



WSCC 2010 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

HOUSING

PRINCIPLES

The lack of safe, affordable housing requires a renewed commitment to increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships, especially with religious groups and community organizations. The USCCB continues to oppose unjust housing discrimination and to support measures to meet the credit needs of low-income and minority communities.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2007

Many families cannot find or afford decent housing, or must spend so much of their income for shelter that they forego other necessities, such as food and medicine.... [The Catholic bishops] support housing policies which seek to preserve and increase the supply of affordable housing and help families pay for it.

Putting Children and Families First, USCCB, 1999

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Restoring funding for the Housing Trust Fund (HTF)
- Targeting investments within the HTF to address the issues of communities of concern and veterans
- Redirecting the State's housing efforts toward reducing poverty
- Maintaining the Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) and Washington Families Fund (WFF) programs

HOMELESS PERSONS ON CHURCH PROPERTY: An increasingly high number of homeless individuals and families has resulted in overcrowded shelters. Tents are also used as a means to survive the elements. Local governments have been reluctant to have the "tent cities" locate in their jurisdictions. The result has been ongoing conflict between local governments and organizations, including churches. **ESHB 1956** allows churches to host temporary encampments for homeless persons on property owned or controlled by a church. Local governments are prohibited from enacting ordinances that impose conditions other than those necessary to protect the public health and safety, and that do not substantially burden the religious organization. The bill, signed by the Governor, also prohibits the imposition of permit fees in excess of actual costs associated with the review and approval of required permit applications for a homeless housing encampment.

WORKFORCE HOUSING PROGRAM: Workforce housing has been in high demand in Washington as the cost of housing has increased. The result has been families paying a higher percentage of their income on housing. **ESHB 2753**, signed into law, establishes the Washington Works Housing Program. The goal is to incentivize nonprofit organizations and public agencies to develop affordable housing for working people. \$1 billion of the Housing Finance Commission's outstanding debt capacity will be used for implementation of the program. The intent is to create housing for the working poor within proximity of transit for easy access to employment and create thousands of prevailing wage construction jobs and housing equity for low-income workers.

SURPLUS PROPERTY FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING: Washington State's new Department of Commerce administers a program that identifies and catalogs the State's under-utilized real property.

State agencies and local governments are all required to participate in this program. The Department of Commerce provides a copy of the inventory to parties interested in developing the sites for affordable housing. **EHB 2138** would have expanded the entities that are required to list surplus property to include the Parks and Recreation Commission, ports, public utility districts, and water and sewer districts. Eligible organizations would have the right of first opportunity to purchase surplus properties, under reasonable option and purchase conditions, in return for a commitment to provide affordable housing for at least 30 years. A governmental entity that sells real property to an eligible entity may do so at a price that is less than fair market value, provided that the affordable housing developed on the property is occupied solely by individuals or families who are very-low or low-income. All of our Catholic Charities are involved in development of housing for low-income persons, and would have been considered eligible organizations under the bill. **EHB 2138** passed the House, and was heard in the Senate, but did not pass.

VICTIMIZATION OF HOMELESS PERSONS: SHB 2497 would have added an aggravating circumstance to the list in statute which permits courts to impose an exceptional sentence, if the offense was intentionally committed to cause harm to a person who may be homeless or perceived as homeless. Homeless is defined in the bill as lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate night time residence, including one at a public or private shelter or a private residence where the individual stays as an invited transient. The bill, which died in committee, would have a jury decide beyond a reasonable doubt that the aggravating circumstance existed.

FUNDING TO THE HOUSING TRUST FUND ACCOUNT: The Housing Trust Fund (HTF) provides loan and grant moneys to eligible organizations, such as the housing divisions of Catholic Charities, for development of housing for low-income and special needs populations. The HTF recipients have been very successful at leveraging these funds, usually raising \$4 to \$5 for each HTF dollar. **SHB 3177** would have increased HTF funding by providing for a \$62 surcharge to be applied to assignments or substitutions of previously recorded deeds of trust that are recorded with county auditors. Currently, there is no money available for low income housing development in the second year of the biennium, as the original \$100 million appropriated for the HTF has been committed to projects. This legislation would have provided an additional \$50 million for the 2011 fiscal year. Unfortunately, the bill died.

DISCHARGE OF PERSONS FROM STATE INSTITUTIONS: There is a growing concern about the number of persons who are discharged from State institutions into homelessness. The institutions include the Department of Corrections, juvenile rehabilitation facilities, and State mental institutions. **SHB 2905** and **SB 6478**, which died in committee, would have required State agencies to collect data regarding these populations and their housing status. In addition, both the Department of Corrections and the Department of Social and Health Services would have been required to submit plans to the Legislature on how they would plan to eliminate homelessness for persons being discharged from State custody or receiving care from an agency.

TENANCIES FOR PERSONS WITH CRIMINAL BACKGROUNDS OR SUBSTANCE ABUSE ISSUES: SSB 6338, which died in committee, would have created an intermediate tenancy agreement; that is a voluntary tenancy agreement between a landlord and an eligible tenant to provide a supportive living program for persons who have criminal backgrounds or who suffer from addiction. To be eligible, a tenant must have been released from a correctional facility or convicted of a crime within the past 24 months or is a recovering alcoholic or drug addict and is participating in a program of recovery. Landlords could have terminated intermediate tenancies if the tenant failed to remain clean and sober, engaged in illegal activity, or failed to meet other obligations in the agreement or as part of the supportive living program. The bill passed the Senate, but died in the House.