

# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

## 2013 ANNUAL REPORT



# LETTER FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

This past year at Virginia Organizing, we made great strides toward justice. As you will read in the following pages, Virginia Organizing not only accomplished many things at the local and state level, but, because of our strategic capacity, Virginia Organizing was also approached by national campaigns to lead the fight in Virginia for immigration reform and work for federal tax fairness policies.

We expanded our work into the Petersburg/Tri-Cities area and in Hampton Roads. We diversified our staff in the process of our expansion and have made progress in those local communities.

You will read about our Martinsville/Henry County Chapter, which has begun a new meeting style that incorporates more traditional community organizing practices from the Civil Rights Movement. You will hear about our expansion into Louisa County this year. You will learn how the Washington County Chapter was able to fight local hydraulic fracturing (fracking) and make sure the local government heard the concerns of the people instead of blindly allowing corporate interests to begin the environmentally dangerous practice.

I think the most impressive accomplishment of 2013 is Virginia Organizing's focus on leadership development with grassroots leaders in the local Chapters — it will be a continued focus for 2014.

As Virginia Organizing celebrates our accomplishments of 2013, we do so understanding that the long-term work of achieving change through grassroots community organizing is not finished in Virginia. We will continue to work harder, use our resources wisely, expand into communities that are traditionally underrepresented or forgotten in the Commonwealth, and keep bending the arc of history a little more toward justice.

Thank you for all your hard work this year. Without your time, energy, commitment, and financial support, Virginia Organizing would not be where we are. Because of you, we have 12 organizers on staff and are moving closer to our goal of 20 by 2016. Because of you, we are hopeful we can significantly increase our capacity over the next three years to make sure that Virginians whose voices have been silenced are heard loud and clear and elected officials are held accountable by their constituents. Because of you, we are able to build power for directly affected people and develop even more leaders in local communities.

I hope you enjoy reading about all our accomplishments of the past year. I am looking forward to working with you again in 2014!

Sincerely,

Sandra A. Cook  
Chairperson

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# 2013: JUST THE NUMBERS

In 2013, Virginia Organizing worked to build more grassroots power. As a result, we:

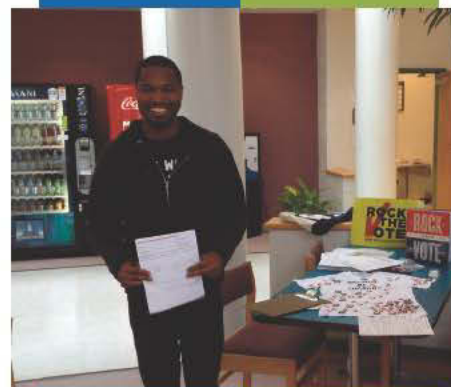
- Facilitated 244 leadership development trainings, dismantling racism/sexism/heterosexism workshops, and forums with a total attendance of 5,250 people.
- Helped 920 leaders learn a new skill.
- Worked with 3,586 people who were directly affected by the issues.
- Set up 151 constituent/legislator meetings across the state.
- Organized 83 direct actions, in which 2,297 people participated.
- Had 99 letters to the editor and 10 op-eds published in newspapers across Virginia.
- Sent out 113 media releases and received 484 media hits.
- Registered 651 voters and helped 131 returning citizens submit applications to restore their voting rights.
- Met with 1,614 people one-to-one in local communities.
- Increased our social media presence by attracting 400 new Twitter followers and gaining 515 Facebook “likes.”
- Helped other non-profits in the state by consulting with 91 other groups.
- Encouraged 65,187 calls to Congress and other elected officials on issues like immigration reform, tax fairness, Medicaid expansion, and others.
- Sent 5,890 postcards supporting comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship.



## OUR FUTURE

To fulfill our mission statement, the 2013-2014 State Governing Board has created ambitious but attainable goals for the next several years. Here are some of those goals:

- Involve even more directly affected people on the local, state, and national issues that are important to them
- Increase our capacity to 20 community organizers and 35 chapters
- Work to make our membership larger and more diverse
- Continue to focus on community values, creating long-term, sustainable change in Virginia, and develop community leaders



# LOCAL CAMPAIGNS



Virginia Organizing is dedicated to local communities coming together to create change. Here are some of the ways our local Chapters accomplished this goal in 2013!

In Virginia Organizing's oldest Chapter, Lee County, 200 people gathered in November to better understand the closure of a local hospital that was vital to the community. The hospital closed due to Virginia's failure to expand Medicaid in the face of decreasing government reimbursements. The forum provided information to local residents and meetings were set up with Virginia elected officials as a result.



In Washington County, the Chapter was able to successfully keep hydrofracking out of the area for the year by working with local officials to encourage more education and information before drilling began. Chapter leaders were excited about this huge accomplishment.

In Danville, the Chapter celebrated a year of success with a focus on local issues like discriminatory policing, downtown development, fair housing, and the early stages of a "ban the box" campaign to prevent exclusion of potential employees based on answering affirmatively to having a criminal history. In addition, local Chapter leader Johnny Mayo was elected to serve on the Virginia Organizing State Governing Board!

The Martinsville/Henry County Chapter achieved a new level of community recognition by jumping head first into the restoration of civil rights campaign. The Chapter hosted trainings and forums to help people better understand the process. To date, over a dozen former felons from the area have begun the process of civil rights restoration.



In Fredericksburg, the Chapter co-sponsored a community celebration at Hurkamp Park to honor the area's diversity and call on U.S. Representative Rob Wittman to support comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship.

Immigration was also a focus for Chapters in the Shenandoah Valley (Harrisonburg and Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro) and South Hampton Roads. In the Valley, U.S. Representative and immigration advocate Luis Gutierrez spoke to more than 400 people in downtown Harrisonburg to support immigration reform in August. In October, the Chapters held a "March for Dignity and Respect" that included 150 people, led by a high school student and local Chapter member.



The South Hampton Roads Chapter started a monthly tradition in Virginia Beach to stand up for immigration reform called "Light the Way." Chapter members and other local activists gathered on the first of every month to stand in solidarity for real immigration reform. These gatherings and other local meetings have generated hundreds of phone calls, letters, postcards, meetings and other communications to U.S. Representative Scott Rigell from his constituents.

# LOCAL CAMPAIGNS, CONT'D

In the Petersburg/Tri-Cities area, leaders are meeting and working to eliminate racism. This past fall, a Petersburg leader co-facilitated a dismantling stereotypes workshop with the students of Petersburg High School.

The Charlottesville/Albemarle Chapter focused on supporting a successful effort as the Charlottesville City Council established a Human Rights Commission.

The Richmond Region has been working on voter registration and restoration of civil rights, immigration reform, and tax fairness this year. On April 15, activists handed out pizza divided to symbolize the federal budget and the nation's skewed spending priorities.

In Louisa County, local leaders worked on spreading the word on the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion at several local events.



# VIRGINIA ORGANIZING CHAPTERS



- Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro
- Charlottesville/Albemarle County
- Danville
- Harrisonburg/Rockingham County
- Fredericksburg
- Lee County
- Louisa County
- Martinsville/Henry County
- South Hampton Roads
- Washington County
- Tri-Cities/Petersburg
- Richmond Region

On Campus:

- UMW, VSU, CNU, UVA, E&H, U of R, ODU, NSU, RU



# WISDOM FROM OUR GRASSROOTS LEADERS



“I never thought my voice mattered, but over the last four or five years, I have seen that people speaking out makes a difference. Elected officials are taking note now that more people are calling and getting involved.” -**Rick Chapman, Louisa County**



“As I started learning more about the issues, I realized that not only do I have a moral obligation to be involved, but it also makes good business sense.” -**Kevin Wilson, Richmond**



“We have to continue to work for affordable health care, equity and justice in all areas of social and economic justice. I agree with Franklin Roosevelt that we can’t be a great nation if we don’t take care of those who are sick and in poverty.” -**Winston Whitehurst, South Hampton Roads**



“I got involved with Virginia Organizing because I receive Social Security and I wanted to raise my voice to protect the program for myself, my family, and other people.” -**Renee Stone, Danville**



“The well-being of every person is to be cared for. This is what I understand when our country lives for the truth of ‘justice for all.’ Virginia Organizing truly is about ‘power to the people.’”  
-**Jossimar Diaz-Castro, Harrisonburg**



“There is a level of quality and commitment and passion from those who work with Virginia Organizing to really do something about pressing problems. We are a group that puts feet on our words!” -**Dell Erwin, Charlottesville**



“In my church, my pastor teaches that we need to meet people where we are. I’m working with Virginia Organizing to help solve some of these problems at a systemic level.”  
-**Duane Edwards, Fredericksburg**

# NATIONAL AND STATE ORGANIZING WORK

In 2013, Virginia Organizing focused on several national and statewide issues, including comprehensive immigration reform, tax fairness, Medicaid expansion, the Affordable Care Act implementation, civic engagement and restoration of civil rights, children's issues, and more. Below is a brief overview of some of this work!

Virginia Organizing was the lead group on **comprehensive immigration reform** in the state of Virginia. Our leaders organized meetings, marches, rallies, vigils, and protests to persuade Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship. A bill was passed in the U.S. Senate that provided increased border security and protections for immigrants, including a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented neighbors in the U.S. Unfortunately, this bill was not taken up by the U.S. House of Representatives. Virginia Organizing will continue to work for immigration reform in 2014.

**Medicaid expansion** was a hot topic in 2013 and Virginia Organizing focused on this as a key issue throughout the year as part of our ongoing work on health care. The 2013 General Assembly created the Medicaid Innovation and Reform Commission (MIRC) to make some changes to Medicaid. Virginia Organizing leaders attended every MIRC meeting, met with their legislators, wrote letters to the editor and submitted op-eds to local papers across Virginia (many of which were published), held educational forums on health care and Medicaid expansion, and organized various actions to support expansion in Virginia.

Virginia Organizing has been working for more than 15 years to make the **restoration of civil rights** process for former felons automatic. In 2013, Governor Bob McDonnell created a more streamlined process for restoration that standardized the process. Virginia Organizing representatives served on the Governor's workgroup to implement these changes.

2013 was a big year for budget battles in the U.S. Congress. Our government was even shut down for 16 days due to unrealistic demands for a repeal of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The ACA was not repealed and Congress eventually reopened the government, but it caused undue hardship for Virginia families. Virginia Organizing has worked all year for **fair tax solutions** that eliminate tax breaks for the wealthiest Americans and wealthy corporations shipping jobs and profits overseas.

For more information, please visit [www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org) and subscribe to our monthly newsletters!



# 2014 STATE GOVERNING BOARD

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## THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT

Virginia Organizing exists because of the generous time and financial donations of people like you. Thank you for your commitment to social and economic justice in Virginia. We look forward to working with you in 2014!

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