

WSSC 2009 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

PRINCIPLES

Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2007

37.3 Million people, including 13.3 million children, continue to live in poverty in our country. In Washington State 11.4% of people live below the federal poverty line. Reducing poverty is a priority. However, as the nation reels from the impact of the economic downturn, those most vulnerable in Washington continue a daily struggle to meet their basic needs. Persons who rely on public support such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) or General Assistance-Unemployable (GA-U) find themselves watching costs rise and grant levels remaining stagnant. Grants in the TANF or GA-U programs have not been increased in over ten years. There are more families seeking shelter, lining up at local food banks, and requesting assistance to meet other needs, like clothing, medicine, health care and utilities. Poverty disproportionately affects families of color in our country.

HUNGER: Hunger programs such as the Emergency Food Assistance Program and the school meal programs provide needed access to food for struggling families.

LIHEAP: The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) assists low income households, particularly those that pay a high proportion of household income in meeting their immediate home energy needs.

PAYDAY LOANS: According to the State Department of Financial Institutions, payday lenders make over three million loans with fees on those loans totaling \$173 million. Economically distressed persons are the ones who most often take out payday loans.

LIVING WAGE: A living wage is a just compensation that is sufficient to provide food, clothing, shelter, healthcare and education for workers and their families

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: Human trafficking is the third largest and fastest growing crime worldwide because it combines high profit and low risk. Between 600,000 and 800,000 persons, including children are harbored and transported for purposes of slavery or forced bondage, often of a manual labor or sexual nature. Five years ago Washington was the first state in the nation to pass a human trafficking statute, but to date there has been no convictions. Police officers are often the first to encounter victims of trafficking when enforcing prostitution laws. Increased resources are needed to provide training to assist them in recognizing victims of human trafficking.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSSC SUPPORTS:

- Increasing grants and access to services for TANF and GA-U recipients
- Addressing the disproportionate impact poverty has on families of color
- Expanding anti-hunger programs
- Increasing financial assistance for LIHEAP
- Eliminating predatory lending practices
- Establishing of living wage policies
- Increasing public awareness of human trafficking.
- Improving training for law enforcement to recognize victims of human trafficking