

Living Wage Rally
April 20, 2011
University of Virginia
Madison Hall

My name is M. Rick Turner, and I am President of the Albemarle-Charlottesville Branch of the NAACP --the oldest, most revered civil rights organization in America.

Thank you Brandon, for inviting the NAACP to join in this important effort. We are a protest organization that stands up for civil rights. The NAACP believes that the rights of workers to organize and to earn a living wage are precious civil rights.

I'm glad to hear that President Sullivan has been willing to meet with you. In your future meetings and dialogues, you might want to remind her that she is back in *the South* now, and that unfortunately *Jim Crow* is still alive and well here --even though the university and others try to deny its existence. Fear of *Jim Crow* stifles the voices of African-American students', faculty and workers.

Unfortunately, many of us know far too well --from history, from observation, and from personal experience --that retaliation is real.

How do I know this? -- We receive many calls in the NAACP office from low wage workers who complain that no office at the university helps them when they encounter issues of discrimination or when they complain about low wages.

They call the NAACP out of desperation and because they fear what might happen if they voice their grievances within the university.

The living wage campaign calls on the university to acknowledge that a disproportionate number of people at the bottom of the wage scale are the same people whose ancestors helped build this great university. And the majority of those who supervise the lowest wage earners are in great need of diversity training.

Those of us who have spent any time here know, ---if we don't know anything else-- that the poor not only get the lowest wages, they also face the highest incidence of sexism and racism in the workplace and in society.

So, President Sullivan while you are advocating for higher wages, please set a tone that ensures that the workers who keep the university afloat are treated with respect and dignity.

To those workers who are present today and who have historically been victimized, you must decide --despite the difficulties, how you will protest these disparities.

You must devise creative ways to move forward so that your children will follow a different path and not become victims of low wages and disrespect.

At a crucial moment it is the strength and courage of ordinary people who have no name or position in society that save the day. The famous, the well-

connected, almost always have too much to lose, and they abandon the cause in order to protect themselves.

In the final analysis, it is the workers themselves who must bring about the long overdue change we seek.

The NAACP is proud to stand with you!