers have been slandered by Zionist organizations and U.S. politicians and have even been subjected to an FBI investigation. The project has been falsely labeled, according to Josh Gottheimer, a Democrat who represents New Jersey's fifth congressional district in Congress, as “a roadmap for terrorists and violent extremists to intentionally target Jewish groups.”

According to Palestine Legal, an independent organization dedicated to protecting the civil rights of pro-Palestine activists, there currently are 32 states with legislation in effect targeting advocacy for Palestinian rights. In addition to legislative suppression, pro-Palestine activists face doxxing and the subsequent harassment and intimidation by a McCarthyite-style Zionist campaign called Canary Mission.

Boycotting Israeli apartheid and institutions complicit in U.S. imperialism is fundamental for the liberation of oppressed

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international & antiwar news



The Plowshare Peace & Justice Center in Roanoke is Virginia's oldest peace organization. Beginning in the 1970s, its members and supporters have held vigils at the city's City Market. Those vigils became monthly events in April 2005 and, with just a few breaks for blizzards, hurricanes, heat waves and the current pandemic, have taken place ever since. Plowshare will be observing its 200th vigil next September. The organization can be contacted at: plowshare@plowshareva.org, 540-492-3582 and on the web at plowshareva.org

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peoples around the world. And supporting organizations and projects under attack for carrying out this important work is a responsibility for all progressive organizations.

In addition to declaring our support for The Mapping Project and BDS Boston, the Defenders want to help expose Virginia-based entities that are complicit in Israel's occupation of Palestine as well as U.S. war crimes:

Virginia Commonwealth University

VCU's School of World Studies and the Global Education Office host a study-abroad program in Israel where students travel throughout occupied Palestinian land, including the Old City in Occupied East Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is the current focus of the Zionist occupation's campaign of Palestinian evictions and home demolitions with the goal of populating the area with Israeli settlers. Information on the VCU-sponsored trip to occupied Palestine can be found on the webpage for the study abroad program.

Virginia Israel Advisory Board

The Virginia Israel Advisory Board is a state agency with the mission of promoting commerce with a particular country. It is funded by Virginia taxpayers with the purpose of advising the governor on ways to improve economic and cultural links between Virginia and the Israeli occupation. The VIAB also works against the BDS Movement. Information on the VIAB can be found here.

Virginia police departments

According to the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights, of which the Virginia Defend-

ers are a member, the police departments of Richmond, Smithfield, Virginia Beach and Fairfax and Prince William counties are among many across the country that receive "counter-terrorism" training in Israel. Law enforcement agencies and government officials meet with Israeli military and police forces for conferences, training, and workshops. Repressive methods used by the Israeli occupation to brutalize and incarcerate indigenous Palestinians are then used to subjugate African-Americans and protestors here in the United States. Further information about these Virginia police departments' training in Israel can be found here.

Sabra Dipping Company, LLC

Sabra is a U.S.-based company that produces various food products, including hummus and guacamole. It is co-owned by PepsiCo and the Strauss Group, one of the largest food product manufacturers in Israel. Sabra has a major, state-of-the-art plant in Chesterfield, Va. The company is on the official BDS list due to its support for the Israeli military, specifically the Golani and Givati brigades, both of which have been credibly accused of human rights abuses against Palestinians. (See this 2011 article from the Guardian for further information on Golani brigade atrocities, and this 2014 Haretz reporting about the Givati brigade). Additionally, Strauss Group Chairperson Ofra Strauss sits on the advisory board of the Foundation for Former Soldiers (HES-EG), an organization that pays non-Israelis to serve in the Israeli occupation forces. Information about boycotting Sabra Hummus can be found here.

'Axis of Resistance' shows growing opposition to U.S. drive for world domination

By Sanaz Ghodsi

On June 10, Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro visited Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in Tehran, Iran, to discuss plans to boost bilateral ties between the two countries. As two oil-rich nations under economic siege by the United States, Iran and Venezuela have developed strategic relations with each other to survive sanctions targeting their oil industries.

Presidents Maduro and Raisi signed a 20-year cooperation plan with the goal of further boosting the decades-long cooperation between the two countries. Maduro announced the opening of weekly flights between Caracas and Tehran to develop tourism between the two nations, as well as plans to sell Venezuelan coffee in Iran. The partnership also aims to bolster cooperation in science, technology, agriculture and more.

Despite being an oil-rich nation, the infrastructure of Venezuela's oil refining facilities does not have the capacity to refine oil into gasoline. In addition, U.S. sanctions on Venezuela have prevented the country from importing fuel from other nations. Beginning in September 2020, in an effort to break the embargo on Venezuela, Iran delivered three tankers with more than 800,000 barrels of fuel to Venezuela. Iranian tankers also have loaded Venezuelan crude oil for sale throughout Asia. In May 2022, Iran's National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company signed a 110 million euro contract to help repair one of Venezuela's oil refineries.

Relations between Venezuela and Iran extend beyond fuel deliveries and crude oil exports. In June 2020, Iran delivered medical aid packages to Venezuela to assist the country's containment of COVID-19. The next month, the first Iranian supermarket, named Megasis, opened in Venezuela selling food, home appliances and clothing.

Regarding the cooperation and comradery between the two nations, Maduro stated, "The Axis of Resistance exists throughout the world; it exists in Africa, in Asia, in the Middle East, in Latin America and in the Caribbean. The resistance also belongs to the people who are fighting against neoliberalism, racism, and various forms of colonization, political, economic, and cultural colonization. All of us who fight against colonialism, all of us who fight to decolonize our minds and our people,

are part of the Axis of Resistance that stands against the methods of the imperialists for imposing hegemony on the world".

Maduro's visit symbolizes the strategic economic alliance of nations targeted by sanction campaigns and hostility by the U.S., referred to as the sanctions economy. Attempts to isolate countries such as Cuba, Nicaragua, Bolivia, Lebanon, Syria, China and Russia have inadvertently created a union of these countries through trade and diplomacy. In March 2022, the head of the U.S. Southern Command, Gen. Laura Richardson, expressed before Congress that "Iran expanded economic and security cooperation with Venezuela, Cuba, and Bolivia through fuel transfers, barter, basic foodstuffs and military assistance, reducing the effects of U.S. sanctions."

The Axis of Resistance, which originally referred to the resistance against Zionism and U.S. domination by Iran, Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria and Yemen, has now come to include countries around the world that have boldly revolted against efforts by the U.S. empire to enslave the Global South. Iran's strategic role in the geopolitical sphere extends beyond its alliance with neighboring countries. In addition to leading West Asian resistance efforts, Iran also has come to serve as the bridge between Latin American and West Asian nations.

Bolivian President Luis Arce restored diplomatic relations with Iran that had been destroyed by the U.S.-backed puppet regime of Jeanine Anez. In May 2022, Romina Guadalupe Perez Ramos, the Bolivian ambassador to Iran, met with the Iranian Red Crescent's president, Dr. Pir Hossein Kolivand, to discuss collaborating with the IRC in pharmaceuticals and constructing hospitals and treatment centers, as well as the possibility of using Baraka, Iran's domestically produced vaccine for COVID-19.

In January 2021, Cuba announced the signing of an accord to collaborate with Iran on coronavirus research. Technology and research on coronavirus vaccine candidacy would be exchanged with Iran in order for Iranian scientists to carry out the remainder of clinical trials.

As inflation inflicts Western economies as a result of the U.S.-led sanctions campaign against Russia, countries whose sovereignty has been undermined by the United States strengthen trade relations and diplomacy amongst each other. President Maduro's visit to Iran exemplifies a shift to a multipolar world and the decline of the U.S. empire.

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