



Danville Chapter leader Renee Stone (left) was recognized at the Dan River Region Nonprofit Network's End of the Year Celebration as a nominee for Volunteer of the Year. Renee has been active on a variety of community issues including Ban the Box and Medicaid expansion.



The Petersburg Chapter held a fundraiser with actress Daphne Maxwell Reid and other local talent! Virginia Organizing supporters and Board Chairperson Sandra A. Cook posed with Mrs. Reid at the event.



The Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro Chapter rallied in support of Medicaid expansion at a Senate Finance Committee hearing in Staunton.

News From the Grassroots

President Obama's Announcement Means Relief for Families

A week before Thanksgiving, a time when families across the United States gather with loved ones to celebrate and share in gratitude, President Barack Obama announced an Executive Action on immigration to provide relief to millions of immigrants living in the U.S.

This action means that millions of families will celebrate the holidays without the looming fear of deportation of a mother or father. Although limited, the relief is welcome since the U.S. House of Representatives has blocked bipartisan reform efforts.

"This is a great victory for the families that are affected," said Virginia Organizing Chairperson Sandra A. Cook. "But we cannot stop working for a permanent, comprehensive immigration reform plan so that all immigrants will be allowed to participate fully in the country they call home."

In November and December, the Fredericksburg, South Hampton Roads, and Harrisonburg Chapters have all participated in actions and events to

support comprehensive immigration reform.

Domingo Bautista of Fredericksburg will benefit from the President's action. Bautista is a small business owner trying to expand his business, but kept hitting road blocks because of his immigration status.

"I hope, through the President's executive action, I will be able to live free of fear, which means that I will be able to move forward and advance in this country," said Bautista. "My greatest fears are the separation of my family, and knowing that, no matter how much time I have spent making a life in this country, from one day to the other, I could lose everything."

Linda Peña of Virginia Beach is excited that her mother will benefit from new immigration guidelines. Peña received Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status through the President's action in 2012 and is able to benefit from in-state tuition rates. Having lived in Virginia most of her life, she was excited to finally be recognized as a part of her home state.

"Relief is great, but we need real reform," said Peña. "Comprehensive immigration reform with a path to

citizenship is good for families, good for the economy, and good for workers. It just makes sense."

Harrisonburg leader Maria Peña visited Washington, D.C., recently and shared her story at a national media conference.

"Since I arrived in the United States, I have been an active and productive member of my community. I am involved in my church and my husband and I own a small business that pays taxes and employees two part-time U.S. citizens," said Peña. "My visa expired and I have not been able to obtain a status because of our broken immigration system."

For more information on administrative relief and how to qualify, please visit <http://www.adminrelief.org/about/>. If you know someone who needs help applying for relief, please make sure they review the information on this site and protect themselves from fraud.

Virginia Organizing and other groups will continue to focus on comprehensive solutions to immigration reform. Contact your member of Congress and ask him or her to support comprehensive immigration reform with a path to citizenship. To find contact information for your member of Congress, visit <http://1.usa.gov/1xAs1u>.

Real people. Real change.

Virginia Organizing Receives Generous Anonymous Donation

Virginia Organizing is very excited to announce that we have been given a generous \$1 million gift to fund an organizer position indefinitely! The money will be placed in our endowment fund to secure the future of Virginia Organizing. We are incredibly grateful for this generous donation and look forward to expanding our work in even more communities.

Virginia Organizing is built on the grassroots donations of grassroots people. When we receive your gifts, it is a big deal to us! A while ago, a donor sent in an envelope with two crumpled dollar bills and a note telling us to keep up the good work. We valued that donation because every single dollar received from our grassroots partners means we can put more work into creating a more just Virginia. Virginia Organizing is fortunate to have an amazing community of donors. We hope you know that every donation, whether it is \$1, \$10, \$100, or \$1,000,000, is critically important to continuing the good organizing across diverse communities in Virginia. Thank you!

Virginia Organizing Leaders Met with Attorney General Herring

Several Virginia Organizing leaders met with Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring on the issues of ICE holds, predatory lending, and racial profiling. The meeting was productive and the Attorney General is open to discussions about these issues. The meeting was a result of a two day call-in campaign in October asking Attorney General Herring to issue an opinion on

unconstitutional ICE holds that some Virginia sheriffs' offices have used to detain individuals after they would normally be released. We are still waiting for that opinion.

Virginia Organizing Day in Martinsville

The Martinsville/Henry County Chapter celebrated Virginia Organizing Day on December 13, 2014.

"We are grateful to the City of Martinsville for their recognition of Virginia Organizing's 20th anniversary in 2015 and for designating December 13 as Virginia Organizing Day," said Martinsville/Henry County Chapter leader Martha Woody. "As a non-partisan group that tries to find common ground on issues of concern such as restoration of rights and health care reform, Virginia Organizing works to empower all citizens to participate in the betterment of their communities."

On Virginia Organizing Day in Martinsville, the local Chapter held a restoration of civil rights clinic to help returning citizens apply to restore their civil rights, like voting.

20th Anniversary Celebrations Begin Next Month

Virginia Organizing plans to kick off a year of celebrations for the 20th anniversary in January! Be sure to check out our calendar at www.virginia-organizing.org/events and find posts about events and stories associated with the 20th anniversary at www.virginia-organizing.org/20th-anniversary. Mark your calendars for a big benefit "festivale" on March 13 in Charlottesville (more details to come in January)!

Leader of the Month Elizabeth La Grua



Elizabeth La Grua has been a part of the

Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro Chapter for many years. She first got involved with Virginia Organizing from a partnership on peace issues in her local community. Since then, Elizabeth has worked on a variety of issues, but is most passionate about health care, Medicaid expansion, and protecting her community.

"One of the reasons I'm so glad to be a part of Virginia Organizing is that we are doing something--we take action," said Elizabeth. "There is a plan to make things better and I am a part of that as a local community leader."

Elizabeth has participated in her local Chapter by attending actions and events, meeting with her state legislators, meeting with U.S. Representatives and Senators, and being a spokesperson for Virginia Organizing in the media.

"Virginia Organizing taught me how to be on television," said Elizabeth. "I learned how to be ready to talk to reporters on the issues that are important to me."

Elizabeth is currently focused on how to educate her community on the new pipeline coming to the George Washington National Forest. "The pipeline threatens the environment and water sources in a widespread area of beautiful central Virginia," said Elizabeth.

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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Local Chapters and Areas Served

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

On Campus: UMW, VSU, CNU, UVA, E&H,
U of R, ODU, NSU, RU, TCC, VCU, JMU



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News in Brief

- Virginia Organizing has a new website! Check out www.virginia-organizing.org and tell us what you think!
- Did you know you can donate to Virginia Organizing through payroll deductions if you work for the state? Use CVC #3168 for the Commonwealth Campaign. Thanks in advance for your support.
- The Richmond Chapter sent season's greetings to legislators from community members in favor of Medicaid expansion. The key message: "All I want for Christmas is health insurance!"
- Virginia Organizing held a successful Dismantling Racism workshop in Harrisonburg in November. Leaders from across the state joined to confront privilege and racism and learn more about how to fight systemic injustice.
- The Washington County Chapter met to begin training on water testing in preparation for gas drilling. Washington County leaders will continue this work to protect local residents from the potential harmful effects of drilling.

www.virginia-organizing.org