



Virginia Organizing delivered letters, postcards, and petitions to the offices of U.S. Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine to support protecting and strengthening Social Security and oppose changing the cost of living calculation to the “chained-CPI.”



In South Hampton Roads, leaders gather for an interfaith prayer service called “Light the Way” to stand in solidarity with the immigrant community and share stories.



Harrisonburg leaders gathered and marched on May 19 in a prayer vigil with the Group of Harrisonburg Hispanic Pastors for comprehensive immigration reform.

News From the Grassroots

A Positive Step for Virginia

After 15 years of hard work from Virginia Organizing supporters and many other groups, Governor Bob McDonnell announced an administrative policy change to restore civil rights to some former felons on an individual basis through a more streamlined process. Beginning July 15, non-violent former felons will have their civil rights restored after certain conditions are met.

In order to register to vote, a former felon must still receive a letter from the Governor stating his or her rights have been restored.

Sandra A. Cook, Virginia Organizing Chairperson said, “We are thrilled at this new development, and that there will be an additional 100,000 Virginians able to vote this year. But there is still injustice in the restoration of rights process and we will continue to push for a constitutional amendment for the rights of all former offenders to be restored automatically.”

The Secretary of the Commonwealth’s website now states that an applicant convicted of a non-violent felony wishing to have his or her rights restored must

satisfy all court-ordered conditions and sentences, pay certain fines and other costs, and not have any other pending felony charges.

Virginia’s Constitution currently gives the Governor sole authority to restore civil rights, including voting rights. The new administrative change will streamline and make the process of restoring rights more objective and fair. In addition, those who meet the conditions set by the new policy will be able to get their civil rights back without the previous two-year waiting period.

Martha Woody, a Virginia Organizing Martinsville Chapter leader who has worked on restoration of rights, said, “This is progress in the right direction, and that’s a very good thing. Some people I’ve talked to have not voted in 20 to 30 years because of a conviction on their record and previous conditions for restoration of rights. This is an opportunity for some people to have a voice after being silenced for so long.”

But Woody raises concerns, as well. “It’s disheartening to look at some of the crimes on the ‘violent’ crimes list, like drug possession with intent to distribute, while prescription fraud is listed as a ‘non-violent’ felony.”

Virginia Organizing will continue to focus on registering eligible voters and working with those seeking to have their rights restored that do not qualify under the new administrative process to complete the longer application process.

For more information, contact Cathy Woodson at (804) 683-1227 or cwoodson@virginia-organizing.org.

How You Can Help

- Write, and recruit others to write, letters to the editor and op-ed pieces to newspapers. Contact your local organizer or Amanda Pohl at amanda@virginia-organizing.org for more information.
- Contact your state senators and delegates and urge them to work for changes in the state Constitution regarding restoration of rights.
- Volunteer to help register voters. Contact Joe Szakos at szakos@virginia-organizing.org or 434-984-4655 ext. 222 for more information.
- Donate to Virginia Organizing to help us continue work on voting rights. Visit www.virginia-organizing.org and choose “Donate” or mail your donation to 703 Concord Ave, Charlottesville, VA 22903.

Real people. Real change.

Immigration Update

On June 11, the U.S. Senate voted to debate the bipartisan comprehensive immigration reform bill, S. 744. The bill remains the most comprehensive of the immigration bills before Congress and Virginia Organizing is supporting the passage of this bill. While there remains some concerns about the time and financial barriers to citizenship, this bill is a great starting point for so many of our undocumented immigrant community members.

Virginia Organizing organized a media conference on June 13 in Richmond to release a poll commissioned by the Alliance for Citizenship, Partnership for a New American Economy and Republicans for Immigration Reform that showed the majority of Virginians, across party lines, support the comprehensive immigration reform bill in the Senate.

Virginia Organizing also organized prayer vigils in Harrisonburg on May 19 and Virginia Beach on June 1 for immigration reform. Another interfaith prayer vigil is scheduled in Virginia Beach for July 1. Please contact Teresa Stanley at tstanley@virginia-organizing.org for more information.

Grassroots Gathering: Register Today!

Have you ever talked to an elected official about an issue that's really important to you? How did he or she respond? How do we strengthen our voices and share our opinions with decision-makers in meaningful ways

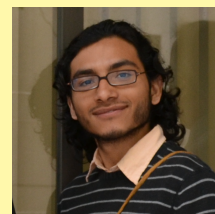
that produce results and build relationships? At this year's Grassroots Gathering, we'll answer that question and even get a chance to put training into practice with some special guests from Virginia politics!

Mark your calendars for Saturday, August 10 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. We will meet at University of Richmond's Jepson Hall (28 Westhampton Way, Richmond, Va.). Registration is easy! Just contact your local organizer or Nik Belanger at 434-709-4953 or nik.belanger@virginia-organizing.org by August 1. To find your local organizer, please visit www.virginia-organizing.org/chapters. Stay tuned to your email for updates and more information on where to find a schedule for the day!

Virginia Organizing Delivers Letters to Senators on Social Security

Chapter leaders from Danville, Fredericksburg, Richmond, Abingdon, and South Hampton Roads delivered letters from Virginia Organizing, the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, letters from community members, and postcards and petitions to support protecting and strengthening Social Security to four of U.S. Senator Mark Warner's offices and U.S. Senator Tim Kaine's Richmond office. Chapter leaders urged the Senators not to re-calculate the cost of living increases from the inflation index to the lower chained-CPI method.

Leader of the Month Jossimar Diaz-Castro



Jossimar Diaz-Castro has been working alongside Virginia Organizing for about three years. Throughout those years, he has focused on

immigrant justice issues, including supporting comprehensive immigration reform and fighting against discrimination.

Jossimar quickly recognized the diverse struggles of other community members and became active on other social justice issues such as environmental justice, Social Security, Medicare, and more.

"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,'" said Jossimar.

Jossimar believes Virginia Organizing is working hard to educate people on the issues and relate to those directly affected by our nation's policies in their communities.

Jossimar said, "Virginia Organizing truly is about 'power to the people.'"

A recent graduate of Eastern Mennonite University, Jossimar has worked hard for Virginia Organizing in his community. Thank you for all your hard work, Jossimar!

VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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Local Chapters

Augusta/Staunton/Waynesboro
Charlottesville-Albemarle County
Danville
Harrisonburg
Fredericksburg
Lee County
Martinsville-Henry County
South Hampton Roads
Washington County
Tri-Cities/Petersburg
Richmond
On Campus: UMW, VSU, CNU, UVA, E&H, U of R

News in Brief

- The City of Charlottesville agreed to establish a Human Rights Commission! Virginia Organizing is excited about this victory.
- Please consider Virginia Organizing in your estate planning. For more information, please contact Mary Alex at maryalex@virginia-organizing.org.
- The Petersburg Chapter will begin meeting this summer! Please contact Fancy Greenwood at fgreenwood@virginia-organizing.org for more information.
- Help us make our Grassroots Gathering successful by asking business and community groups to place a non-partisan ad in our program book! Visit www.virginia-organizing.org and choose "Forms" from our Resource Library for a printable ad form.
- The Richmond Chapter hosted a restoration of rights training on June 1. Seventeen people were trained on how to help former felons submit applications to restore their civil rights.



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