

LEGISLATIVE HOT LINE



1-800-869-6525 Ext 6690

Sponsored by the Five Catholic Commissions and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development of the Secretariat for Catholic Charities Health and Human Services

October 23, 2007

Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously. Defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9)

2007 FARM BILL – URGE SENATORS TO SUPPORT FAIRNESS FOR FARMERS / JUSTICE FOR HUNGRY

BACKGROUND: Catholic Charities USA, Catholic Relief Services and the US Catholic Bishops have been working together to seek a reform-focused farm bill that reflects a commitment to feed the hungry at home and abroad, to offer effective support for those who till the land, while promoting fairness and equity for farmers and ranchers. We especially support efforts to target agriculture resources to those who need help the most rather than those who need it least.

Starting next week, the Senate will take important steps towards completing a new Farm Bill, that is written every 5-7 years and sets the nation's agricultural and food policies, as it is the principle means of feeding the hungry at home and abroad, promoting rural development, and caring for the land. When the House of Representatives passed their version of the Farm Bill in July, the familiar system of channeling billions of dollars to mostly large producers remained in place. For this reason, it is vital that you tell your Senators that the 2007 Farm Bill must not reflect business as usual.

The U.S. Bishops have stated that "the primary goals of agricultural policies should be providing food for all people and reducing poverty among farmers and farm workers in this country and abroad." (For I Was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers and Farm workers, 2003).

To make the Farm Bill fairer, ask your Senators to:

- 1) Support the Dorgan Grassley Amendment that establishes strong and meaningful payment limits in order to target farm supports to struggling family farmers who often lack access to these programs.
- 2) Make Title I of the Farm Bill more equitable and just, by offering support where and when it is needed regardless of crop grown. Tell your Senator that a real farm safety net should tie support to farmer's income rather than crop prices. This approach would reduce trade distortions, better prepare U.S. farmers to compete fairly in a global marketplace, and reduce undue harm to the most vulnerable farmers around the world.

To make the Farm Bill more generous to the hungry at home, ask your Senators to:

- Increase the minimum monthly benefit of \$10 and increase standard deductions to make the program more accessible to the working poor;
- Restore food stamp eligibility to such vulnerable groups as adult legal immigrants and parents with past drug conviction. These provisions penalize children in these low-income households;
- Allow poor families and seniors to access food stamps during times of hardship and crisis, regardless of modest savings that should serve as a safety net during difficult times

To make the Farm Bill more generous to the hungry overseas, ask your Senators to:

- Establish a \$600-million "safebox," containing food aid that is dedicated exclusively to address chronic hunger and longer term food security;
- Allow the use of cash to purchase food locally when appropriate to address food insecurity;
- Provide greater flexibility in the use of monetary funds under Sec. 202(e) of Title III of the Farm Bill; and increased resources for Title II and McGovern-Dole education-nutrition programs.

ACTION: Call Senators Brown and Voinovich, ask for their legislative aid handling nutrition and agricultural policy. Advise them of your concerns as outlined above. Urge your Senators to support a more equitable and just Farm Bill

Senator Sherrod Brown (202) 224-2315

Senator George Voinovich (202) 224-3353

CHILDRENS HEALTHCARE/ SCHIP – NEW MEASURE MAY BE INTRODUCED

The House was unable to override the President's veto of the legislation renewing SCHIP, a federal-state partnership that provides health coverage to children with family incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid, but not sufficient to pay for open market health insurance.

Catholic Social Teaching tells us that every person has a basic human right to adequate health care. Society has a responsibility to ensure that everyone has access to health care, to protect the dignity of the human person and ensure the common good.

The Majority Leadership in the House has stated their intention to produce a revised bill, making minor changes to the bill to address concerns, while still aiming to cover 10 million children through SCHIP. Speaker Pelosi in her comments on the House floor thanked Catholic Charities for its efforts in support of SCHIP.

It's not over. In the next few weeks a revised measure may be produced and your continued efforts will be needed more than ever. Keep posted regarding developments on this important piece of legislation.

PAYDAY LENDING

On June 27, 2007 the Ohio Catholic Bishops went on record as supporting initiatives that protect the poor and all Ohio Consumers from the spiraling indebtedness caused by Payday lending.

One way of protecting consumers is passage of legislation that regulates Payday Lending with a rate cap on loans. **The Ohio Coalition for Responsible Lending** has been working with Representative William Batchelder in Columbus to **devise legislation that is comprehensive** and has been successful in other states to curb these practices, while making it possible for other products to be developed to help those in financial need. This legislation would:

- 1) **Establish a 36% rate cap** on small loans \$800 or lower
- 2) **Prohibit** a loan cashing business from **making a loan to a borrower** who has an outstanding loan with any check cashing licensee
- 3) **Establish a maximum number** of loans per customer within one calendar year
- 4) **Create a linked deposit program** that provides incentives to banks to make small loans
- 5) **Expand responsibilities** of consumer finance education board to promote small loan counseling

ACTION: *In accordance with our Catholic Social Teaching and its values of human dignity, common good and participation, we call for supporting business practices that are fair and just. The issue is not providing the loans, but at what cost, especially for those who are in vulnerable positions of need.*

Call, write or fax your State Representative and encourage him/her to support the Batchelder/Hagan Bill (HB 333) which contains the only proven method of regulating payday lending – that is a rate cap. Any legislation that does not contain the rate cap will be ineffective. Insist that real reform of this industry take place and that more is done to make alternative products available for those in need of small loans.

For more information please call the Diocesan Social Action Office at 216-939-3851 or 888-620-5280. You can also visit our web page at www.catholic-action.org for more information. Thank you.