



Legislative Agenda 2004-2005

Recommendations by the Voice of the Poor Committee
Council of the United States

Following is the 2004-2005 Legislative Agenda presented to National President, Gene Smith, by the Voice of the Poor Committee (VOP) for the National Council of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul. The Legislative Agenda was reviewed by the President's Council and approved by President Smith at the 2004 National meeting in Phoenix. This document will be used as a framework for Society advocacy. It is hoped that the document will become an ongoing agenda item at VOP national committee meetings for submission to the National President for approval.

Affordable Housing/Homeless Housing

Based on the national goal to end chronic homelessness within 10 years and President Gene Smith's call "urging all members of the Society to support legislative efforts aimed at increasing housing opportunities for all people in need of a decent place to live" (Society of St. Vincent de Paul Position Statement on Affordable Housing for the Poor, July, 2002):

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is grateful to Congress for funding Section 8 vouchers, critical assistance for low income families, elderly and disabled across the country. However, the funding for Section 8 was done at the expense of programs critical to homeless and nearly homeless in our land.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul *supports* the following bills in Congress in the 2004-2005 session whose purpose is to address chronic homelessness and maintain and create housing for low income citizens.

- Restoration of funding cuts to **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Programs** and increase funding to \$150 million for the Supportive Housing Program-Permanent Housing renewals.
- Authorization of **ELHSI (Services for Ending Long Term Homelessness Act)** a new program administered by HHS funding a range of services to keep homeless off the streets.
- **H.R. 4057:** Passage and funding for the **Samaritan Initiative** (Proposes to combine funds from HUD, HHS and the VA to provide permanent housing and support services for homeless).
- **H.R. 4866:** Passage and funding for the **SELHA Act** (Proposes to fund a variety of services in permanent housing for chronic homeless).

H.R. 1102: Support creation of a **National Housing Trust Fund** as a funding source for the construction, rehabilitation and preservation of rental and owner-occupied housing for the very lowest incomes.

Immigration

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul *supports* the following bills in Congress in the 2004-2005 session whose purpose is to protect undocumented minors and workers in the U.S.

- **S.B. 1545:** DREAM ACT to allow undocumented who have been in the U.S. five years and were under the age of sixteen when they entered the U.S. to have their status changed to legal permanent residents qualifying for in-state tuition and other educational benefits.
- **S.B. 1129:** UNACCOMPANIED ALIEN CHILD PROTECTION ACT (Innocents Protection Act) to prevent undocumented children from being incarcerated with criminal offenders.

S.B. 1645: AGJobs Bill addresses the status of the estimated 50% of farm workers in the U.S. who are undocumented by establishing a process for "earned legalization" through granting of temporary work visas. Workers are eligible for legal permanent residency ("green card") based on work records for a six year period.

Child Tax Credit

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul *supports* extending the child tax credit to low income families.

- **H.R. 1308:** this bill to expand the tax credit of \$1,000 per child to include low-income families has been bottled up in conference (the House and Senate passed different versions of the bill) since spring. If HR 1308 is finally brought to a vote, Members should be urged to include low-income working families in the child tax credit.

Welfare Reauthorization (TANF)

Absent agreement between the House and Senate on welfare reauthorization, a series of extensions of existing rules (expiring September 30) have been passed. The Senate has passed an important amendment to the PRIDE ((Personal Responsibility and Individual Development for Everyone) Act adding \$6 billion in new child care funding for low income working families.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul *supports* this increase in child care funding and seeks additional improvements to the PRIDE Act through amendments to:

- Restore benefits eligibility for legal immigrants.
- Give states more flexibility to provide education and training by allowing vocational education to count as work for two years.
- Maintain current hourly work requirements, especially for single parents with children under 6.
- Expand amount of time states can allow recipients to participate in substance abuse treatment programs and other activities addressing barriers to employment.

Health Care Reform

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul *supports* efforts to extend meaningful health care benefits to the most vulnerable. There is no substitute for an involved, effective, and committed government.

Faith-Based Initiative/CARE Act

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul *supports* providing crucial new resources to faith-based and secular charities including the \$1.3 billion in new funding for the Social Services Block Grant (SSBG) program. Senators from all states should be urged to finish work on the CARE Act and to insist that SSBG funding be part of the final bill that goes to the President.

- **S.B. 476** (CARE Act) has been passed including the \$1.3 billion in SSBG funding.
- **H.R. 7** (The Charitable Giving Act of 2003) was passed without the increase in SSBG funding.

Senators from all states should be urged to insist that SSBG funding be part of the CARE Act.

Communication Action Link with Washington

The effectiveness of Voice of the Poor is directly related to accurate, timely information communicated in a concise and understandable way to Vincentians from coast to coast. A future goal to be considered by the Society should be the hiring of a lobbyist on the hill to promote the Society's agenda and coordinate communications with our membership. This could be an individual who splits time with another Catholic organization.

For this year:

- Communicate the Society's legislative agenda as approved and adopted to members of Congress at the beginning of the session.
- Communicate the Society's legislative agenda to like-minded organizations who have lobbyists in Washington, DC.
- Begin to link VOP to appropriate legislators who sponsor (or oppose) legislation supported by the Society.

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