

MEDIA CONTACT:

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Advantage Communications Inc.  
Nigel Hall, Sr. Account Executive  
(501) 374-2220 office  
[nhall@advantageci.com](mailto:nhall@advantageci.com)

Michael McCray  
National Spokesperson

## *“Don’t Fault Poor Workers ... Blame The Board”*

As members, former leaders and dedicated community activists; we are saddened and troubled by the recent transgressions of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, especially the recent stories about “pimps and prostitutes” condoned by ACORN staff from Baltimore, Washington, DC and Philadelphia. Unfortunately, this is yet another example of poor governance, mismanagement and corruption within the once venerable organization.

Margaret Williams, Maryland ACORN board member and Sonja Merchant-Jones, Baltimore ACORN President both reported that the low level ACORN employees caught on tape in the Baltimore office and two additional employees from DC ACORN were immediately terminated for behaving unprofessionally; but yet, senior staff members who assisted and concealed a million dollar Rathke embezzlement remain employed.

While we commend these board member’s decisive action, we find it extremely ironic since the board of directors do not actually control ACORN employees; according to ACORN’s by-laws that authority is exclusively exercised by the “Chief Organizer” formerly Wade Rathke. This fundamental disconnect between an actual functioning board of directors and senior management is the true problem and real scandal within ACORN, it causes low-income members and staff to become mere pawns of senior management.

The existing board of directors has been dumbfounded by ACORN's complex organizational structure in the past – but the future is crystal clear. If ACORN is to survive then the know nothing, see nothing, do nothing board of directors must be replaced by individuals with the strength and capabilities to fulfill their fiduciary responsibilities and the courage to reign in corruption by ACORN's senior management.

Ultimately, ACORN's low-income workers are simply trying to meet and fulfill unreasonable membership quotas set by senior staff, this undue management pressure results in fraudulent voter registrations, tax assistance for “pimps and prostitutes” or worse. However, all community based organizations providing tax preparation assistance to low and moderate income individuals should not become scapegoats for individual wrongdoers. Don't fault poor workers – blame the board!

DC ACORN President (and ACORN 8, LLC co-founder) Marel Reid was physically removed from the DC ACORN office for fighting for truth, transparency and accountability in the DC ACORN office. Carol Hemmingway, President of Philadelphia ACORN was a member of the management committee that first sought ACORN's books and records following the discovery of the Rathke embezzlement. We are simply trying to correct the saddest of sadness, the living out of the proverb that *corruption of the best becomes the worst*. We are few but we are mighty and we've been fighting for truth and transparency inside ACORN for the last few years. We've filed lawsuits, sought injunctions, called for a boycott and reported wrongdoers to the Justice Department.

Unfortunately, the media's focus on the trivial and salacious actually distracts and detracts from legitimate investigations and true reform efforts. For instance, ACORN would much rather talk about Mickey Mouse or Tony Romo voting rather than explain why there was never a forensic audit following the multi-million dollar embezzlement.

Poor governance and lack of accountability are the real problems. Voter Fraud or rather Voter Registration Fraud are mere red herrings. They are symptoms of a far greater problem. And that is the lack of meaningful control and accountability by the membership. ACORN has been hijacked by senior staff and

executive leadership who are acting in their own personal interest and not the best interest of the association or its membership.

Consequently, the ACORN national board of directors must wake up, step up and right the ship – the crooks are not going to remove themselves. But instead, the ACORN board members who stood up for fairness and righteousness were improperly and illegally removed from the national board. By ejecting the ACORN 8 from its national board of directors, ACORN and other alleged perpetrators conspired to “injure, oppress, threaten, and intimidate” these members “in the free exercise or enjoyment of their rights or privileges secured to them by the Constitution” and as dues-paying ACORN members; violating their First Amendment right to speak out on matters of importance to ACORN and petition government for related relief. Moreover, one or more of senior staff members may have acted to avert liability for the referenced embezzlement, the unlawful concealment of that crime, and/or other breaches of fiduciary obligations.

On January 7, 2009, ACORN 8 representatives submitted criminal complaints to 15 different FBI and/or U.S. District Attorneys offices across America including the District of Columbia. These complaints allege violations of Title 18 U.S.C. §241 - *Conspiracy Against Constitutional Rights*, and possible RICO violations. Additionally, a blistering report released by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-CA), the Ranking Republican on the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, also supports ACORN 8 allegations of wrongdoing and enterprise corruption; and presents compelling evidence that ACORN has evaded taxes, obstructed justice, engaged in racketeering, and created a conspiracy to defraud the United States.

Unfortunately, in the words of House Judiciary Committee Chairman John Conyers, Jr. (D-Mich), as reported on June 25, 2009 by the Washington Times, the “powers that be” do not want an investigation of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now.

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The ACORN 8, LLC ([www.acorn8.com](http://www.acorn8.com)) consists of national, state and local board members, presidents or chairs. As such, the ACORN 8 is an organization of ACORN leaders; current and former board members who are struggling to reform the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now following the discovery of a multi-million dollar embezzlement.