

## Voices for Justice legislative wrap-up

May 2015

This year's General Assembly session wrapped up on May 6, 2015. While our legislators take a well-deserved break, it's time to look back at what happened under the gold dome this year. The Voices for Justice (VFJ) task force is responsible for the public policy work of the Colorado Council of Churches. This session, VFJ took positions on bills in a wide variety of areas, including poverty, immigration, criminal justice, health care, education, and affordable housing. With split control of the legislature, it was a tough year for many groups to get their priorities passed, but a number of bills we supported made it through both chambers. Below is a snapshot of how our many of our priorities fared (**green** is a bill we supported, **red** is a bill we opposed):

- In the area of **poverty**, we joined several groups in supporting **SB 12**, the Colorado Works Child Support Pass-through, which passed with bipartisan support. SB 12 allows child support payments to "pass through" to families receiving Colorado Works benefits, rather than being kept by county governments. This was the only major poverty-related legislation to survive the session. We supported **HB 1100**, which would have increased the amount of money credited to the old age pension fund, as well as **HB 1133**, which would have continued the Colorado Pay Equity Commission, but both bills died. We also actively supported several efforts to raise the statewide minimum wage, but those bills were also lost. **HB 1195** would have triggered the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-earning families, but revised budget forecasts led the sponsor to withdraw it.
- On **immigration** issues, we opposed the Joint Budget Committee's withdrawal of funds for centers that provide licenses to undocumented residents, and supported the compromise that was eventually reached to fund three centers instead of just one. We supported **SB 66** to expand the types of documents sufficient to receive a state ID, but it was defeated.
- In the area of **criminal justice**, we supported two successful bills that will protect victims of human trafficking from being charged with prostitution crimes (**HB 1019** and **SB 30**). We supported **SB 195**, which will increase funds available for academic & vocational programs to rehabilitate offenders, as well as **HB 1022**, which will allow juveniles to avoid court charges for petty offenses if they satisfy a petty offense contract. Also successful were bills to protect the information of domestic violence victims (**HB 1174**) and improve the Restorative Justice Council pilot program (**HB 1094**). Unsuccessful this session was an attempt to create a foster youth success collaborative (**SB 131**).
- In **health care** issues, we supported the successful telemedicine bill, **HB 1029**. We were in favor of several successful improvements to child protection and foster care services, including **SB 242**, **HB 1023**, and **HB 1248**. We strongly supported **HB 1258** to establish a Family and Medical Leave Insurance program, but it was lost on third reading on the House

- floor. Also defeated was an attempt to repeal the state's health insurance exchange (**HB 1066**).
- In **education**, we successfully opposed a bill to reduce the number of schools and children eligible for Breakfast After the Bell by speaking against **HB 1080**. We supported attempts to provide school lunches on additional weekdays for 4 day per week schools (**SB 54**), increase funding for preschool programs (**HB 1024**), and reduce student contact with law enforcement as a disciplinary measure (**HB 1240**), but all were defeated. We strongly opposed a bill to use tax credits for nonpublic education as well (**SB 45**), which was defeated.
  - We supported several late-breaking bills to improve the state of **affordable housing** in Colorado, including **HB 1383** and **HB 1384** but both were killed in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

In all, the Voices for Justice task force monitored 78 bills, took a position on 47 bills, and actively worked on or testified for approximately 15 bills. Of the 40 bills we supported, 19 were passed. Of the 7 bills we opposed, all 7 were defeated.

Thanks to all who helped us in our work, our ecumenical and coalition partners, and the members of the Colorado Council of Churches for entrusting this group to speak and act on its behalf. We look forward to another good year in 2016!