



Presbytery of Baltimore

2007 Legislative Priorities

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The Presbytery of Baltimore, through its Director of Public Policy, Julie Erickson, and with the vital assistance of any interested participants from all congregations, will advocate in support of the social justice issues important to our churches and to our Presbytery. These primary issues have been identified through regional listening sessions held during the fall of 2006 and through the Legislative Task Force of the Peace and Justice Committee of Presbytery.

The top items for this year's Maryland General Assembly Session that were determined by our Peace & Justice Committee include (but are not limited to):

Environment

Policies that will help reduce global warming and provide cleaner air and water will be supported. Included in those policies are:

- The *Clean Car Initiative*, which will require that new vehicles sold in Maryland have lower tailpipe emissions, and will encourage increased sales of hybrid cars and vehicles with more efficient engines
- *Chesapeake Bay Restoration* initiatives including better storm water runoff management, protection of areas zoned critical, and reduction of nutrient runoff from adjacent land

Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Two different aspects of affordable housing are being pursued. One initiative aims to prevent homelessness and provide safe affordable housing to low-income workers through a Rental Allowance Program (RAP), shelter housing funding and homelessness prevention programs. Another housing initiative will make sure that professionals such as teachers and police can afford to live within the areas that they serve. In this case Housing Trust Funds for workforce housing are being supported.

Energy Assistance

With the increase in electric energy rates, the funds for assistance to low-income families must be increased to ensure that these families are able to pay for their electric service. These programs have been inadequately funded in the recent past and the shortfall will only increase as the electric utility rate increases. Included in this initiative are incentives for landlords to make their properties more energy efficient.

Earned Income Tax Credit

A refundable portion of a low-income family's wages are available to be refunded to qualifying families. This EITC, both the Federal and the Maryland

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portions, have been successful programs that have helped families get out of poverty and become more self reliant. The Maryland portion of this fund needs to be increased, and awareness of its existence must be made available through increased education.

Medical Care Access

Over 800,000 Marylanders lack health insurance. More than 90,000 eligible children remain unenrolled in the Maryland Children's Health Insurance Program (MCHIP). These adults and children either forego appropriate health care and/or use emergency rooms for primary care. The *Healthy Maryland Initiative* proposes to increase a tax on tobacco products by \$1.00 per pack to fund increased access to health care, provide smoking cessation classes and with the higher price of tobacco products encourage more people, especially the young, to quit smoking.

Welfare

Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) grants to qualified needy families help 52,000 Marylanders (over 38,000 children) afford rent, utilities, clothing and other basic necessities. Strict rules govern who gets this assistance. Currently TCA and Food Stamps combined are regulated by Maryland law to equal, at a minimum, 61% of the state's Minimum Living Level. We encourage this minimum be increased to 75% of the Minimum Living Level within four years.

Immigrants

We encourage the state to support increased funding for adult education, especially for English classes, to enable immigrants to become more productive members of our society. We also support fair treatment for immigrants, recognizing that they make a positive contribution to our society and economy.

Other Issues

Other issues traditionally supported by this office, including defense of public education funds, women's reproductive rights, gun control and an end to the death penalty, will also be attended to as each bill appears in the GA agenda.