

*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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Autumn 2023

A preliminary report on the People's Tribunal

**People's Tribunal on
Virginia's Prisons, Jails
& Detention Centers**

**Presented by the VIRGINIA PRISON JUSTICE
NETWORK and the VIRGINIA DEFENDERS
for FREEDOM, JUSTICE & EQUALITY**



With prisoner testimonies, photos & Community Judges statements. See pages 3-9.

"When the prison doors are opened, the real dragon will fly out." — Ho Chi Minh - Vietnamese Revolutionary, May 19, 1890 - Sept. 2, 1969

regional & national news



Photo by Phil Wilayto

APSP Chairman Omali Yeshitela, one of the Uhuru 3, speaks at a rally held in Malcolm X Park before the 15th Annual Black People's March on the White House.

National march demands DOJ drop bogus charges against Uhuru 3

Staff Report

Every year on the first Saturday in November, the Black is Back Coalition for Social Justice, Peace and Reparations, an 18-member alliance led by the African People's Socialist Party, holds a Black People's March on the White House. This year's march, the 15th, called for the federal government to drop its charges against the Uhuru 3.

The African People's Socialist Party is a revolutionary, anti-colonialist organization founded in

1972. It has always been outspoken against U.S. wars and interventions, including the current U.S. support for Ukraine in its war against Russia. On July 29, 2022, the FBI raided the offices of the party and its related Uhuru Movement in Florida and Missouri.

In April, the misnamed Department of Justice charged APSP Chairman Omali Yeshitela and two white supporters, Penny Hess and Jesse Nevel, with acting as unregistered agents of the Russian

government, claiming they had spoken out against U.S. support for Ukraine because they were working for the Russian government. The three have become known as the Uhuru 3. "Uhuru" is the Swahili word for "freedom."

What is especially dangerous about the case - not just for the three defendants, but for the entire progressive movement - is that the Biden administration is arguing that the defendants spread "disinformation" when they said the U.S. and NATO provoked the Ukraine War. This is the position taken by much of the U.S. antiwar movement, including the Virginia Defenders. If the government can define what is true and what is "disinformation," the First Amendment right to free speech is essentially gutted.

At a pre-march rally held in D.C.'s Malcolm X Park, Jesse Nevel, who heads the APSP-related Uhuru Solidarity Movement, gave the Defender an update on the legal case, explaining that the presiding judge was expected to rule sometime in November on a defense motion to dismiss the charges. If the judge declines, Nevel said, the case is expected to go to court in February.

The charges carry a maximum penalty of 15 years. Chairman Yeshitela is 81.

Among the many speakers delivering solidarity messages at the Nov. 4 rally was Virginia Defender editor Phil Wilayto, who coordinates the Defenders' Odessa Solidarity Campaign, which also has been outspoken against the U.S. role in the war in Ukraine.

The Virginia Defenders have been supporting the Uhuru 3 since the FBI raids in 2022.

Atlanta Cop City struggle intensifies

Staff Report

The years-long struggle to block the city of Atlanta from opening a massive, \$90-million police training center is poised to enter a new stage in November, with plans for a week of Black-led events aimed at the local Black community, followed by a mass march Nov. 13 onto the 171-acre training site. Half of Atlanta's population is Black, as are the majority of people living around the training center site.

Organizers hope to turn out more than 1,000 people for the nonviolent march that will take place in one of the few remaining forested areas in Atlanta's metropolitan region.

The struggle against the project known as Cop City has garnered national and international attention, especially after the Jan. 18 fatal police shooting of protester Manuel Paez Terán, or "Tortugueta," as the young activist was camping with other protesters in a public park about a mile from the planned center.

An autopsy "... described 57 gunshot wounds and at least 14 bullets being found in or near Paez Terán's body," according to a May 24 report in the Guardian newspaper.

Adding to the intensity around the struggle has been the charging of 61 people under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO, a highly unusual use of the law originally aimed at organized crime.

More information at: blockcopcity.org.

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

THE VIRGINIA DEFENDERS for Freedom, Justice & Equality

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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.

People's Tribunal Report

Virginia Defender Staff Report

More than 150 people came together Oct. 7 for the People's Tribunal on Virginia's Prisons, Jails & Detention Centers, an all-day public hearing held at the Greater Richmond Convention Center in Richmond, Va.

The event was co-sponsored by the Virginia Prison Justice Network (vapjn.wordpress.com) and the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality (defendersfje.blogspot.com).

From 10 in the morning till 4 in the afternoon, with a break for lunch, a panel of Community Judges heard testimony sent in by prisoners from across the state. Some of the testimony appears in the following pages.

Both the morning and afternoon sessions also had an Open Mic, during which formerly incarcerated people, family members and supporters had an opportunity to tell about their own experiences with Virginia's places of confinement.

The purpose of the Tribunal was to try and help make Prison Justice a real issue in the elections for the General Assembly and at the Assembly itself.

To accomplish that, a full report of the Tribunal is being compiled and will be sent to every member of the 2024 Virginia General Assembly.

Meanwhile, the entire hearing was videoed and a link has been sent to the hundreds of candidates for the General Assembly.

For those with access to the Internet, the hearing can be viewed on the Facebook page of the "Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality."

The following is the Tribunal program:

FIRST SESSION - 10 am - 12:30 pm

Co-Chairs

Hassan Shabazz - Co-Founder & Steering Committee Member, Virginia Prison Justice Network
Lynetta Thompson - Co-Chair, Richmond Chapter Virginia Prison Justice Network; Co-Founder, Community Unity in Action

WELCOMING REMARKS

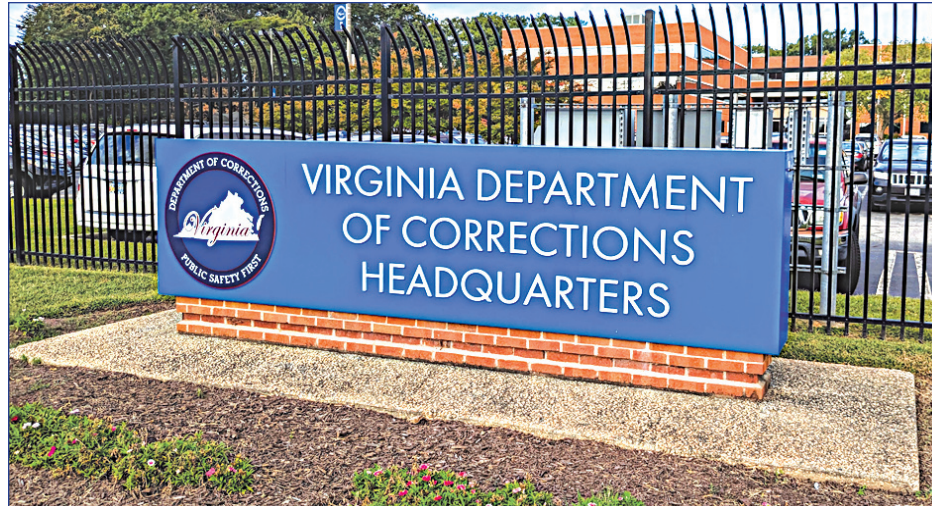
INTRODUCTION OF COMMUNITY JUDGES

Princess Blanding - Sister of Marcus-David Peters; Co-founder, Justice & Reformation; Liberation Party candidate for governor of Virginia, 2021

Lillie "Ms. K" Branch-Kennedy (1st Session) - Founder & Executive Director, Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged & Disenfranchised (R.I.H.D.); mother of a formerly incarcerated son; statewide

Lorrene Crowell (2nd Session) - Representative, Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged & Disenfranchised (R.I.H.D.); mother of an incarcerated son

Monica Chavez - Co-founder, Amigos Legacy, works with programs to improve the quality of life



Headquarters of the Virginia Department of Corrections, 6900 Atmore Drive in Richmond.
Photo by Phil Wilayto

A preliminary report on the People's Tribunal on Virginia's Prisons, Jails & Detention Centers

in the community

Mignonne C. Guy, Ph.D. - Associate Professor & Former Chair, Department of African American Studies, Virginia Commonwealth University; Founder & Co-chair, VCU College of Humanities and Sciences Committee on Racial Equity & of the Committee on Racial Equity Student Advisory Group; Multiple Principal Investigator, Center for Research, Health, and Social Justice.

Rev. Rodney Hunter - Pastor, Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church; Board Member, Virginia Poverty Law Center; Former President, Richmond Area Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC)

Rob Poggenklass - Executive Director, Justice Forward Virginia; former attorney with the Youth Justice and Civil Rights and Racial Justice program of the Legal Aid Justice Center, Charlottesville

ANNOUNCEMENT about Virginia Indigenous Day - Oct. 9

DEDICATION of the People's Tribunal to the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel & Announcement about the Oct. 10 21st Annual Gabriel's Gathering

Ana Edwards - Founder & Chair, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project of the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality

WHY WE ARE MEETING & WHAT WE HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH

Phil Wilayto - Editor, The Virginia Defender; Co-ordinator, People's Tribunal

STATEMENTS BY VIRGINIA PRISONERS

OPEN MIC

LUNCH - Outside the hall - 12:30 - 2 pm

SECOND SESSION - 2-4 pm

Co-Chairs:

Joseph S.H. Rogers - Community Organizer; Member, Virginia Defenders
 Jennifer Dalton - Founder & Director, Virginia Justice Alliance

STATEMENTS BY VIRGINIA PRISONERS

OPEN MIC

COMMENTS BY THE COMMUNITY JUDGES

FINAL REMARKS

Phil Wilayto - Editor, The Virginia Defender; Co-ordinator, People's Tribunal

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funding for the People's Tribunal has been provided by a generous grant from the **JustVA Fund** of the **Weissberg Foundation**. The JustVA Fund supports efforts at the intersection of criminal and racial justice in Virginia. (weissbergfoundation.org/justva-fund). The Weissberg Foundation envisions a world that recognizes inequities and actively seeks to dismantle structural racism by continuously building access, opportunity, and power so that all can thrive. (weissbergfoundation.org)

The sound was provided by **Pro Teen Productions**.

The Tribunal graphic, based on an existing graphic, was designed by **@ministersof-monsters**.

The PEOPLE'S TRIBUNAL has been endorsed by the following organizations & individuals:

Abolish Slavery Virginia
 Bridging the Gap in Virginia
 Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants
 Coalition for Justice (Blacksburg)
 Forty Strong
 Freedom Over Everything (F.O.E.)
 From Conviction 2 Redemption
 House of Dreams ReEntry Services
 The Humanization Project
 Ignite Justice
 Inmate Support Virginia
 Interfaith Action for Human Rights
 National Association of Social Workers - VA/DC
 Nolef Turns Inc.
 Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged & Disenfranchised (R.I.H.D.)
 Sistas in Prison Reform
 Valley Justice Coalition (Central Shenandoah Valley)
 Virginia Justice Alliance
 Virginia Prisons Accountability Committee
 Virginia Voice for the Voiceless

Community of United Focus (Norfolk)
 Community Unity in Action (Richmond)
 Democratic Socialists of America - Richmond
 Gabriel-Bowser Circle
 Hampton Roads Coalition for Peace & Planet
 Justice for Xzavier
 Odessa Solidarity Campaign (Richmond)
 Peace Praxis - Shenandoah Valley Antiwar Coalition
 Petersburg Community Resiliency Hub.
 Plowshare Peace & Justice Center
 Richmond Food Not Bombs
 Richmond For All
 Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project (Richmond)
 United Parents Against Lead & Other Environmental Hazards

Divine Truth Architect Allah - Parole Virginia Rep. at Augusta Correctional Center
 Princess Blanding - Liberation Party Candidate for Virginia Governor, 2021
 Jermaine Doss - Wrongfully convicted person, sentenced to life-plus-34 years (incarcerated at Greensville CC)
 Alejandro Tabb El - Parole Virginia Rep. at Buckingham Correctional Center
 Askari Lumumba - Co-Founder & Steering Committee Member, VAPJN; Member, Virginia Defenders (incarcerated at Greensville CC)
 Kevin "Rashid" Johnson - Defense Minister, Revolutionary Intercommunal Black Panther Party (incarcerated at Sussex I CC)
 Vermetta Phillips - Mother of Anwar R. Phillips, who was found murdered in a solitary confinement cell at Red Onion State Prison
 Uhuru Baraka Rowe - Co-founder/Co-leader, Justice for Uhuru Coordinating Committee and Incarcerated Women's Clemency & Support Project (incarcerated at Dillwyn CC)
 Shaka Shakur - on behalf of NALC - New Afrikan Liberation Collective, Co-Founder (incarcerated at Beaumont CC)
 Natasha White - Director of Community Engagement, Interfaith Action for Human Rights
 Phil Wilayto - Editor, The Virginia Defender

African People's Socialist Party (APSP)
 Hands Off Uhuru! Fightback Coalition
 Hands Off Uhuru! Hands Off Africa! Defense Campaign
 International Action Center
 Jeff Mackler - National Secretary, Socialist Action
 Mobilization to Free Mumia Abu-Jamal, Northern California
 Popular Resistance
 Socialist Unity Party
 Struggle-La Lucha newspaper
 United National Antiwar Coalition
 United National Antiwar Coalition (UNAC), Northern California
 U.S. Peace Council
 Workers Voice Socialist Movement - Louisiana

Heinrich Buecker - Director, Coop Antiwar Cafe, Berlin, Germany
 Agneta Norberg - Former Chair, Swedish Peace Council

People's Tribunal Report



Testimony at the People's Tribunal was heard by a panel of Community Judges. From left: Morning Session Co-chairs Hassan Shabazz and Lynetta Thompson. Judges: RIHD Founder Lillie "Ms. K" Branch-Kennedy; Justice Forward Virginia Executive Director Rob Poggenklass; VCU African American Studies Department Chair Mignonne C. Guy; Justice & Reformation Founder Princess Blanding; Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church Pastor Rev. Rodney Hunter; and Amigos Legacy Co-founder Monica Chavez.

People's Tribunal photos by Phil Wilayto

The following are samples of the many statements that were sent in by Virginia prisoners to be read at the People's Tribunal.

BEATING AT RIVER NORTH

To those who believe in Justice for all and that of Equal Rights and Protections under the U.S. Constitution ...

On Dec. 21, 2021, I was viciously attacked and beaten by correctional officers upon my arrival at River North Correctional Center. This vicious and brutal act was carried out while I was in full restraints - i.e.m that of trip gear, belly/waist chain, shackles, handcuffs and black box.

Sometime in the year of late 2022, after exhausting all of my administrative remedies, I filed a 1983 Civil Rights Complaint within the Southwestern Division Federal Court. As the proceedings progressed, some of the defendants hired individual attorneys to represent their interest instead of relying upon the Attorney General office alone to defend them. This placed me in a situation where I'm having to fight against three separate lawyers.

Three separate firms and three different attorneys, while I attempt to litigate the case as a Pro Se litigant and using an outdated law library at the time.

In August of 2023, I decided to withdraw the case without prejudice because of personal medical reasons and my inability to keep up with the task at hand.

This was a vicious attack and was infected with all kind of racial epithets and derogatory

commentary. It should not be allowed to stand. I have until December or January in which to refile. I'm seeking the legal assistance of an Attorney, either as a Pro Bono Attorney or for a reasonable fee.

If you're an Attorney or part of a legal organization and you would like to read or learn about this case or the circumstances around it, you can contact me at shakashakur@protonmail.com or the below listed address.

Thank you for your time and patience.

Shaka Shakur #1996207
Beaumont Corr. Center
3500 Beaumont Rd.
Beaumont, Va. 23014

BRUTALITY AT POCAHONTAS

To whom this may concern:

There were two serious incidents last month (September) of prisoners here at Pocahontas Corr. Ctr. being beaten maliciously by officers. Both these men were fully restrained (handcuffs and leg irons) while having their heads and faces smashed into the ground. They were repeatedly punched, kicked, and yanked around by these officers. This was done in full view of other prisoners!

One incident involved Antonio Vidals. It was on Sept. 7, 2023, in D-building, 3 pod. Mr. Vidals was confronted by officers for a rule violation. They decided he needed to go to the r.h.u. (hole), but something went terribly wrong and the officers slammed Mr. Vidals face first into the door jam. At least 10 officers proceeded to punch kick and jump on him while

he was handcuffed. Mr. Vidals was emergency transferred to W.R.S.P. that day. The camera footage and multiple witnesses in that pod will confirm this account.

The other incident involved L. Watson. It was Sept. 5, 2023, and Mr. Watson got into a verbal dispute with officers in B-building 1 pod.

He was verbally aggressive and the officers decided he should be placed in r.h.u. (hole). After a brief standoff, he complied with Captain Sturnam and was handcuffed and shackled. During the officer escort to the hole, certain extraction team officers began to antagonize Mr. Watson because he had "cuffed up" instead of following through with refusing to comply. More words were exchanged and the officers say Mr. Watson spit on them. What followed next was one of the most vicious instances of excessive force that Pocahontas has ever seen.

He was slammed face first into the concrete sidewalk. Then at least 15 officers proceeded to kick, punch and drag his body on the concrete.

Camera footage of both these incidents has been preserved while an "internal investigation" ensues. Photos were taken of the horrible facial injuries both these men suffered amongst other injuries to their bodies. They both have permanent scarring.

FOIA requests may allow for viewing of the photos, cameras and bodycam footage.

We as a nation have seen this year how officers can also get that "mob mentality" that makes normally decent people act savage. Tyre Nichols lost his life at the hands of officers. Henrico County sheriff's deputies beat a pris-

oner to death this year. At this rate, Pocahontas will be the next to kill a detainee if this behavior is allowed to continue.

I'm not justifying any prisoner's bad behavior, but the job of a staff member or officer of the Virginia Dept. of Corrections requires professionalism and restraint. If everyone can act savage, then there is no separation of officer and offender. These two men happen to be minorities.

This is not the only incident of prisoner abuse this year, these are just two of the worse ones. Prisoner's lives matter too.

(Name withheld to protect the prisoner)

IS RACISM A FACTOR IN PRISON CLOSINGS?

Why is it that the only area where prisons are closed or partially shut down is the Eastern or Central regions? Could it be an issue of race?

The Western region employs predominantly white staff, while the Eastern and Central employ mostly African American staff. Because of these closings, prisoners are being funneled into the West region and placed in prisons like River North, where staffing shortages are rampant.

In the last 12 months, this Security Level 4 prison has never provided the minimum of eight hours of "out of cell activity" mandated by VADOC for all SL4 prisons. Religious programming is restricted to twice monthly, instead of weekly. Outside rec is provided three days out of the week at best, unless you reside

People's Tribunal Report

in a P.B.U.

The administration has provided every excuse, from COVID restrictions to staffing shortages. We spend on average 19 hrs in the cell, 18 hrs on a good day. It should be 16 hrs minimum.

This prison is labeled a correctional center, but is run like a state prison. Prisoners have tried to address these issues, to no avail. The admin does not take our requests seriously.

There is an ongoing investigation into the beatings and K9 assaults, at the hands of officers, of multiple mentally ill prisoners this year. Why does this prison get to stay open? Does the DOC allocate the same amount of money to the other North as they do the Western? Does River North have to perform to a certain standard to qualify for these funds? Is Keen Mountain underperforming also?

These are serious questions that must be answered in the interest of equality and fair treatment by the VADOC, not only of prisoners but of staff of color in other regions. Maybe former officers from all regions can enlighten us.

Thank you for listening, and may someone do something.

Sincerely,

Phillip Daniel
RIVER NORTH CC

MANY PROBLEMS AT GREENSVILLE

Hello,

Would you mind helping bring publicity and help to our situation here at Greenville.

On 9-8-23, the lead warden Punturi signed off on a notice saying that we will be out one hour a day, bottom tier top tier. This is against their policies and is cruel and unusual punishment. as a Level 3 we are to have 10 hours out of bed area time a day.

Additionally, the onsite ombudsman Ms. Witt is not logging in complaints or grievances to protect the corruption going on here at Greenville. We are being oppressed by K9 officers, guys are being bit & they are taking a more racial oriented prejudicial approach. Any type of resistance and they will send us to the mountains, but how much can we take?

THE CONSEQUENCES OF SHORT STAFFING

What is going on today in the Dept. of Corrections is the stench of Complacency and Marginalism gone awry. This reality is indicative of poor leadership - a leadership that is reactionary and not visionary!

The Dept. of Corrections has been short of staff for the past six yrs and is NEVER going



People's Tribunal volunteer Taimir Gore reads statements from Virginia prisoners before the panel of Community Judges.

to be fully staffed again! (Whatever that number is.)

The fact of the matter is that being short is the new normal! So much so that they actually have to rewrite the partially staffed definition, because it is actually the "fully staffed" definition now.

The once "barely staffed" definition was a number that would activate a modified lockdown. That number doesn't exist anymore because in most cases that is the actual staffing number for the day.

Because there is no staffing there is no rec, programs, school, nobody to do rounds etc. We are left to our own devices. It is prisoners who notify staff of O.D's or seizures. It is prisoners who are the first responders and render first aid (with no medical training). It is prisoners who run to medical and get the stretcher because they brought the wheelchair. It is prisoners who place the victim on the stretcher or the wheelchair because there aren't any C.O.s to escort the nurses. It is prisoners who go to the chow hall on lock down and retrieve the food carts and feed the buildings. It is prisoners who have seamlessly been maneuvered into carrying out the C.O.s duties.

If and when we do get pod rec, it is then we have our semblance of freedom. Where if you are a person not equipped to cope, the nothingness of pod rec provides you with only a desire to self-medicate in order to "kill time." Ironically, they end up only killing themselves.

This environment is not built to facilitate rehabilitation, when secretaries and maintenance men or teachers and counselors TRY to fill in for C.O.s. But it is extremely conducive to the consistent resignation of a bewildered employee base.

Greenville has four to five wardens, five

to 10 lieutenants, three to five majors, a colonel, two to four captains, one Asst. warden, a lead warden, five to 10 Sergeants and only five C.O's. Metaphorically speaking, it is the epitome of "Too many chiefs and not enough Indians."

The Dept. of Corrections was in a crisis eight yrs ago. Today it is in Code Red and experiencing a "Death rattle" literally! We are only in this situation because of today's leadership's inability to adapt, adjust, maneuver and offset crime, drugs and social media - "The ills of society."

Punishment is used as a deterrent to crime, but punishment never really deters crime. The powers to be actually know that, but instead of truly solving our problems, they operate in facades and pursue personal agendas.

The few politicians who initially get into politics with good intentions learn that the machine will function at all cost.

So it is like waves in the ocean that our legislature legislates. It is time for the next generation to ASSUME ITS POSITION! And TAKE the reins from the old guard!!! VOTE NEW BLOOD INTO OFFICE

Marcus Ganzie #1041258
Greenville Correctional Facility

NO AC AT BUCKINGHAM

NEWS ITEM: "A Virginia mother is claiming her son and other inmates at Buckingham Correctional Center have been suffering through the recent heatwave because the jail does not have air conditioning. ... In a statement to 8News, the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC) confirmed that Buckingham and other prisons built before the 1990s don't have air conditioning." -- WRIC News, Aug. 3, 2023

Peace

Hope all is well, as for myself, i'm maintaining through it all. Here at Buckingham we've been on locked down since Wednesday, for incidents that were isolated and those who were involved are either in seg. or transferred.

Those that remain in population are being punished and treated inhumane. My reason for making this statement is because there is no AC at Buckingham and we're made to spend a huge portion of the day inside our cells, where the temp. has reach 108 degrees. People treat their pets better then we're being treated at this point.

I speak often about how the prison system doesn't rehabilitate, but only punish, which only sends a man home worse, if he doesn't take responsibility for his own rehab. Well, this is an example of just that. There are men right now that do not understand the reason for this treatment that they are under because they haven't done anything wrong, so they are left feeling useless and are ready to act out. If there is anything that can be done by you, can you look into this matter.

Kevin Dickerson
BUCKINGHAM CORR. CENTER

DRUGS IN PRISON

Concern Citizens -

The Virginia prisoners and their families are faced with a threat that if not addressed by its citizens will impact the well-being and mental state of all those that are incarcerated and including the children of the incarcerated.

The Department of Corrections' mission is to create a healing environment while nurturing each man and woman into productive citizens for preparation for their return into society. It

People's Tribunal Report



Former prisoners, family members and supporters line up to give their testimony. There were Open Mic sessions in both the Morning and Afternoon sessions.

has always been the job of the administration to encourage inmates through their treatment plan to have communication and contact with family and loved ones.

With his latest policy, the Dir. of the Department of Corrections Mr. Harold Charke has chosen to blame the problems of fentanyl overdoses and contraband on those who visit the prisons. All the data and statistics have shown that, during the height of the covid pandemic, there wasn't no visits taking place throughout Virginia. At this time, overdose deaths was at its highest. This can only mean one thing: drugs were brought in by the only people who could freely enter the prisons, which is the officers.

Mr. Harold Clarke and his administration are implementing new policy which will no longer allow contact visits amongst the incarcerated and their friends, only immediate family will be allowed to visit an inmate. This policy is a contradiction to the mission of the Department of Corrections, while also punishing those who continue to take responsibility for their own rehabilitation.

What kind of message does a policy like this say to the innocent child who wishes to see their parent and is depending on someone other than an immediate family member to bring them to visit? This policy doesn't create a healing environment for the prisoners and their family, when in fact it strikes at the core of the family structure and destroys all hope of rebuilding from what's left after most convictions.

What our Director of Corrections is not telling the Virginia taxpayer is that those men and women who they employ to secure the prisons from deadly contraband drugs such as fentanyl are either incompetent to prevent this deadly

drug from coming in or they are the cause of this drug entering the prisons.

Mr. Harold Clarke needs to apologize to the families of all those who lost their loved ones due to an overdose. If you are unsure as to what this means, then understand that if this policy is allowed to take place you will no longer be able to give your loved one a warm embrace or a kiss.

The Department of Corrections will profit from this policy by making you pay GTL to visit your loved one on a tv screen that 90% of the time is malfunctioning.

You have the power, so please take action by using your platform and contact your local representative. Let's start by calling The Department of Corrections with your complaint. "EVERYBODY COUNT."

Freedom Over Everything

PROBLEMS WITH PROTECTIVE CUSTODY

Hi there!

I sincerely request that all candidates please step up this year and put an end to the injustice, denial of Equal Protection of the Law and corruption that is currently going on in the Virginia Department of Corrections (VADOC).

The VADOC clearly designed the Protective Custody (P.C.) Unit to house inmates that are in desperate need of protection from other inmates, etc. With that being said, how can the VADOC place an inmate in a P.C. Unit for his protection from gang members, then turn right around and place known gang members in that same P.C. Unit.

Since 2016, I've seen several incidents where known gang members were placed in this pod, and shortly after, they assaulted an-

other inmate within weeks of being placed in the P.C. Unit. Lives are placed in complete danger due to the deliberate actions of the VADOC Central Classification Services there in Richmond.

Gang members who need protection should be housed in a separate unit. Gang members should never be housed in the same P.C. Unit with those inmates who known gang members have placed a "Contract for Assault" out on them or has caused some sort of harm to them. This is exactly what's going on here at ROSP.

The solution is to remove these individuals from this unit indefinitely and place them somewhere else. Another way is to find a prison that can hold all the P.C. inmates within the state, like Mecklenburg Correctional Center. Since that prison has 12 cells per pod, six pods per building, estimating around 388 cells in all.

The VADOC can house every single P.C. inmate within the state at that particular prison, and be able to provide every inmate with Level 3 privileges, allow every inmate a single cell, and be able to separate ex cops/correctional officials, gang members (Bloods, Crops, GD's, etc.) and keep separate from everyone else. This would eliminate all the VADOC's problems within the P.C. Units. since there are two such units (one here at ROSP, and the other at Haynesville Correctional Center #17).

Inmates here at ROSP receive basically Security Level 5 privileges, and the inmates at Haynesville receive Security Level 2 privileges. Having two P.C. Units here in Virginia, and treating one unit of inmates differently than the other, clearly violates the Equal Protection of the Law.

Nearly [all] the inmates, if not all, housed in the P.C. Unit at Haynesville have no release

date. They all have single life, double life or triple life sentences under the new law. So why are they housed at such a low security level and not this unit, when in fact, nearly every inmate in this unit either has a release date or actually goes up for parole each year.

The VADOC claims that all P.C. Units are considered a "P" and receive Level 3 privileges. However, this is not true. We should all be treated equally, no matter where the P.C. Units are housed at.

Thank you,

Curtis Floyd
RED ONION STATE PRISON

COMMUNIQUE ON THE STATE OF THE VIRGINIA PRISONS

In the wake of several deaths, an escape and prisoners recording fires during a rebellion before emailing it out here at Greenville, the Virginia Department of Corrections finds itself in the midst of significant changes. To fully understand where we are in this moment and what the incarcerated and free activists, organizers, journalists and litigators must do to defend ourselves from the impending attacks while advancing our struggle for Human Rights and Liberation, we must reflect on how we got here.

The basis of this moment emerges out of the Trump Presidency, Governor Northam's Black Face scandal, the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 Social Justice Protests. Collectively, the state's prison reform movements were able to advance for the first time since the dawn of Truth in Sentencing crime policy here in Virginia.

First, Trump's presidency led to the first Democratic Majority of the General Assembly

People's Tribunal Report

in decades. Second, Northam's scandal pressured the Governor to support and pass legislation that directly impacted Virginia's Black community. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic introduced policies such as early release, stimulus checks, no shakedowns, no transfers, mask-wearing, free calls and emails, etc., that fundamentally changed the culture among staff and prisoners in Virginia.



Community Judge Monica Chavez of Amogos Legacy gives a report on the conditions facing Latino and Latina prisoners in Virginia.

Lastly, the 2020 protests pressured lawmakers and corrections leaders to acquiesce to grassroots activists' demands, which led to Juvenile and FISHBACK parole, increased parole rates, increased good time, etc.

The response from the opposition has been to elect Gov. Youngkin and Attorney General Jason Miyares, who have worked to reverse those reforms or impede the impact of them.

What's happened at Greensville and other prisons across the state, namely the fentanyl overdose crisis, has forced the Governor to pay attention to a group of people he frankly would have rather neglected for four years.

Still, the move to bring in Chadwick Dotson, essentially a corrections outsider, to manage the entire VDOC, shows that the Governor doesn't fully trust the agency's current executives.

Included in that skepticism is Corrections Operations Chief A. David Robinson, who clearly has been pining for the Director position for decades. Robinson was appointed to

the position of Corrections Operations Chief in 2014 after longtime corrections exec John Jabe retired. Robinson's reign has consisted of a continuous privation of privileges and attempts to deny rights.

Although Harold Clarke recently resigned from Director of VDOC, everyone involved in VDOC knows he was a straw man and that A. David Robinson has run the system since his appointment.

Since Robinson came into power the following changes have been made:

- Visitors and Prisoners no longer able to use the bathroom in the visiting room
 - Vending machines removed from the visiting room
 - Prisoners unable to wear personal clothes and given a jumper that zips up from the back
 - Visitors limited to a maximum of four hours of visitation time.
 - Visitors must schedule a visit online
 - Visits limited to two hours
 - Began copying regular mail and limited to three pages
 - Legal Mail sent to a central distribution center before being forwarded to the prison
 - Level 3 prisons switched from biannual to quarterly Lockdown (four a year)
 - One Cable Television package of 16 channels for all prisons
 - Prisoners no longer able to type legal documents on Microsoft Word and forced to use typewriters
 - 11 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. pod recreation on weekends at Level 3 ended
 - Magazines and photos containing nude images banned
 - Rated R movies banned
 - No longer allowed to order Timberland or work Boots from commissary
 - All speeches, talks, audio books, language classes, etc., removed from JPay.
 - Promotions of many Red Onion and Wallens Ridge staff with histories of abuse, torture and corruption to executive positions throughout the agency.
- What also must be mentioned is that in 2018 Robinson attempted to force women visitors experiencing menstruation to remove their pad or tampon upon arrival and put on a pad provided by a prison official. Many questioned if this policy was attempted because Black Women make up the largest demographic of people visiting prisons in Virginia. However after much protest and national media coverage, then-Public Safety Director Brian Moran nixed the plan.

This lack of sensitivity and sensibility should have been a sign that Robinson is not

qualified to make decisions for countless free and imprisoned Virginians relying on his care yet no one took heed.

Ultimately, the primary source of prisoners' and their loved ones' hardship has been and continues to be A. David Robinson.

In Conclusion: In order for the VDOC to move into the 21st century and reduce the desire to use and sell drugs so that productive people return to the community, we prisoners and our supporters must demand that Robinson too is forced to resign.

Clarke and Robinson have functioned as a dynamic duo over the last decade, spreading misery and despair to prisoners and their loved ones with arbitrary and draconian punishments.

The current punitive culture that exists in VDOC has intensified significantly under Robinson's leadership. He is the father of disappointment, depression, and despair!!

Many prisoners and their loved ones literally sit in angst wondering what restriction or privation will Robinson pursue next. Robinson must learn that people are sent to prison AS punishment not FOR punishment.

Let's demand that Gov. Youngkin doesn't let Robinson off the hook by aggressively and persistently resisting any repressive policies Robinson attempts to implement in the wake of the crises that have happened under his watch that he also helped create. The Dictator Must Go!!

VIRGINIA PRISONERS OF CONSCIENCE & PRISONERS RIGHTS CLINIC

WE NEED TO CHANGE THE WHOLE SYSTEM

Good morning to everyone!!! I'm glad to see everyone is in the same frame of mind. We all need to stand and change the whole outlook and the whole system as how everything is supposed to be.

People seem to be narrow-minded sometimes and forget what is going on as long as it doesn't affect them, and that is what makes me sad about the world these days. I have sent a letter to the general assembly and I'm working on some congressmen that I know want to see a change. Not only with parole, but also with some other issues as the facts of constant abuse, whether it be mental or physical abuse, is all the same. This lock everyone up and forget about them is a big political pile of crap too.

But I want to give some insight on a program that is made by victims and it's for people to gain a understanding. Victim Impact; listen and learn. People need to get in it because it is the first program I've been in that is actually

about something. It's real and doesn't shoot any bs. Look into it and see what yall think.

Peace.

Russell Browning
RED ONION STATE PRISON

Economic exploitation of prisoners

To Lawmakers:

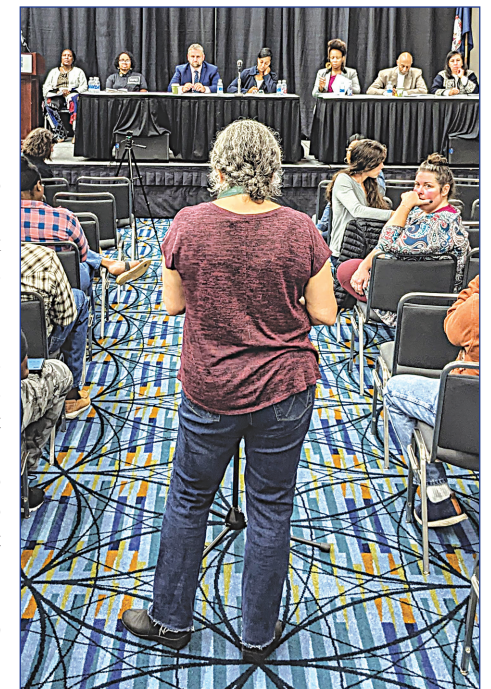
I am a college graduate of Chowan University with a bachelors of science majoring in criminal justice. I am facing 20 more years on my sentence, and being in prison I must bring forth this idea that lays heavy on my heart.

I dislike the drug economy within prisons, but I hate the destitute, exploitative financial structure within the prisons of Virginia.

What are the actual goals of prison? Is it to produce better citizens and a safer society? Or vast profits for prison profiteers/shareholders, while creating drug addicts, mental illness patients and severely under-prepared people for a return to society?

The jobs at Greensville provide the capacity for 100 jobs for 400 people and the median pay is .27¢ hr for 18 hours a week - less then \$20 a month. How can we even purchase necessities when commissary prices have been inflating monthly?

That's right - every month it's a new list with higher prices. We can't, especially when you factor in the \$1 a call it takes to communicate with our people.



Ana Edwards, chair of the Defenders' Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, reads statements from Virginia prisoners.

People's Tribunal Report



Former prisoners, family members and supporters line up to give their testimony. There were Open Mic sessions in both the Morning and Afternoon sessions.

This structure is a directed catalyst to the drug use perpetuated in David Robinson's Vadoc. The target market is the family and loved ones of the prisoners by the degradation of the body and mind of the very people the media and courts crucify - for being drug addicts, for being insane, for robbing, for not having morals, etc.

But the commonwealth of Virginia is not having morals with us. They're robbing us, they're robbing my daughters, your daughters, etc. Billions going to incarceration, but not rehabilitation.

Why do we have no library services on the biggest compound, yet \$200,000.00 in profits on commissions of Keefe & JPay services. The adverse reaction to oversight is to keep the money train going, no matter how many of us die.

\$5 an hour would change Virginia, change the impact on our families and reduce recidivism. Isn't that what we want?

The wood shop made \$10 million in profit last year. You saying they can't pay their slaves - I mean captives - \$5 when the same job on the street is \$25 or more? Same for the paralegals

in the law libraries, the cooks, the librarians, the custodial staffs, the maintenance men.

We must stop prison profiteering now.

Tevin McGougan
GREENSVILLE CORR. CENTER

MEDICAL NEGLECT AT KEEN MT.

My name is Tarik Hudgins and I am currently incarcerated at Keen Mountain Correctional Center.

On 12/2/2021, I suffered an injury to my forearm and knees when I was housed at Wallens Ridge State Prison while working in the kitchen during a COVID-19 outbreak. I was in excruciating pain at the time and I had a very large knot and swelling on my arm, but when asked for medical attention it was immediately denied/delayed.

When I finally did see medical 12/3/2021, my blood pressure was 178/115 and then later 168/100. After several complaints, I did see medical on the two related injuries.

After transferred to KMCC, I received surgery on knee, but not on forearm, on 12/15/2022 after a whole year of delayed treatment. After

surgery, I had to hop and skip on one leg with stitches in my knee without no crutches or wheelchair to get to the van and when I arrived at the prison all the way to KMCC medical department. My arm is permanently scarred with a knot and still in extreme pain.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience with you.

Tarik Hudgins
KEEN MOUNTAIN CORR. CENTER

FROM THE MOTHER OF ANWAR PHILLIPS, WHO DIED WHILE IN SOLITARY AT RED ONION

Greetings Everyone,

My son Anwar Phillips was murdered in solitary confinement at Red Onion Prison on Jan. 3, 2022. The horror of receiving the death notice from his father, mere words cannot describe.

The Assistant Warden told Anwar's father we had two days to collect his body or it (my son) would be given to the Sheriff's Department.

The blatant disrespect and disregard for my

son's murder.

IAHR [Interfaith Action for Human Rights] had worked with my son for two years. They contacted me with heartfelt condolences and immediately assisted with transportation of my son's body.

Anwar's death certificate reads:

Cause of death: Neck compression with a ligature

Manner of death: Homicide

No one has been convicted for his murder.

There is hope: Virginia's Governor has passed a new law for reform in solitary confinement. But so much more needs to be done.

But I am grateful to the many, many who work relentlessly for more positive changes and reform.

Thank you to Phil and all those in this courageous fight for human rights and humane treatment of incarcerated individuals. All people must be treated as human beings.

Thank you and God bless you

Sincerely

Vernetta Phillips
Mother of Anwar Phillips

HOUSE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

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Pastor

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People's Tribunal Report

RETALIATION FOR FILING GRIEVANCES

Good afternoon.
 My husband recently send u guys a letter from keen mountain!
 I have wrote several emails to the vadoc, governors, general assembly, lawyers, etc., without any help!
 My husband became a target to the racist employees of keen mountain! After being harassed and bullied not only by the warden, he was sexually and physically abused a few days ago and wrongfully accused of having a "smoke pipe cuz he had a empty toilet paper role."
 My husband is drug free! The officer boyed didn't use his body cam, had no extra staff, he ran up in my husband cell, handcuffed him arms and feet to a point his hands is complete numb, he got a open wound on his feet from having handcuff on for more than 45 min for no reason after they just came of annual lockdown!
 The warden told my husband once he's done he gone take every f.... thing from us! He constantly is being accused of committing charges that he's not committing! The hearings officer is a mean, lying man that constantly telling us that he gone keep taking his privileges away even tho there was never any evidence provided!
 Everything had been denied! All his griev-

ances disappeared, no complaints ever got to Richmond! They don't provide no paperwork for my husband to fill out! The kiosk been broken since the beginning of September, almost one month!
 The cruel punishment towards my husband had caused him having suicidal thoughts, have him fearing for his life cuz these officers will def kill u. We have no help and I'm doing anything I can, but vadoc refuses to communicate with me, they keep saying we gone discuss anything with ur husband, but for the past three month no one has done anything with him but abuse him and leave him with injuries!
 The hate towards non-white citizens in that place is crazy. They said several times they hate my husband and me. I had been personally harassed by the warden myself and been threatened if I continue to complain he's gone make my husbands life more harder!
 He worked his way down so hard and here we are with 5 200 charges for things he didn't commit where no evidence was ever provided! He's filing a 1038 lawsuits now. No attorney is willing to help and me as a single mother - not singlem but the sole provider - I can't afford no attorney, but help is not here and I'm losing faith.
 Maybe there is a way u can help! My husband is Monte Stokes 1400816! He was moved from Sussex because of cruel treat-



Volunteer Jack Brooks staffs the People's Tribunal registration table, taking names and keeping track of how many people attended. The tally: just over 150.

ment not to go to the next place and even get hurt and treated worse. And there always short-staffed on weekends so night rec don't happen cuz these ppl are lazy and disrespectful!
 Thank u so much
 Sincerely
 Sabrina Stokes
 Wife of Monte Stokes, in Keen Mountain

THE PLIGHT OF TRANS PRISONERS

The Department of Justice (DOJ) has collected data on transgender inmates. Its data from 2015 shows an estimated 35 percent of transgender inmates in prisons and 34 percent in jails experienced one or more incidents of sexual victimization by another inmate or facility staff over a 12-month period, or since being admitted.
WTKR (Hampton Roads, Northeast NC), July 31, 2023

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cops, courts & prisons

Rashid: 'Prison officials plant a street weapon in a vacant cell, then move me into it'

By Kevin "Rashid" Johnson

This entire story is reprinted with permission from the San Francisco Bay View newspaper. sfbayview.com

On the evening of Oct. 18, 2023, I was ordered to pack my belongings to be moved to another cell here at Sussex 1 State Prison. The cell, number 13, in the D-block of 3 Building had been vacant for some six months. During that time, there had been a lot of traffic into the cell by prison officials and civilian workers who had been performing repair work on the cell door for months. The door was also frequently opened, enabling anyone in the cell block to freely enter and exit the cell.

I completed moving my belongings into that cell at about 6 p.m. on that day.

Once I was done, the control booth guard locked me in the cell and would not allow me to come back out for a usual shower.

After several attempts to have him let me out, I finally lay down to rest, not even having had time to unpack my property.

I was abruptly awakened at about 3 a.m. on Oct. 19 by a group of guards known as the Strike Force (SF). This is a select group of guards drawn from prisons all over the state who perform riot containment and targeted searches.

I was ordered to submit to a strip search and handcuffs and was made to sit on a stool as the guards, under supervision of the prison's investigators, went into the cell and proceeded to ransack my belongings. My property was dumped out of the bags I had it packed up in and shuffled into disarray and walked on by the guards.

At the conclusion of the "search," the guards had the cell door closed and crawled on all fours to look beneath it. They emerged from the cell claiming to have found a folding street knife attached to the underside of the door.

I was placed back into the cell and they all left. About three hours later a different group of Strike Force guards came to the cell and ordered me to submit to handcuffs to be moved to solitary confinement.

At that time and afterward I questioned the obvious foul play behind the claimed discovery of a street knife inside a cell I was just moved into that had been empty for months, and after staff had violated their own rules by

not conducting a documented inspection of the cell before moving anyone into it. These inspections are required by staff to ensure the cell is free of contraband and all fixtures are in good working order before a new occupant is placed into it.

After I was moved to solitary, numerous officials admitted this incident was a premeditated set up. That I was moved into a cell that had been vacant for months, only to have it raided hours later by a special task force of guards assembled from numerous other prisons in the early morning. None of these guards wore name tags so their identities could be known.

I was also told by ranking SISP officials that the entire ploy was to set me up to create a pretext to have me emergency transferred to notoriously abusive and racist Virginia prisons which I have an extensive record of exposing for racist abuses, in remote Wise County, namely Red Onion or Wallens Ridge State Prisons.

In fact a younger cousin of mine, Troy Claiborne, was transferred to Wallens Ridge from SISP earlier this year and tortured by officials there to the point he went blind. At Wallens Ridge officials forced him to submit to x-rays some 30 or more times over a few days until his blood vessels burst in his eyes and he went blind. His abusers went further to taunt him with remarks that were obviously directed at me and related to my undergoing a battery of radiation treatments for cancer.

A visitor, Ms. Brittany Purtee, took pictures of his eyes and when she confronted the prison with complaints and evidence of his abuse, she was thereafter banned from future visits with him. (One of the images she took of his damaged eyes during their video visit is attached to this article.)

I am being held once again in solitary confinement without my property – my stationery and legal property in particular – while facing numerous court deadlines in lawsuits that I have pending against prison officials.

Dare to Struggle Dare to Win!
All Power to the People!

Send our brother some love and light:

Kevin Johnson - 1007485
Sussex 1
24414 Musselwhite Drive
Waverly, VA 23891

How you can help

Rashid's supporters are calling for a sustained phone and email zap on behalf of Comrade Rashid. The list of demands is given below along with the numbers and email addresses of officials to be contacted.

List of demands

1. Release Kevin Rashid Johnson from solitary
2. Return all of his personal property
3. End the targeted harassment and set-ups of him
4. Stop interfering with his litigations and outside communications
5. End the abuses in Virginia prisons, especially Red Onion and Wallens Ridge State Prisons.

Complaints should be sent to:

Warden Kevin McCoy, Sussex 1 State Prison, Phone 804-834-9967, Email Kevin.McCoy@vadoc.virginia.gov

Virginia DOC Director Chadwick S. Dotson, Phone 804-674-3081, Email ChadwickDotson@vadoc.virginia.gov

Corrections, Division of Institutions Beth Cabell, Phone 804-834-9967, Email beth.cabell@vadoc.virginia.gov

RIHD: DRIVERS NEEDED FOR PRISON VISITS

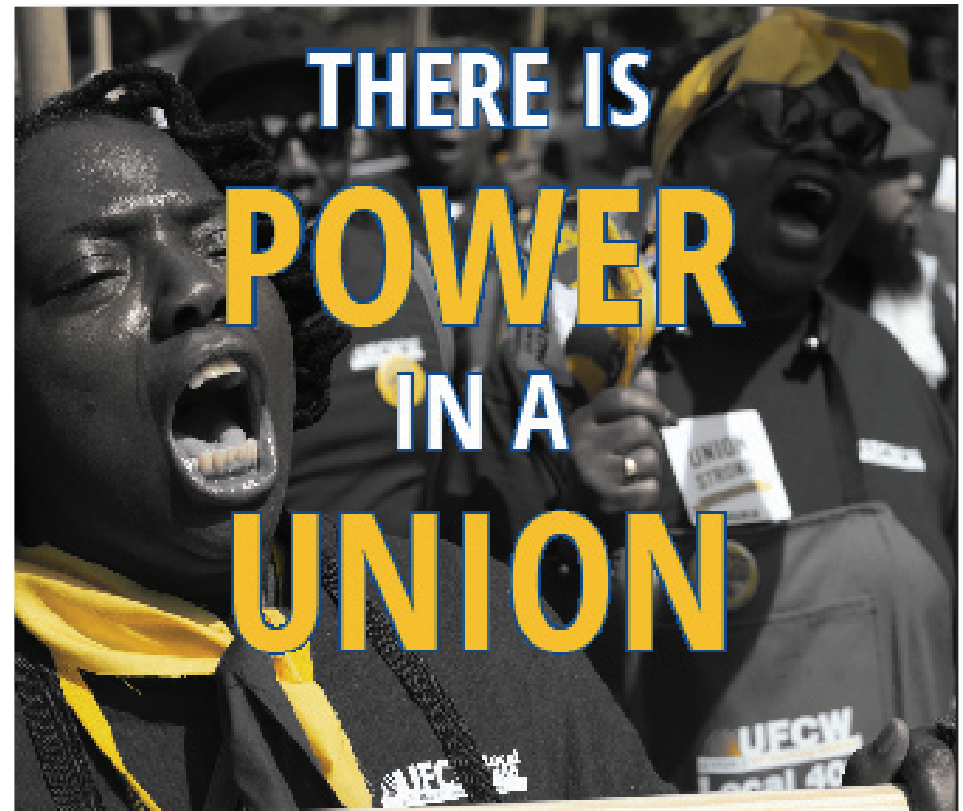
"In an effort to keep families connected with their incarcerated loved one"

VAN DRIVERS NEEDED (2). Currently interviewing for "Drivers" to take families to/from faraway Virginia hotel and prisons (Keen Mountain/Pocahontas; Red Onion/Wallens Ridge and River North) for visitation. Looking to resume transportation (post-Covid) service starting the upcoming holiday trips.

Requirements: 23 yrs of age - Proof of safe driving record - Available 1-2 Weekend(s) Monthly - Long distance (7-8 hours each way) - 15 Passenger Van

Compensation: Salary, hotel and meals

Interested? Contact: Lillie Branch-Kennedy - Call: (804) 426-4426 - Email: rihd@rihd.org - Webpage: <https://www.rihd.org/transportation-to-faraway-prison>



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Scary? Humorous? Respectful? Maybe a little of all three?



"Stunning" was the only word for the dancers' attire.

By Ana Edwards

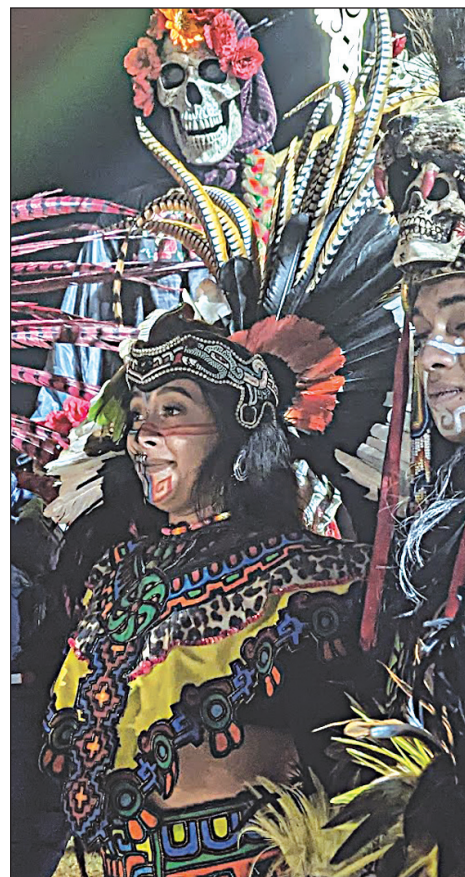
In the Mexican tradition, Nov. 1 and 2 are days to remember those who have passed on before us, celebrate their lives and look upon death, not as something to be feared, but as a part of life to be embraced.

Known as El Dia de Los Muertos, or The Day of the Dead, that tradition was honored with a community celebration at La Milpa Restaurant and Market, a Mexican eatery and gathering space at 6925 Hull Street Road in North Chesterfield County.

The annual event was organized by Martin Gonzalez and Monica Chavez, co-owners of the southside institution.

"We are so happy you are here to celebrate the Dia de Los Muertos with us," Gonzalez told the crowd that had gathered Nov. 2 for the festivities. "We welcome you from the bottom of our hearts!"

In addition to stunning performances by the Aztec fire dancers, all the way from Mexico City, you could buy souvenirs, get your face painted and enjoy tamales, pollo in mole (chocolate) sauce, rabbit stew, Mexican coffee and cocoa, sugar cookies and Pan de Muerto - Bread of the Dead. Delicious!



Colorful costumes and whimsical depictions of the dead create a wondrous atmosphere at the annual event.

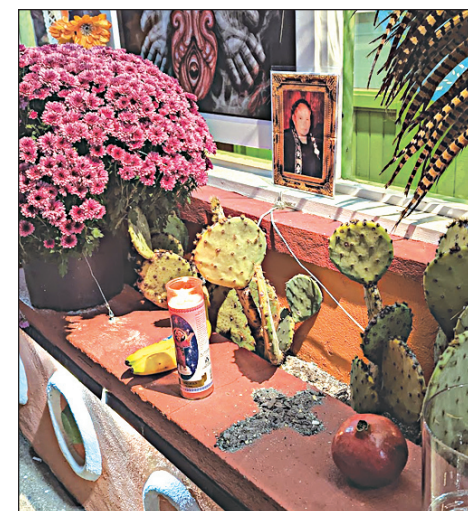
'El Dia de Los Muertos' brings together family, community & the ancestors



A member of the Aztec fire dancers from Mexico City performs at El Dia de Los Muertos, hosted Nov. 4 at La Milpa Restaurant and Market. Photos by Ana Edwards



Pan de Muerto, or Bread of the Dead, is decorated with what is meant to look like small, crisscrossed bones. Delicious!



During the holiday, family members construct home altars, called ofrendas, with the favorite foods and beverages of the departed.

In our opinion

On Gaza

This Nov. 2 marked 106 years since one Englishman gave another Englishman the right to establish a “homeland” for his people. The first Englishman was Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour, the second was Lord Rothschild, a leader of the British Jewish community.

But the land targeted for that homeland in the Balfour Declaration wasn't in England. It was in the Middle East. And it already was home to millions of people.

For centuries, Palestine had been under the control of the Ottoman Empire. When that entity collapsed at the end of World War I, England and France carved it up into new, separate countries, installed leaders and through them sought to control the entire Middle East. But not everyone got a country. Many were left out, including the Palestinians.

Not all Palestinians were Arab and not all were Muslim. There were also Christians and Jews, all of whom had lived together in relative harmony for centuries. That ended with the mass immigration of European Jews to Palestine and their increasing demand, not for a homeland, but for a state. That demand increased greatly after the horrific events of World War II when Germany - a European country - opened a campaign of genocide against the Jewish people, taking the lives of some 6 million, along with millions of others.

The Zionists got their country, the Palestinians resisted, and there has been conflict ever since - 75 years of repression against the Arab Palestinians.

Today, of the estimated 14.3 million Palestinians in the world, half live in historic Palestine, while the other half live in exile, forbidden by Israel to return home.

Those who live in the state of Israel are treated as second-class citizens. Those who live in what are called the Occupied Territories are subject to varying degrees of repression, including murder by fanatical “settlers” in the West Bank and a 16-year, militarily enforced blockade in the Gaza Strip.

This is the background to the events of Oct. 7, when hundreds of Hamas militants broke out of Gaza and attacked Israeli villages, many of which had been Arab villages before the original inhabitants were driven out, and an all-night dance party being held just three miles outside the fence that imprisons the 2.3 million people of Gaza.

The Defenders mourn the loss of any human life. We especially condemn the targeting of children, the ultimate innocents.

But to condemn Hamas for its Oct. 7 attacks would mean we would also have to condemn the slave rebellions, planned and actual, led by Nat Turner, Denmark Vesey and Gabriel, along with John Brown, Harriett Tubman, Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse and all other rebellions by oppressed peoples against their oppressors.

Now we are witnessing the most barbaric ethnic cleansing of a people since the years of Nazi Germany: the mass murder of the Palestinians trapped in the tiny Gaza Strip. As we go to press, the Gaza Health Ministry has announced that more than 10,000 people have been killed by the Israeli air strikes. Forty percent were children. Children.

And while this carnage continues, day after day, the U.S. government leaders are arguing, not about how to stop the killing, but how they can send MORE military and financial support to Israel. Washington has mobilized a massive naval force in the eastern Mediterranean to prevent any other country from coming to the aid of the Palestinians. It has repeatedly blocked resolutions in the U.N. Security Council calling for a ceasefire. And all this is on top of sending \$3.8 billion every year to Israel, making it the largest recipient of U.S. foreign “aid.”

Every bomb that is dropped on Gaza, every bullet that rips open another Palestinian child, every drop of searing white phosphorus, every blast of gas forced into the tunnels of Gaza is paid for with our tax dollars. Willingly or unwillingly, WE are funding this carnage.

Here in Virginia, the country's most militarized state, Gov. Glenn Youngkin ordered that U.S. and Virginia flags be flown at half-staff on all state and local buildings and grounds to honor the Israeli lives lost “in the horrific terror attack committed against Israel.” But there was no mention of the horrific terror attacks that Israeli settlers had been carrying out for months against Palestinians in the West Bank. And no tears for the 10,000 slaughtered in Gaza. Palestinian lives don't matter?

And now Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares has taken time out from collecting “surplus” police gear to send to Israel to open an investigation into the Virginia-based organization American Muslims for Palestine, which has been calling for protests against the Gaza massacre, including here in Richmond.

Meanwhile, Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner have been promoting sending more military aid to Israel. (See our Open Letter on page 15.)

The longer this madness goes on, the less likely it will be that Muslims, Christians and Jews will once again be able to live together, in Palestine, in peace. Far from being a place of refuge, Israel has proven to be a death trap for the Jewish people. Anti-Semitism, always



The People's Tribunal graphic, adapted by @ministersofmonsters.

present, is on the rise, in this country and around the world, as is Islamophobia. All true progressives must condemn and act against both forms of racism.

In this context, we are greatly heartened by the militant actions of members of Jewish Voice for Peace in occupying the Capitol Rotunda in Washington, D.C., and Grand Central Station and the Statue of Liberty in New York

City. Their cry is “Not in our Name!”

These truly are difficult times, and they are likely to get worse. Those of us who consider ourselves conscious - “woke” - and committed to the struggle for social justice need to redouble our vigilance, our activity and our preparations for the future.

And we all need to oppose the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

The Virginia Defender

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reclaiming our sacred ground

Some good things & some yet-to-be with the Shockoe Bottom 'Heritage Campus'

By Ana Edwards

Early in December, Burt Pinnock, architect with the Baskervill architectural firm and master plan project coordinator, is scheduled to present the Master Plan for the 10-acre "City of Richmond Heritage Campus" to his client, the City of Richmond. The 10 acres include the three-acre Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground, one-acre Devil's Half Acre/Lumpkin's Jail Archaeology Site, the 12,000-square-foot interpretive center in the lower level of Main Street Station and a 60,000-square-foot National Slavery Museum.

Delivered to the city in what is known in the development field as a "Basis of Design" document, the plan will include an executive summary, renderings, illustrations, design narratives, preliminary cost estimates for all components, branding and communications work including a project website and recommendations for next steps.

The goal is to break ground in 2024.

From the perspective of the Sacred Ground Project and the Virginia Defenders, the community's role was essential to the struggle to reclaim Richmond's Shockoe Bottom and its significance in the history of Richmond, Virginia and the United States. But we have also stressed the need for more effective Black community involvement in decisions about the cultural and economic resources going forward. While we are as excited as anyone to see the Memorial Park and other features become a reality after so long, we are also disappointed that there seems to be little will to really explore how the community involvement could be deepened.

The first indication of this reluctance was when the City quietly shifted from issuing a Request For Proposals (RFP) for the master planning project to a direct hire, so there was no open, competitive process for hiring the contractors. Perhaps the city saved time by hiring familiar partners, but they may have lost an opportunity for the Heritage Campus to demonstrate a commitment to directly benefit the descendant community: All the companies hired were shown to be white-owned.

Now, half of them have lead Black staffers or subcontractors, including the project lead Burt Pinnock (architect/designer, Baskervill), narrative writer Toni Wynn (Brocade Studio), archaeologist Tim Roberts (Riggs Ward Stu-

dio), and members of the curatorial advisory group: Christy Coleman (historian/museum director, Jamestown-Yorktown Foundation), Ana Edwards (Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project, historian), and Lauranett Lee (historian, with Richmond Hill). And that is progress of a kind in these fields, but is it enough?

Yes, the city's strategic plan, for the first time in its history, places Black history as the centerpiece of its urban development vision. That's a big deal for Richmond.

Yes, the creation of the "Heritage Campus" (aka Memorial Park) is underway.

In addition, the city has recently created a Department of Preservation and Planning and is working on its first cultural resource management plan. The nonprofit Preservation Virginia

graduated its first group of African American Preservation Fellows, a program to train and support emerging Black historic preservation professionals. These are big shifts in a changing status quo - and they are good things.

So, let's keep it moving! In March the Defenders announced a proposal to provide economic benefit to the Black community through education by having a sizable percentage of the expected increase in tax revenues from visitation to the Shockoe Bottom site directed to our city's public school infrastructure and to affordable housing subsidies.

Would you support that? Send us a note at sacredgroundproject@gmail.com and check for updates at sacredgroundproject.net.

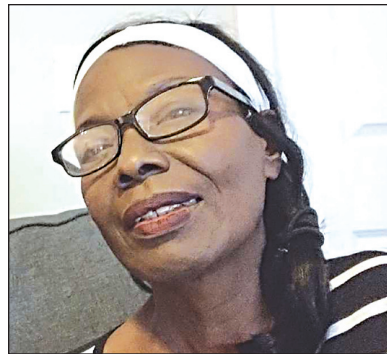
In addition, it's time for us to dig in and figure out what kind of accountability and stewardship organization would best serve the Heritage Campus' future as a cultural and economic engine for a thriving Black descendant community.

We'd love to hear from you.



Photo by Ayame Rogers

21st Gabriel Gathering - The Defenders' Sacred Ground Project held its 21st Annual Gabriel Gathering on Oct. 10 at the Shockoe Bottom African Burial Ground. The date was the 223rd anniversary of the execution there of the great slave rebellion leader Gabriel. Above, Gabriel descendant Pamela Bingham speaks about her ancestor. The annual event has played an important role in raising public awareness about the importance of reclaiming and properly memorializing Shockoe Bottom.



Sylvina Poole

Dec. 22, 1963 - Nov. 5, 2023

Sylvina Renee Poole graduated from Morgan State University with a bachelor's degree in mass communication and media studies. In addition to teaching, including English as a Second Language, she enjoyed a career in journalism. Early in her career she was a staff writer and reporter for the AFRO-American Newspapers. From 2004 to 2012 she was senior reporter with Richmond's The Voice and freelanced for the Richmond Times-Dispatch. She later co-founded Poole and Smith Publishing and went on to publish Sisters Magazine. She enjoyed working in public relations and crisis management. Her last position was Communication Manager for the Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative. Left to cherish her memory are her three children Chauncey, Kazelle and Katelyn and a sister Latarra. Sylvina will be truly missed. May the Ancestors welcome her with open arms. The funeral service will be held at 1 p.m. Nov. 12 at 2720 Enterprise Parkway in Richmond. A repast service will be held at 4:30 p.m. at 9101 Stony Point Parkway in Richmond.

-- Queen Zakia Shabazz



Anthony Lewis

April 23, 1948 - Oct. 15, 2023

Anthony Gene Lewis was a lifelong political activist, a nationalist, an internationalist and an antiwar and community leader. A native of the New River area of Southwest Virginia, he was the 11th child of the late Ray and Regina Casey Lewis. He joined the Navy after high school and, while still on active-duty, founded an organization of Black sailors called the Tidewater Africans. Also while still in the Navy, he helped lead an effort to prevent the offloading in Norfolk of coal from what was then called Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. After his discharge, he co-founded the Black Vanguard Resource Center with activists Diana Chappell and Carolyn Chesson Johnson. The organization was active in building support for the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, as well as many other areas of African solidarity work. Anthony was also a skilled printer and owner of the People's Press/Atlantic Lithography in Norfolk. He passed Oct. 15 after a difficult struggle with prostate cancer. A memorial service attended by family and friends was held Oct. 28 at the First Missionary Baptist Church in New River.

-- Phil Wilayto



Dennis Orton

July 4, 1952- Aug. 29, 2023

Dennis Orton was an organizer with UE (United Electrical, Radio and Machine Workers of America) Local 160 in Virginia. He was also a longtime member of North Carolina-based Black Workers for Justice and a lifelong freedom fighter in the Black Liberation Movement. In 2001 he was part of a BWFJ delegation that attended the World Conference Against Racism in South Africa and met with members of COSATU, the main trade union federation. Dennis was an energetic and relentless organizer of workers, teaching and helping with their struggles in the workplace. He was an insightful researcher, often arming the workers and organizers with information that could be used to their advantage. He joined the ancestors on Aug. 29, passing unexpectedly at his home in Virginia. An online memorial was held Oct. 22. -- Phil Wilayto

international & antiwar news



Photo by Phil Wilayto

Washington, D.C., Nov. 4: Hundreds of thousands march to demand an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and an end to all U.S. “aid” to Israel. In Virginia, buses were organized from Richmond and Norfolk, with carpooling from many other cities, including Roanoke and Harrisonburg. Above, protesters hold wrapped dolls symbolizing the thousands of babies and children killed in Gaza. Photo by Phil Wilayto

Richmond, Oct. 15: Palestinian children in the march of more than 1,000 people demanding an end to U.S. “aid” to Israel.

Israeli genocide in Gaza sparks massive protests worldwide, including in Virginia

By Phil Wilayto

As we go to press on Nov. 7, the death toll in Gaza has risen past 10,000. Many thousands more have been injured. Half of the 2.3 million people trapped inside this tiny, Israeli-blockaded enclave are under the age of 18. Forty percent of those killed by Israeli bombs have been children.

This is not a war between Israel and Hamas. What kind of a war is it where only one side has an air force and the other side is trapped in the world’s largest open-air prison? What kind of a war is it that consists of endlessly bombing hospitals, schools, neighborhoods and refugee camps? Where the aggressor cuts off all food, water, medicine and fuel? Where it tells its targets to flee to the south, and then bombs the south?

This is collective punishment by the Israeli government against the Palestinian people. It’s ethnic cleansing. It’s genocide. And, by any standard, it is one massive war crime.

The daily reports of the carnage in Gaza have ignited a firestorm of outrage around the world. Mass marches are taking place across the Middle East, in Europe, Africa and North and South America.

Virginia has been no exception.

In Richmond, more than 1,000 people turned out Oct. 15 for a march and rally called by the local chapter of American Muslims for Palestine. A week later, another 1,000 came out for another march and rally called by the Pal-



Norfolk, Nov. 4: A Rally & March for Humanity, sponsored by Hampton Roads for Palestine. There also was a rally Nov. 5 in rural Floyd County. Photo by Al Long



Roanoke, Nov. 1: A Rally for Palestine, sponsored by the Plowshare Center for Peace and Justice and covered by Channel 10. Photo by Plowshare Center for Peace & Justice,

estinian Student Organization of Virginia Commonwealth University.

In the Norfolk area, local activists have long been supporting the Palestinian people’s struggle for self-determination through their coalition Hampton Roads for Palestine, which has called a series of protests over the bombing of Gaza.

In Roanoke, the Plowshare Center for Peace & Justice, which bills itself as the oldest peace organization in Virginia, has brought people out on the streets.

In Harrisonburg, there have been protests called by Peace Praxis / Shenandoah Valley Antiwar Coalition.

On Oct. 25, there were student walkouts at more than 100 colleges and universities around the country, including at George Mason, Hampton, William and Mary and the University of Virginia.

And on Nov. 4, hundreds of thousands of people, including many from Virginia, jammed the streets of Washington, D.C., to demand an

immediate ceasefire and an end to any more “aid” to Israel.

The Defenders urge everyone with a moral compass and social consciousness to join the protests or start one of your own. The Biden administration, which has steadfastly refused to call for a ceasefire while sending billions more in “aid” to Israel, is beginning to feel the heat.

Now is the time to add your voice to the rising demand of Justice for Palestine.

international & antiwar news



Senator Tim Kaine

An Open Letter to Senators Tim Kaine & Mark Warner: 'No More U.S. Aid to Israel!'



Senator Mark Warner

The humanitarian disaster now expanding in the Gaza Strip has captured the attention of the entire world. Those of us who live here in the country that is funding this carnage must speak out, now.

Shortly after the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas, Israel severely tightened its 16-year blockade of Gaza, cutting off all deliveries of food, water, fuel and medicines. On Oct. 13, it gave more than 1 million Palestinians just 24 hours to leave their homes in the northern half of the Gaza enclave - and then bombed the people as they fled. Now they are bombing southern Gaza, where they told the people to go. Not one, but at least four hospitals have been hit, along with schools, apartment houses and United Nations buildings where people had sought refuge.

As of Oct. 23, the Gaza Health Ministry was reporting that more than 5,000 Palestinians had been killed. The vast majority of these were civilians, including 2,000 children and 1,000 women.

Deliberately bombing civilians is a war crime ex-

plicitly forbidden under international law.

Denying a civilian population food, water, fuel and medicine is collective punishment explicitly outlawed by international humanitarian law.

Gaza has been under a brutal Israeli military blockade since 2007, locking 2.3 million people, half of them under the age of 18, into a sliver of land just 25 miles long, which is why it is called the "world's largest open-air prison." Now it is being massively bombed by the most powerful military in the Middle East. For the people of Gaza, there is nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. And all this is happening as the Israeli military prepares for a ground invasion of Gaza that is expected to go on for months. This is barbaric mass murder that every thinking, caring human being must oppose.

And yet, in the middle of this carnage, the Biden administration, speaking in our name, has given full-throated support to the Israeli government. It has sent two aircraft carrier task forces, from Norfolk, to the

eastern Mediterranean, the largest naval concentration in that area in 40 years. This includes "an amphibious task force made up of about 4,000 Marines and sailors," according to The Washington Post. This support from Virginia puts a special responsibility on the people of this state to speak out.

Israel already receives the most U.S. foreign aid of any country - \$3.8 billion a year - and now the president is asking Congress for an emergency transfer of another \$14.3 billion. Our tax dollars are paying for mass murder.

In the light of this expanding humanitarian disaster, we the undersigned call on U.S. Senators Tim Kaine and Mark Warner to oppose any new funding for Israel. Without U.S. support, Israel would not be able to continue its war against the Palestinian people. We cannot finance this carnage.

We urge you to act now. Find the courage to stand up in the U.S. Senate and demand "No More U.S. Aid to Israel!"

Signed (as of Nov. 7, 2023):

Phil Wilayto - Editor, The Virginia Defender
Ana Edwards - Founder & Chair, Sacred Ground Historical Reclamation Project
Adeeb Abed - President, Arab American Association of Central Virginia
Zaid Mahdawi - President, American Muslims for Palestine - Richmond Chapter
Lugene Qawasm - President, Palestinian Student Organization at Virginia Commonwealth University
Nancy Wein - Co-founder, Richonders for Peace in Israel-Palestine
Abolish Slavery Virginia
Katherine Metres Akbar - Founder & Chairperson, Person2Person International - Fairfax County
Ida Audeh - Freelance Editor - Centreville

Princess Blanding - Sister, Marcus-David Peters; Liberation Party Candidate for Va. Governor, 2021.
Barry Bless - Musician - Richmond
Lillie Branch-Kennedy - Founder, Resource Information Help for the Disadvantaged & Disenfranchised - RIHD
Daniel Bresau - Professor, Virginia Tech
Monica Chavez - Co-founder, Amigos Legacy
Coalition for Justice - Blacksburg
Mara Cortez - Co-founder, Amigos Legacy
Martin Gonzalez - Owner, La Milpa Inc. - Chesterfield County
Maliha & Emile Haddad - Retired College Professors - Fairfax County
Hampton Roads for Palestine
Leah Harris - Jewish-American Journalist - Reston
Rev. Dr. David M. Hindman - United Methodist Clergy

Christine Hoppe - World Language & Culture Educator - Norfolk
Derrick Minhaj Malie Hansford - Founder & Executive Director, Community of United Focus - Norfolk
Rev. Rodney Hunter - Pastor, Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church - Richmond
Peace Praxis / Shenandoah Valley Antiwar Coalition
Ann Perry - Human Rights Activist - Deltaville
Adele Roof - Member, Jewish Voice for Peace & the Virginia Coalition for Human Rights - Charlottesville
John Steinbach - Community Organizer, Prince William County
Lynetta Thompson - Past President, Richmond Branch NAACP
Shawn Utsey - President, Virginia Association of Black Psychologists

Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality
William J. Walls - Retired Foreign Service Officer - Arlington
Hannah Wesley, MPH - Richmond

This Open Letter was initiated by the Virginia Defenders for Freedom, Justice & Equality. It is being delivered to the Richmond offices of Senators Kaine and Warner and sent to Virginia media.

To join this appeal, send the name of the endorsing organization or your name, some kind identification (professor, attorney, civil rights activist, etc.) and the city or county where you live to:
DefendersFJE@hotmail.com

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