

Society of St. Vincent de Paul

Hot Topics

From the National Voice of the Poor Committee

www.voiceofthepoor.org

According to US Census data (1) (2) poverty remains steady; the poor are poorer. There are 37 million poor in the USA (12.6% of the population), and 16 million (43%) of those who are poor earned less than half of the poverty limit which is identified as "deep poverty." Poverty is defined for a family of four as \$19,971 or less; for a family of three, \$15,577; for a family of two, \$12,755; and for unrelated individuals, \$9,973. This is the highest percentage of people recorded as living in deep poverty since the government started keep track of the numbers (1975) 30 years ago!

1. DeNavas-Walt, C, Proctor, BD, Lee, CH. Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2005. US Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, US Census Bureau. August 2006.

2. Webster, BH and Bishaw, A. Income, Earnings, and Poverty Data From the 2005 American Community Survey. US Department of Commerce Economics and Statistics Administration, US Census Bureau. August 2006.

Housing

Housing costs have skyrocketed coast-to-coast resulting in higher shelter costs for working families — over 50% of income in many cases. The Society receives requests for larger amounts of emergency housing assistance and help with utilities nationwide.

We Support:

- Increasing permanent housing for low and moderate-income families (i.e., National and State Housing Trust Funds).
- Raising the number of rent subsidy programs especially for extremely low-income households.
- Full funding for affordable housing programs such as Section 8 and Section 202 Preserve targeting Section 8 vouchers for extremely low-income households.
- Increased funding for homeless assistance programs. (i.e., McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance)
- Provide housing first with supportive services for homeless.
- Utility assistance programs. (The need for utility assistance is critical to well being and even survival, particularly for the elderly, the sick, and children.)

On January 31, 2007 the House passed its version of the fiscal year 2007 appropriations bill [H.J.RES.20.EH]. It has been received in the Senate. Under this funding bill, McKinney-Vento homeless assistance funding would increase by \$115 million over 2006, Section 8 Tenant-Based Rental Assistance would receive a nearly \$500 million increase to account for increasing costs of renewing vouchers, and Public Housing Operating Funds would increase by \$300 million. These funds are urgently needed as sufficient private funding does not exist to meet current needs.

Now is the time to encourage your Senators to support a \$115 million increase for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants. It is also a good time to thank House members who supported this bill. (House roll call votes are found at <http://clerk.house.gov/evs/2007/index.asp>)

2007 Farm Bill (Food Stamps)

Nutrition Programs, such as Food Stamps, fill a critical need and determine for many whether they will have food sufficiency month to month. It is estimated that 36 million people don't have reliable access to food in the USA; an estimated 26 million receive Food Stamps. Children are over half of the participants. Families and children receive nearly 80% of all benefit dollars. The USDA's 2007 farm bill proposals introduced by Agriculture Secretary Mike Johanns would "spend approximately \$10 billion less than the 2002 farm bill spent over the past five years (excluding ad-hoc disaster assistance), upholding the President's plan to eliminate the deficit in five years. The Society provides emergency assistance receiving thousands of requests for emergency food assistance annually.

We Support:

- Maintain Food Stamp eligibility. Support outreach and education efforts to those eligible for Food Stamps.

What is Needed:

- Extend eligibility to more single adults and more working families.
- Allow families to participate without forfeiting the opportunity to save.
- Provide adequate funding for Food Stamps and other nutrition programs that serve the needy. In the 1996 welfare debate, Food Stamps lost \$28 billion over six years according to the Congressional Budget Office and only 1/3 of that funding has been restored. Yet the number of needy in the USA continues to increase.
- Base monthly benefits on an updated measure of what families need. Provide families with access to quality food options — a variety of foods including fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, whole grains, and other wholesome foods
- Adequate education (e.g. based on the 2005 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and current infant feeding practice guidelines of the American Academy of Pediatrics).
- Food Stamps must be easily accessible to those who qualify. Reduce the complexity and stigma in the application process. Promote outreach efforts at national, state and local levels. Education regarding eligibility is needed along with simple registration procedures to use of Food Stamps, much be encouraged.

Income and Assistance

The economy exists to serve people, not the other way around.

Economic Justice for All, Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1986.

People have the right to productive work, to fair wages, and to private property and economic initiative. Paying a just wage is a powerful witness to employers, donors, government officials, church leaders and others who are - or should be - concerned with economic justice for all people.

We Support:

→ Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF): Support improvements to reduce child poverty, improve employability of recipients, provide affordable, quality child care, promote adequate family income, and support marriage and family life.

→ Support and promote the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).

→ The abolishment of predatory loan practices.

In a letter to Congress on behalf of the USCCB, Cardinal McCarrick writes, "Efforts to revitalize neighborhoods and to expand homeownership among low income families are being threatened by abusive lending practices. These practices, termed predatory lending, trap far too many unsophisticated and vulnerable people, often the elderly, into high cost loans that frequently lead to foreclosure after stripping any equity from the home. "

Immigration

US immigration policies should be based upon the following guiding principles:

- People have the right to find opportunities in their own homelands.
- People have the right to migrate to support themselves and their families.
- Sovereign nations have the right to control their borders.
- Refugees and asylum seekers should be afforded protection.
- The human dignity and human rights of the undocumented migrants should be respected.

Reference: "Strangers No Longer, Together on the Journey of Hope", A Pastoral Letter Concerning Migration from the Catholic Bishops of Mexico and the United States, January, 2003. Nos. 33-38.

We Support:

→ Adoption of an immigration policy that is comprehensive and provides legal status and legal avenues for entry into the United States, based on the US Bishops' document, "Strangers No Longer," and Pope John Paul II's, "Ecclesia in America."

→ Allow undocumented who have been in the US five years and were under the age of 16 when they entered the US to have their status changed to legal permanent residents qualifying for in-state tuition and other educational benefits.

→ Address the status of the estimated 50% of farm workers who are undocumented by establishing a process for "earned legalization."

An estimated 11 to 12 million undocumented persons reside in this country. The USCCB and Network have endorsed immigration reform that allows a path to citizenship for undocumented persons in the country; a temporary worker program which protects both U.S. and foreign-born workers; family based immigration reform which reduces backlogs in family unity categories; restoration of due process protections for immigrants; and policies which address the root causes of flight.

Health Care

We Support:

→ Preserving Medicaid entitlement and benefits for low-income individuals.

→ Legislation to facilitate enrollment of children in Medicaid and SCHIP (State Children's Health Insurance Program).

→ Restoration of Medicaid and increased funding of State Children's Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) to cover children at up to 300% of the Federal Poverty Level at States' choice. (Based on population growth, S-CHIP is underfunded in many states.)

- The poor should not have to choose between food, shelter and medicine.
- Every child should receive basic health care, which includes vaccinations and regular check ups.
- No child should be allowed to suffer from what are often easily treatable illnesses.
- Every person in need of medical help should have easy access to quality and compassionate care.
- Health care institutions should be encouraged to deliver just, compassionate, and quality service to the poor.

Having adequate medical coverage for all means finding a way to encourage and enable health care providers to provide service. The Society seeks to keep an open dialog with the medical community and legislators on economic issues related to universal health care.

• Holding the medical community to the highest standards, including ethical integrity from administration to face-to-face patient service, to medical research and development must be encouraged.

• While investigating ways to improve the quality of human life, scientific study must be conducted in such a way that all work honors God, the creator, and the human person. Every person has value.

• Life is a precious gift from God. From conception, to maturity, and aging, the person must be honored and respected.

Reference: Position Statement on Health Care for the Poor, SVDP, Voice of the Poor, Feb. 2004.