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Dear Supporter,

I am honored to present Virginia Organizing’s 2015 Annual Report featuring our 20th anniversary celebrations! Our Chapters across the state worked hard this year—as we have for the last 20 years—to organize for social, racial, economic, and environmental justice.

In 2015, Virginia Organizing continued efforts to “ban the box” in Virginia. Today, individuals who have felony convictions on their record are not singled out on state job applications before they get an opportunity to explain their past. Thanks to Virginia Organizing and other groups, individuals in many localities across Virginia will not be weeded out of the job application process because of a past mistake.

This year, we added women’s issues to our list of priorities because we understand that women are disproportionately affected by discriminatory policies at the local, state, and national levels—especially women of color—and Virginia Organizing is always committed to empowering people who have been oppressed to speak out and work toward social change.

Virginia Organizing also continued our focus on leadership development. For example, Chapter leaders Debra Grant, Maxine Jackson, and Paula McBride attended a Women’s Equality Center conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, where they learned about leading with race, gender, and class in organizing work. Virginia Organizing leaders are constantly learning new skills!

These are real people experiencing real changes in our Commonwealth because of our Chapter leaders, donors, partners, members—all of us. We have more work to do, but together—organized—we can achieve great things. I hope you enjoy reading about our 20th anniversary year as much as I have enjoyed being a part of it!

Sincerely,

Ladelle McWhorter
Chairperson
2015 Chapter Accomplishments

Virginia Organizing Chapters across the Commonwealth organized for social change in our communities, our state, and our country. Read about their accomplishments and most important highlights from 2015.

On January 27, 2015, the Harrisonburg City Council took a first step towards the inclusion of a more diverse city staff. Unanimously, the Harrisonburg City Council voted to change the hiring policy language to state affirmatively that the city seeks a diverse and inclusive workforce. Other language was added to the policy to ensure that this goal is considered in hiring decisions. Virginia Organizing Chapter leaders organized for this change and will continue to monitor the hiring in Harrisonburg to assure City Councilors are following through.

Virginia Organizing received proclamations honoring our 20th anniversary from 22 local governments. Leaders from South Hampton Roads posed after receiving the proclamation from the City of Chesapeake.

Virginia Organizing was congratulated on our 20th anniversary by U.S. Senator Mark Warner (by video), Governor Terry McAuliffe (by letter), Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam (by letter), and U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (by letter). Virginia Organizing was also honored by the 2015 General Assembly and Senator Warner read a congratulatory note into the Congressional Record.

In April, thousands of people from across Virginia gathered in Washington, D.C. to build a movement for the people at Populism 2015. Jay Johnson (pictured above) was invited to participate by giving the opening plenary speech. “We need a national movement like we’re trying to build here,” said Jay. “It needs to be grounded in and owned by community organizations that are committed to building power within their states.”

“I love Virginia Organizing because I have a sense of wholeness as well as the opportunity to become a leader for change in my community in order to do the same for others.”

-Sheila Carter

“Together, we are all changing Virginia.”

-Sandra A. Cook
Virginia Organizing focused on several coordinated statewide efforts that developed from a strategic power analysis:

- Ban the criminal history box on job applications and support other policies that help returning citizens in local communities.
- Support Medicaid expansion and increased retirement security by strengthening Social Security.
- Continue work to dismantle racism across Virginia.
- Prioritize women’s issues and organize women who have traditionally been left out of women’s rights conversations.
- Challenge predatory lending norms in Virginia and the U.S.
- Organize to support those most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Fredericksburg Chapter leader Eunice Haigler spoke to Governor Terry McAuliffe after his announcement that legal financial obligations will no longer be a barrier to restoration of civil rights (top left photo). Virginia Organizing held dismantling racism workshops across Virginia, helped returning citizens apply to get their rights restored, and participated in events designed to bring people together to discuss issues that affect all of us from a framework of anti-racism and inclusion of those traditionally left out of decision-making processes.

Virginia Organizing continued organizing in support of stronger regulations for small dollar, high interest consumer lending. In 2015, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau announced that they would consider strong regulations of these loans, limiting the effects of predatory lending on vulnerable communities. Our leaders have supported these rules every step of the way!
Chapters across Virginia stood together to celebrate the 5th anniversary of the Affordable Care Act. The Chapters celebrated with parties, marking important historical sites across Virginia where the fight for health care took place, and standing in support of Medicaid expansion.

Virginia Organizing partnered with other organizations this year to focus on climate change, clean power, environmental justice, and local environmental issues.
Local hospital Augusta Health is changing its policies on working with the deaf community and increasing accessibility as a direct result of the ongoing organizing work of the Staunton/Augusta/Waynesboro Chapter of Virginia Organizing. Pictured to the left are members of the Wayne Hills Deaf Fellowship receiving information about the new services available at the hospital.

Virginia Organizing celebrated our 20th anniversary at the 2015 Grassroots Gathering, featuring music from Mighty Joshua, Chapter updates from leaders across the state, and Virginia Attorney General Mark Herring. “It was great to be with a group of Virginians committed to making our Commonwealth a better place and to discuss issues that are important to all of us,” said Herring.
The Fredericksburg Chapter met with the Spotsylvania School Superintendent in 2015 to discuss the “school to prison pipeline” in local schools. Directly affected people are organizing to change the disciplinary system to be fair for all students and limit referrals to law enforcement officials.

The Danville Chapter held a joint media conference with the Danville Police Department to announce wider availability of police complaint forms and provide a public explanation of the citizen complaint process, both key asks of this past year’s meetings with local police. Additionally in Danville, Attorney General Mark Herring announced a pilot program to fund recruitment of more people of color to the local police force. Chapter leaders were present for this important announcement.

Harrisonburg Chapter leaders traveled to Roanoke to participate in a voter rights rally and to call on U.S. Representative Bob Goodlatte to support voting rights and comprehensive immigration reform. Chapter leader and DREAM activist Dulce Elias spoke at the rally.

The South Hampton Roads Chapter worked in partnership with other groups to host “A Flood of Voices” actions to address local flooding. The events began in 2015 to raise awareness about how flooding affects the most vulnerable in the area.

“Virginia Organizing is thankful that our Governor takes these issues seriously and believes in rehabilitation and second chances.”

-Catherine Fitzgerald on the Governor’s statewide “ban the box” announcement in April
2015: The Numbers

8,065 people attended one or more of 196 workshops, trainings, or forums to learn more about developing strategic capacity, develop real organizing skills, and build power for a more just Virginia.

Virginia Organizing held 12 dismantling racism workshops across the Commonwealth for 257 participants.

We organized 53 direct actions where 799 people participated through storytelling, protesting, speaking out in the media, and demonstrating their collective power.

Members of Virginia Organizing wrote 205 letters to the editor, commentaries, and op-eds — 102 of those were published in newspapers across Virginia (and in a few newspapers with a national reach).

In addition to working to make the restoration of civil rights process easier for returning citizens and organizing in localities to ban the box, Virginia Organizing helped 157 people apply to restore their voting rights.

Organizers and leaders met with 1,626 people one-to-one in 2015 to tell them about Virginia Organizing and to ask what they want to change in their communities.

812 leaders applied a new skill for organizing — skills that will help in jobs, volunteer work, and community change efforts.
Statement of Beliefs

• **We believe** that all people should be treated fairly and with dignity in all aspects of life, regardless of race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, ability, or country of origin.
• **We believe** that every person in the Commonwealth is entitled to a living wage and benefit package that is sufficient to provide the basic necessities of life, including adequate housing, a nutritious diet, proper child care, sound mental and physical health care, and a secure retirement.
• **We believe** that every person is entitled to an equal educational opportunity.
• **We believe** that community, economic, social, and environmental policy should be developed with the greatest input from the people it is meant to serve, and that the policies should promote, celebrate, and sustain the human and natural resources of Virginia.
• **We believe** in the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty, in a progressive tax system based on the ability to pay, and in making the nation’s financial systems, including the Federal Reserve Bank, more responsive to the average citizen’s needs.
• **We believe** that we should enhance and celebrate diversity in our community and in our state.
• **We believe** that those who have positions of authority in our governmental bodies, law enforcement agencies, and institutions of learning should reflect the diversity of our communities.
• **We believe** that our public officials should be held accountable for their actions and decisions.
• **We believe** in the rights of workers, consumers, shareholders, and taxpayers to democratic self-organization.
• **We believe** in the elimination of the death penalty in all cases because it is fundamentally inhumane, ineffective as a deterrent to crime, and disproportionately and unjustly applied against people of color and those who are economically or educationally disadvantaged.
• **We believe** that physical and mental health are parts of personal and community well-being; we believe that Virginians have a broad public health and economic interest in ensuring that adequate care is available to low and moderate-income residents.

“I am active in Virginia Organizing because from start to finish, there are real people making real, visible change”

-Lily Hungarland
Thank you for your support and for 20 years of grassroots organizing for a better Virginia!

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