



PUBLIC POLICY ADVOCATE 2006 Legislative Agenda

The Public Policy Advocate for the Presbytery of Baltimore will concentrate on the following priorities during the 2006 Maryland General Assembly Legislative Session:

1. The Healthy Air Act: Enactment of this piece of legislation will solve the serious problem of power plant pollution. It closes the loophole that allows power plants to emit more pollution than the standards set by the EPA. Four pollutants that are targeted for reduction are sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, mercury, and carbon dioxide.
2. Embryonic Stem Cell Research: The governor has requested funding for one year for research and for a building. Bills have been filed in both legislatures that seek annual funding for five years for embryonic stem-cell research.
3. Tobacco Tax for health Care Expansion: Maryland Health Care for All! Coalition is working to raise the state tobacco tax by \$1.00 per pack to reduce teen and adult smoking and to save the state billions in long term health care costs. The revenue from this tax would be used to expand Medicare in the state, provide for more tobacco control, provide for community health center specialist care for uninsured people, and help with the funding of a pilot program to help small businesses with health insurance costs.
4. Energy Assistance: This increase in assistance will help low-income families keep up with the increases in their heating and electricity bills which are expected to rise as much as 70% this year due to increased heating and energy costs.
5. Temporary Cash Assistance: These are grants which help people afford rent, clothing and other basic necessities. Maryland law specifies that the combined total of a family's Temporary Cash Assistance grant and Food Stamps should equal 61% of Maryland's Minimum Living Level. This advocacy will ask the General Assembly and Governor to increase these grants to reach the 61% benefit standard.
6. Homelessness and Affordable Housing: The governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness and the Governor's Commission on Housing Policy have recommended creating a dedicated funding source for affordable housing. We support this.
7. Immigrants: Legal immigrants, both children and pregnant women in Maryland recently had a significant cut in health care funding, which, designed to save the state money, will only result in more sick women, children and babies, and higher (state-paid) uncompensated emergency room costs. This office supports the full restoration of health care funding to immigrant children and pregnant women legally residing in MD.
8. Gambling: Once again we ask the legislators to reject legislation that legalizes slot-machine and other casino-style gambling in Maryland.