

MEDIA RELEASE



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Bertha Lewis Statement on Scott Harshbarger Report,

Yesterday, Mr. Harshbarger shared the findings in his report with the Executive Committee of the ACORN Board, ACORN's Advisory Committee and our Management Council.

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.

It is important to me and to our Board to read on page 2 of Mr. Harshbarger's report that: *"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."*

Indeed, it is important to note that the transcripts published by the undercover videographers themselves (and referred to in Mr. Harshbarger's report) show that these ACORN employees consistently advised even the couple in the video tapes to pay taxes, not to evade them. Those transcripts also show that Giles and O'Keefe, identifying himself not as a pimp but as Giles' boyfriend, pleaded with the ACORN staff to assist with housing to protect her and underage girls from a violent pimp

The report recommends a number of ways that ACORN should strengthen its training, management, and supervisory structures. 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.

The report acknowledges that the leadership of ACORN has taken strong steps over the past year and a half to simplify its corporate structure, improve its governance, and modernize its financial systems.

The recommendations in the report to further strengthen ACORN's management are good ones. As the Harshbarger report states on page 10 *"The ACORN leadership is aware of these issues, and has initiated action steps to remedy them. Organization*

leaders appear committed to effect reform and are on their way to preserving ACORN and its mission in a reduced size and scope.”

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.

As the report makes clear, some of the goals we have set for strengthening our management and governance structure will take time to fully accomplish. Others—hiring top-flight management, legal, and financial teams—will take significant sums of money. We will work with donors and funders who have supported us in the past to seek the resources to implement these as well.

Overall, the report paints a picture of an organization that is very different that the characterization presented on Fox News and in the imagination of pundits who have attacked us.

It shows some employees and volunteers who were taken in, to varying degrees, by a scam based on the idea that a women and sometimes children were in danger and could be helped. Some took very appropriate action (like calling the police)—others less so.

It shows an organization that is not perfect, but is made up of dedicated, people working hard on behalf of their communities.

The past several weeks have been a very difficult time for the dedicated community leaders and organizers who have worked with ACORN organization to save homes, strengthen neighborhoods, and encourage millions to participate in democracy.

Along with the challenges and pitfalls, the remarkable women and men who do ACORN’s work every day have made tremendous achievements. There are thousands of families today with roofs over their heads, grocery money in the bank, and stronger, safer communities because of what they have done. This work must go on, and it will.

We thank Mr. Harshberger and his team for their work and thank the many organizations and citizens who have extended their support during recent weeks.

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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.