



**Virginia Organizing South Hampton Roads Celebrated a Huge Victory Over Predatory Lending in Chesapeake.**



**Over 100 People Gathered at the Capitol on Valentine's Day for Virginia Organizing's Broken Hearts Day.**

**Board Member Gabrielle Brown Represented Virginia Organizing at a State of the Union Amplification Event at the White House.**



## News From the Grassroots

### Broken Hearts at the General Assembly

On Valentine's Day, over 100 Virginia Organizing supporters from Abingdon to Arlington made their way to the Capitol to express their disappointment with the General Assembly's emphasis on partisanship and ideology instead of kitchen table issues like the economy and education.

"Virginians voted for legislators who promised to work on jobs and the economy and instead have focused on far-flung legislation like restricting voting rights, lifting the one gun per month limit, restricting gay adoptions and drug testing public assistance recipients," said Sandra Cook, Chairperson of Virginia Organizing. Wearing stickers that said, "The Virginia General Assembly Broke My Heart," participants distributed empty heart-shaped boxes of candy to all 140 legislators. Inside, instead of candy was

a note saying, "Disappointed? So are we! We want a General Assembly that works for All Virginians." The candy boxes were distributed with a letter and factsheet explaining the specific policies of concern.

"I'm disappointed that instead of working on jobs, the legislature is working hard to restrict voting rights. I grew up in a Virginia in which all of my relatives paid a poll tax each year to vote. I see voter ID bills as another tax, only this time the expense is incurred by all poor and vulnerable citizens – white, black and brown. It's a travesty that our elected representatives are engaged in voter suppression instead of job creation," said Janice "Jay" Johnson, board member of Virginia Organizing. The group also marched to the Bell Tower for a rally bearing broken heart signs that emphasized the General Assembly's misplaced priorities.

With chants like "Turn Around, Better Run, The General Assembly's Packin' Guns" and a rendition of the Supreme's classic "Stop in the Name of Love," the Broken Hearts Day proved an unusual and light-hearted critique of a deeply controversial legislative session. "As long as the Virginia General Assembly has priorities that are out-of-whack, we will continue to remind them that they work for everyone," added Johnson.

### *2012 General Assembly Priorities by the Numbers:*

- 32 bills** increasing the tax giveaways and loopholes for big corporations;
- 13 bills** making it harder to vote;
- 9 bills** attacking Virginia workers' rights;
- 34 bills** dealing with handguns;
- 12 bills** interfering with women's private medical decisions;
- 12 bills** criminalizing immigrants;
- 13 bills** insinuating that being poor is shameful;
- 3 bills** restricting gay adoption rights.

# Real people. Real change.

## Speak Out for Voting Rights

The 2012 Virginia General Assembly seems intent on taking Virginia backwards. Senator Dick Saslaw of Fairfax summed it up perfectly: "It seems to me there are people here who would like to repeal the whole 20th century."

The right to vote and choose our leaders is at the heart of what it means to be an American. The voter suppression bills that are being considered right now threaten the very fabric of our democracy. The House of Delegates and the Virginia Senate have each passed differing versions of a bill that would require a voter to present identification or cast a provisional ballot, reducing the likelihood of their vote counting. According to a survey conducted by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, in 2010 nearly 60 percent of provisional ballots cast were not counted. While either chamber will tweak the bills, it's clear Governor Bob McDonnell will have a voter suppression bill on his desk to sign.

Virginia Organizing has held actions opposing the voter suppression bills in Norfolk, Martinsville, Fredericksburg and Abingdon. It is estimated that 500,000 Virginians lack the proper voter ID and could be kept from voting if these laws are passed. These bills will disproportionately affect seniors, minorities and low-income Virginians

who may not have the required identification.

Please join us in reminding Governor McDonnell that Virginia is for Voters, not voter suppression.

*Take Action Today: Call Governor Bob McDonnell (804-786-2211)*

## Fighting for a Fair Budget

As the Virginia General Assembly debates the upcoming budget, Virginia Organizing is speaking out on the need for a balanced approach. The House and Senate budgets simply continue the cuts-only approach that is hurting working families and slowing our economic recovery. Virginians need a balanced approach to the budget that includes new revenue so we can invest in our future. Instead of taking a balanced approach that includes reforming costly tax loopholes, both Chambers have resorted to borrowing and accounting gimmicks.

On February 15, the Staunton Chapter hosted a forum on budget cuts to public education, featuring the superintendent of Staunton schools. The Fredericksburg Chapter is planning a similar forum for the first week of March. Check our website for more details and please contact your legislators. Tell them to hold out for a budget that invests in education, public safety and transportation, not more wasteful tax loopholes.

## Leader of the Month:

### Debra Grant



Debra Grant has led the charge on many issues in South Hampton Roads including opposing voter suppression laws, fighting predatory

lending and fair redistricting.

Most recently Debra helped with the successful effort to get the Chesapeake City Council to pass a requirement for predatory loan stores to get conditional use permits before locating or re-locating in the city of Chesapeake. Thanks to the efforts of Debra and other supporters the public will be able to comment on whether these lenders should get the permits.

Debra is one of many Virginians who has fallen into the predatory lending trap. "I've been caught in the predatory lending cycle of debt and so have my children. My son even lost his car to the car title lenders. Now, that I am out of the cycle of debt, I spend my time helping others realize that there is a better way. These payday lenders are hurting low-income communities," said Debra.

Debra has helped with BankOn, an initiative of the Interfaith Alliance to provide small loans to low-income residents who would otherwise get caught in the predatory lending trap. So far the program has helped over 100 South Hampton Roads families avoid the predatory lending trap and get financial planning education.

## VIRGINIA ORGANIZING

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

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

## News in Brief

- After the Virginia General Assembly failed to take any action on predatory lending this session, the Charlottesville Chapter held a protest on February 25 outside of Bank of America in opposition to the bank's funding of predatory lenders.
- The Norfolk Chapter joined the Deltas, Missing Voter Project and the Virginia ACLU in hosting, "Democracy's Ghosts" a Film Screening and Forum on Voter Suppression in Virginia: Past, Present and Future.
- The Harrisonburg Chapter kicked off "The Rockingham County 287G Listening Project" which aims to collect the stories of how the community has been impacted by the local 287G law enforcement arrangement which unfairly profiles local immigrants.
- The Washington County Chapter has blanketed the area with yard signs educating property owners on a controversial measure to lift the local gas drilling ban.

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

