

Interfaith Advocacy Program

National Legislative Priorities – February 2007

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2007 Provides Great Opportunities for Congress to Prioritize Programs to help Low-Income Families

This year Congress has a great deal on its plate, and we have compiled a short summary of the most important ways Congress can strengthen our communities and help low-income families gain lasting independence. There are also a number of links to websites within these summaries, which provide more extensive information on the topics we cover. Please take some time to read about these issues, contact your Senators and Representatives and tell them about the opportunities they have to strengthen our communities by helping low-income families gain lasting independence.

MINIMUM WAGE

As of the writing of this legislative update, Congress has yet to pass a final version of the minimum wage because of differences in bills passed by the House and Senate. A more comprehensive update on progress of this bill and how you can make a difference by contacting your elected officials can be found by visiting Let Justice Roll, a nonpartisan coalition of ninety faith, labor and community organizations, on the web at <http://www.letjusticeroll.org/>.

HOMELESSNESS

Every year The Department of Housing and Urban Development allocates resources for homeless assistance programs around the country. Family Promise and other advocates for the homelessness are excited to see the introduction of The

“Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing Act” (HEARTH), HR 840, which seeks to reauthorize and strengthen the HUD McKinney-Vento Homeless assistance programs by allowing greater decision making at the local level; more closely aligns the HUD definition of homelessness with other federal agencies; expands resources for emergency shelter and supportive services; provides a framework for greater homeless prevention activity; and allows communities the flexibility to implement a range of housing solutions. There is a push nationally to get as many co-sponsors as possible to ensure this bill is passed. You can learn more about this important issue by visiting the National Policy and Advocacy Counsel on Homelessness on the web at www.npach.org.

HOUSING

At least 3.5 million people in the United States experience homelessness every year, and 40% of the homeless population are families with children. Many more people, who are not counted among this homeless population, are living in substandard housing, staying long term in hotels or are doubled up in unaccommodating living situations. Lack of affordable housing is a driving factor in our national housing crisis. By creating a National Housing Trust Fund we will be providing a consistent reliable source of revenue to build and rehabilitate 1.5 million units of housing for the lowest income families over the next 10 years. Go to <http://www.nlihc.org/template/page.cfm?id=40> to visit the National Low Income Housing Coalition to learn more about this important issue and how you can make a difference.

For the poor will never cease from the land; therefore I command you, saying, “You shall open your hand wide to your brother, to your poor and your needy, in your land.” - Deuteronomy 15:10

HUNGER

The Federal Food Stamp Program is our nation's first defense against hunger, and greatly strengthens the efforts of the emergency food assistance system. A healthy diet can fall by the wayside for many poor families. More than 80 percent of food stamp benefits go to families with children, allowing their parents to obtain food at grocery stores for meals at home. Much of the remainder goes to seniors and persons with disabilities. Even with this support, the US Department of Agriculture, the federal agency that administers the Food Stamp Program, estimates 35 million people in the United States face a constant struggle against hunger. To learn more about hunger and how you can make a difference visit the Food Research Action Center at www.frac.org.

HEALTHCARE

The State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) has gone a long way to ensuring children have access to quality healthcare coverage. However, caps on funding for SCHIP have left 8.3 million children in the United States without healthcare coverage. A serious illness can mean homelessness for many families who are struggling to pay their rent and make ends meet. As a first step to addressing America's overall health care crises, Congress needs to provide adequate resources to ensure every child has access to quality health insurance when they reauthorize SCHIP this year. Visit Families USA at www.familiesusa.org to learn more about this issue and how you can make a difference.

2007 FEDERAL BUDGET

On Monday, February 14, 2007 the Senate will continue debate on H.J.RES.20, which will finalize appropriations for the current fiscal year. Due to efforts of a broad coalition of homelessness advocates, we were able to secure an increase of \$100 million for homelessness assistance programs in this bill. This is a tremendous victory, but the bill must be passed in the Senate for the appropriations to take place. Click [here](#) to get the phone number for your US Senator and ask them to approve

H.J.RES.20 and ensure funding for homeless assistance programs are protected.

2008 FEDERAL BUDGET

The President's proposed budget for 2008 has been met with criticism by many advocates for low-income families to its insistence on huge cuts to federal programs that benefit low-income families and children. The Coalition on Human needs has compiled an extensive list of analysis on the Presidents Budget that can be found at <http://www.chn.org/budgettraining.html#response>

Call your US Representative and US Senators and tell them:

- The poor have been forgotten for far too long and you have an opportunity to make a change;
- Pass the minimum wage bill;
- Support programs that help increase access to affordable housing, healthcare and food;
- Pass moral budgets that prioritize the critical needs of families;
- Sponsor the HEARTH Act and The National Housing Trust Fund.

Find Your House Representative Here:

<http://www.house.gov/>

Find Your Senators Here:

<http://www.senate.gov/>

For more information or to receive IAP alerts contact:
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