



The South Hampton Roads Chapter gathered outside of Cuccinelli's office to voice their disapproval of anti-immigrant provision 287-G.



We dropped the Project! From our name, that is. The work continues...



August 7, 2010 we celebrated 15 years of organizing. We have come a long way since our start in Lee County!

## News From the Grassroots

### The name changes but not the ideal.

By: Janice "Jay" Johnson  
Chairperson

It was wonderful to see many of you this month as we celebrated our 15th anniversary. For those of you who could not make it, we had a great time celebrating with over 200 wonderful supporters from all across the state. The group that gathered in Richmond got the first peek at our new logo and were also on hand for the big announcement that we will now be known as Virginia Organizing!

We want our name to reflect our mission, which is long-term change in Virginia. The word "project" sounds temporary to some and make no mistake about it, we are in this for the long haul.

Our work and our challenges remain the same. And although these challenges mount every day, we can be optimistic for the next 15 years. We have the people working together as part of a strong organization that speaks truth to power. We will continue to listen to the people most affected, encourage them to raise their voices, hold rallies, write letters, monitor legislation, promote civic engagement and hold our elected leaders accountable.

The name changes but not the ideal. The logo changes but not the people!

### Education and Accountability

It seems that the McDonnell administration brings an almost

daily assault to many of the issues we care about like equal rights, health care and the environment. We are striking back with public education events to set the record straight and educate the public on critical issues. The Martinsville Chapter hosted a Dismantling Racism workshop and is working on dismantling racism in the school system. The Martinsville, Danville, Washington County, Charlottesville and South Hampton Roads chapters all held tax reform and budget workshops. The South Hampton Roads Chapter is holding a large forum on September 16 featuring the regional director of Health and Human Services, Joanne Grossi, on the new health care bill at Ascension Episcopal Church in Norfolk.

**Are you a state employee? Please support our work! Virginia Organizing is participating in the Commonwealth of Virginia Campaign (for state employees) and our number is 3168.**

# Real people. Real change.

## Looking Back On 15 Years

By: Joe Szakos  
Executive Director

Virginia Organizing started in 1995 with the simple goal of bringing people with similar problems together in order to find practical solutions. When I look back at the accomplishments of the last 15 years, I am proud of what we have achieved together but I am also reminded that long-term change is hard.

Every battle has been hard fought. Providing a living wage to all workers is a common sense idea that has taken years to implement in many communities across the state — and the fight continues. Making sure that a black man standing trial in Lee County has a jury that represents his peers should be a given, but it was a battle we were fighting in 1998, not 1958! Seeing to it that every man, woman and child has access to affordable health care has been a goal for the last 80 years! After two years of citizen action, we are finally just starting the process of change. And thanks to our Attorney General, change in Virginia just got that much harder.

Virginia Organizing is not about simply an organization; it is about an idea. This idea was inspired by thousands of people across Virginia

who got together and did the unthinkable: they got involved and spoke out together, challenging power structures along the way.

They fought for fair wages, pushed for non-discrimination policies, registered voters, renamed bridges and demanded to be heard. Over the last 15 years we have involved thousands of new people in the political and legislative process, whether it be testifying at the General Assembly, speaking out at local public comment periods or going to Washington to lobby members of Congress.

Since our start, Virginia Organizing has grown into a large organization with 90 employees. Besides our 17 chapters, we also have a “Joint Plan of Work” with 47 groups that operate under our umbrella, ranging from Advancing Green Chemistry to the Virginia Forest Watch. Despite its growth, we have stayed true to its roots. We recognize that people coming together and speaking out is the only path towards long-term change. This idea is present in everything we do.

Despite the fact that long-term change is difficult, I appreciate that you have chosen the long road with us. It would be that much harder and a lot less fun without your support.

## Leader of the Month:

### Jeff Hunt



Jeff Hunt's first experience with Virginia Organizing involved knocking on thousands of doors as part of the 2009

summer Civic Engagement Project. Jeff, along with 39 other interns, braved heat waves, thunderstorms and angry dogs in order to register voters and talk to residents about their concerns door to door.

After the summer was over Jeff stayed on as a Virginia Organizing intern, working on a diversity of issues including fair housing and progressive tax reform. Jeff is currently part of the Balance Virginia Strategy Committee and is working hard to make sure we raise more revenue for our state rather than balance the budget by cutting vital services for the poor.

Jeff is studying economics at the University of Richmond. He is motivated to fight inequality—whether it be unequal civil rights or economic inequality. “I believe grassroots organizing is important because it is the best way to address local issues.”

## VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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**Local Chapters** (call or visit the website for more information)

Charlottesville

Danville

Martinsville

Fredericksburg

Northern Virginia

Newport News/Hampton Roads

South Hampton Roads

Williamsburg

Shenandoah Valley

Washington County & Lee County

Petersburg

Richmond

**On Campus:** W&M, UMW, VSU,

CNU, UVA, E&H, U of R

## News in Brief

- The Shenandoah Valley Chapter is partnering with the DREAM Act group to hold "Dream University," a forum educating people about immigrant rights.
- Over 30 people with the Fredericksburg Chapter attended a meeting of the Spotsylvania Board of Supervisors and spoke about the need to relocate dangerous CSX railcars. On September 8, the group is having a *The Hazards Posed by Toxic Chemicals on Our Tracks* forum.
- As part of an ongoing local struggle, Washington County attended the Virginia Gas and Oil Board hearing where they made a monumental change that actually lets landowners access their money from royalties.
- Danville, Charlottesville and Martinsville chapters celebrated a victory this month when Congressman Tom Perriello and both Senators Mark Warner and Jim Webb voted in favor of a \$26.1 billion aid package which will help millions of unemployed Americans—especially Southside.
- The Providence Mobile Home Park Affordable Housing Campaign has arranged stakeholder meetings with housing non-profit groups to develop a plan to save the "deeply affordable" trailer park housing in the region.

[www.virginia-organizing.org](http://www.virginia-organizing.org)