



Grounded
in Faith.
Working
for justice.

2016 State Legislative Priorities

The Church Council of Greater Seattle, as an organization rooted in communities of faith, urges robust action toward the meeting of human need as the State Legislature convenes this year. We believe that a “sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all” should be the goal to which we strive for all of God’s people. In addition to our ongoing commitments to end homelessness, create low-income housing, protect human services and promote a shared prosperity, the Church Council will examine and take positions on a case-by-case basis for measures that advance: climate justice, immigration reform, equitable and just taxation, mental health services, and chemical dependency services. On these measures and our priorities noted above, we will seek to use a critical racial justice lens as a means to enhance equity in our communities.

Ending Homelessness, Creating Low-Income Housing and Protecting Human Services

Continue to fund the Housing Trust Fund

Support funding for the Housing Trust Fund (HTF), which is funded within the State Capital Budget, at the highest possible level. The Housing Trust Fund, leveraged flexibly with other resources, provides funding support for development of low-income housing by agencies and organizations in the State of Washington. Historically, King County (including the City of Seattle) has received up to 40 percent of the State Housing Trust Fund dollars.

Preserve and Strengthen the Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) Program

Hold harmless HEN assistance (funded at \$59 million in previous budgets), the Aged, Blind and Disabled (ABD) cash grant program, and SSI Facilitation Services. Improve the program by removing the current restriction on chemical dependency as primary disability; increasing ABD cash grant and/or; allowing ABD recipients to retain their HEN benefit for an extended period of time. The HEN program ensures that people with temporary mental health or physical disabilities can meet their basic needs and access stable housing when facing extreme economic hardship. Recipients are also able to access essential basic needs, including transportation assistance and health/hygiene items, until they have recovered from their disability. The Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD) Cash Grant provides extremely low-income adults who have a permanent mental health or physical disability with cash-assistance while they are applying to the federal Supplementary Security Income (SSI) program.

Support new local financing options through Real Estate Excise Tax for Housing (REET)

This priority asks the legislature to add a new chapter to RCW 82.46 that would allow a city (planning under the Growth Management Act), via council action, to impose an additional Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) specifically for affordable housing. The additional .25% REET capacity, above and beyond the existing State cap, will allow local jurisdictions to make public investments in affordable housing. REET offers an opportunity to re-capture a portion of that value upon the transfer of property and reinvest it in critical affordable housing infrastructure.

Address current shortfall in Consolidated Homeless Grant funding

The Consolidated Homeless Grant provides support to local communities to fund services that prevent and end homelessness. There is an \$8 million shortfall in funding that is forcing counties to significantly reduce services and implement cuts. The ask is for the state to backfill this shortfall with a one-time allocation out of the Operating Budget.

Shared Prosperity

Statewide Minimum Wage

The Church Council of Greater Seattle has created a set of Living Wage Principles that include working toward the goal of a “sufficient, sustainable livelihood for all (ELCA).” The legislature can enact a measure to responsibly phase in a raise in the minimum wage to at least \$12, phased in over 4 years, and then to continue inflation-indexed increases.

End Wage Theft

Even in this modern day, many workers are denied the wages they are owed for work they have provided. Addressing wage theft will put millions of dollars back into our economy, improve the fiscal health of our local communities, and put wages back in the hands of working families across the state.

Justice and Equity in Jobs and Contracts

The State of Washington is responsible for ensuring that jobs and contracts emanating from the state Departments of Transportation and Commerce include minority workers, businesses and contractors. Concrete actions that result in justice and equity for minority workers, especially the African American community and businesses, as reflected in the budgets and oversight of the Departments of Transportation and Commerce, are needed in this biennial cycle so that the whole community is served.

Reform Washington’s Broken Legal Financial Obligations (LFOs) System

The current LFO system imposes crushing debt burdens that are unfair and impossible to pay for many of those who want to pay. The Church Council supports prioritizing both the collection and payment of restitution to victims and the support of successful reentry of individuals coming out of the criminal justice system. Eliminating the current 12% interest rate during and shortly after incarceration is one of a number of positive steps that can be taken which will reduce disproportionality in the system and provide meaningful alternatives to ensure that no Washington resident is jailed for being poor.

Allow for Inmate Postsecondary Education

The Department of Corrections may offer postsecondary degree opportunities within current funding. Research has demonstrated the benefits of educating inmates, 97% of who are eventually released back into our communities.