

MEDIA RELEASE



**ACORN**®

[www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org)

**For Immediate Release:** December 7,  
2009

**Contact:** Scott Levenson (212) 239-7323  
[scottL@theadvancegroup.com](mailto:scottL@theadvancegroup.com), or  
Kevin Whelan, (612)-388-8026;  
[kwhelan@acorn.org](mailto:kwhelan@acorn.org)

## **Harshbarger report on ACORN videos: No illegal conduct ACORN leaders embrace recommendations of “roadmap for reform and renewal”**

An independent report examining the undercover videos filmed in offices of the national anti-poverty group ACORN states the employees portrayed in the videos did *not* engage in any illegal activity.

The report by former Massachusetts Attorney General Scott Harshbarger calls for the organization to take nine steps to strengthen its management and oversight structures as part of a “roadmap for reform and renewal” in order to regain public trust shaken by the video controversy.

“The report is part vindication, part constructive criticism and 100% roadmap to the future,” ACORN CEO Bertha Lewis said. “ACORN’s leadership is pleased that this evaluation shows even the low-level employees portrayed in the videos did *not* engage in any illegal activity or seek to encourage it,” Mr. Harshbarger was tough but fair in examining where ACORN has been and what we still need to accomplish in having the most effective possible organization to represent the interests of the communities we represent--low and moderate income, African American and Latino families across America.”

Harshbarger’s report states: “While some of the advice and counsel given by ACORN employees and volunteers was clearly inappropriate and unprofessional, we did not find a pattern of intentional, illegal conduct by ACORN staff; in fact, there is no evidence that action, illegal or otherwise, was taken by any ACORN employee on behalf of the videographers (pg 2 -3).”

The report contains nine recommendations (page 3) for improving ACORN’s management and six comments on the videos (page 12). The report notes on page 11 that “The videos that have been released appear to have been edited, in some cases substantially, including the insertion of a substitute voiceover for significant portions of Mr. O’Keefe’s and Ms.Giles’s comments, which makes it difficult to determine the questions to which ACORN employees are responding. A comparison of the publicly available transcripts to the released videos confirms that large portions of the original video have been omitted from the released versions.”

The recommendation include a simplified organizational structure, a return of focus to its “core competency – community organizing and citizen engagement empowerment, with related services” and recruitment of additional management and legal staff.

“The following nine (9) recommendations...are neither an epitaph nor an absolution for ACORN, but are a roadmap to reform and renewal, if implemented in their entirety in concert with other measures to regain the public’s trust,” Hashbarger’s report states (on page 3).

The report notes that since June 2008, ACORN has pursued a significant effort to evaluate and reform its financial and governance structures. “It has implemented, or is implementing, the recommendations made by these consultants,” the report states (on page 6).

“The ACORN Board, management and Advisory Board will be reviewing each of the nine recommendations in detail. We are committed to achieving the goals they set out as rapidly as possible,” Lewis said in a statement.

The full report can be downloaded here:

<http://www.proskauer.com/files/uploads/report2.pdf>

For more information, including Lewis’ full statement visit:

[www.acorn.org](http://www.acorn.org)

###

**About ACORN:** *ACORN, the nation’s largest grassroots organization of low- and moderate-income families has organized chapters in dozens of cities nationwide working on neighborhood improvement campaigns. ACORN’s 500,000 member families are vocal advocates for health care reform and have worked for decades to promote homeownership for working families. The organization raised early alarms about predatory lending practices by financial institutions and has helped thousands of families avoid foreclosure across the country. ACORN successfully sued FEMA to extend housing benefits for hurricane Katrina survivors and recruited volunteers to clean out and preserve thousands of homes in New Orleans.*

*ACORN’s large-scale voter registration drives in African-American and Latino communities drew the attention of Karl Rove, who dismissed at least one U.S. Attorney for failing to prosecute the group, and rhetorical attack from Sen. McCain and Governor Palin in 2008. ACORN has helped families prepare 150,000 free tax returns and obtain \$190 million in tax refunds in the last five years.*