



*Grounded
in Faith.
Working
for Justice.*

2014 Legislative Priorities

As people of faith, we advocate that our elected officials prioritize meeting human needs in the formation of the budget and other legislation. The measure of our society is what it does to and for people who are traditionally not in power. The Bible emphasizes the importance of taking care of widows, orphans, immigrants, and the poor. Let us together reflect on whose voice is silenced and needs go unmet and act to ensure their voices are heard and their needs met.

Supporting Access to Affordable Housing:

- ➔ Invest deeply in the [Housing Trust Fund](#)
 - Washington State's Housing Trust Fund (HTF) is a critical tool needed to create and preserve affordable housing. The vast majority of people living in homes built or preserved by the HTF are extremely low-income, earning less than \$19,000 per year for a family of three. HTF has also funded first-time homeownership programs, and homes for vulnerable communities, such as veterans, people with disabilities, and seniors. The HTF leverages over five times its funding from other public, private and philanthropic sources. We must recognize the number of projects in the pipeline that need this last piece of funding to succeed and fund the Housing Trust Fund to the maximum extent feasible.
- ➔ Strengthen the [Housing and Essential Needs and Aged, Blind and Disabled](#) Programs
 - The Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) program ensures that people with temporary mental health illness or temporary physical disabilities can meet their basic needs and access stable housing when facing extreme economic hardship. The program has provided rental and utility assistance to over 13,000 disabled adults with incomes below \$339 per month since it was implemented in November 2011.
 - The Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD) program helps extremely low-income adults with permanent mental health illness or permanent physical disabilities with \$197 per month while they are applying to the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. This can be a multi-year application process. ABD provides the temporary \$197 monthly cash grant to over 20,000 individuals. When people transition to SSI, the state is retroactively reimbursed for the full cost of the ABD cash grant.
 - We need to not only protect HEN and ABD from new budget cuts; we also need to increase the ABD cash grant and extend HEN eligibility to people whose primary disability is chemical dependency.
- ➔ Prevent the sunseting of the state's [document recording fees](#)
 - Washington State's most significant funding source for homelessness programs – representing almost half of all funds – are modest recording fees on some real estate related documents. Document recording fees fund domestic violence and emergency shelters, provide rental and moving assistance, and fund other critical programs that prevent and end homelessness. Set reductions of \$10 in July 2015 and another \$20 in July 2017 would result in a loss of 62.5% of total current funding for homelessness. If this happens, effective homelessness programs across the state will experience severe cuts or will close. Preserving and expanding homeless and affordable housing funds generated by document recording fees is critical to continued progress towards ending homelessness.

Supporting Youth:

- Fund expansion of [Extended Foster Care](#) (Foster Care to 21) [SB 6101](#) / [HB 2335](#)
 - The Extended Foster Care Program allows youth to remain in care until age 21 in order to achieve a high school diploma/GED, pursue their post-secondary education, or pursue programs that break down barriers to employment. In Washington State, 35% of youth who age out of care at age 18 experience homelessness within one year. In order to ensure that all youth aging out of care have the opportunity to maintain safe housing until age 21, the Extended Foster Care program needs to be passed and fully funded to include the final two categories outlined in the Fostering Connections Act: youth working 80 hours per month or more and youth with a documented medical condition.
- Remove Barriers for Rehabilitated Youth: [Youth Opportunities Act \(SHB 1651\)](#)
 - A major barrier to reintegration of rehabilitated youth is the widespread dissemination and easy public access to generally non-serious juvenile offense records in our state. Having a public juvenile offense record can prevent youth from obtaining education, employment, and housing – leading to a cycle of poverty, homelessness, and crime. The Youth Opportunities Act will diminish this barrier to success while promoting public safety and government accountability by making juvenile offense records confidential, except for the records of a youth that was adjudicated of any serious violent offenses or a sexual offense; continuing to allow complete access to all records by courts, prosecutors, and law enforcement; continuing to keep juvenile court proceedings open to the public; and continuing to allow access to records for research and statistical purposes. In 2013, the House voted the bill out unanimously, emphasizing that it strikes the appropriate balance between rehabilitation and public safety. We need to pass the Youth Opportunities Act to give our state’s youth a chance at success.
- Keep the Commitment: Pass the [Washington State DREAM Act \(ESHB 1817\)](#)
 - The Washington State DREAM Act is intended to provide a more affordable and attainable route to college by extending state-based financial aid to our state’s young aspiring citizens -- children granted deferred action for childhood arrival status who reside in Washington State. This builds on our values of education, fairness, and diversity. We are committed as a state to educating all students from kindergarten through high school, and yet in Washington State, not all students have access to financial aid for higher education. Under the Federal Government’s Deferred Action order (DACA), many of these students are no longer “undocumented” and have or will obtain a legal work permit authorizing them to live and work in Washington State legally. We have invested in these students from cradle to high school and it makes no sense to let their skills and talent go to waste. Furthermore, hardworking students should be rewarded with opportunity, not excluded. The Washington State DREAM Act will keep talented students in state and should increase graduation rates for immigrant students. With a strong incentive and means to pursue higher education, these bright young aspiring citizens will give back to their communities after graduation and continue to keep making Washington competitive. We need to pass the DREAM Act in Washington State to continue our commitment to these young aspiring citizens.

Public Safety:

- Extend [background checks for gun sales and transfers: I-594](#)
 - 594 is an initiative to the legislature that extends criminal and public safety background checks to all gun sales or transfers, and specifies that sales tax does not apply to the sale or transfer of any firearms between two unlicensed persons (not licensed dealers) if they have complied with all background check requirements. Gifts between immediate family members and antiques and relics are among the exclusions. Washington’s current background check requirements apply only to sales or transfers by licensed firearms dealers. In the U.S., an estimated 40% of gun transfers take place without going through a licensed dealer, including online and at gun shows. The Criminal Background Checks Initiative closes this loophole in Washington State by requiring that private sales and transfers — including those at gun shows or on the internet — go through the same background check process as sales through a licensed gun dealer.