



LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY 2006

As many expected, the 2006 session featured little new legislation to significantly address issues of economic justice. Even so, OSJ weighed-in on a multitude of bills. I'm happy to report no major setbacks, and a few noteworthy victories.

Housing:

A great success for low-income people was the allotment of \$17.5 million for supportive housing and \$2 million for transitional housing in the 2006 bonding bill. While significantly less than our pre-session goal, this is still a major investment in housing programs for the homeless. OSJ's "Housing Action Team" made a great contribution, holding homelessness forums in important districts and generating numerous calls to legislators throughout the session.

A proposal to raise the deed tax and dedicate the revenue to housing programs was new in 2006. It moved further through both the House and Senate than either supporters or opponents predicted. Watch for this to resurface in 2007.

Child Care:

In its supplemental budget bill, the legislature allocated badly-needed funds for child care and early childhood education programs. Included was \$11.5 million for the Basic Sliding Fee waiting list, which provides childcare for families transitioning out of Minnesota's welfare-to-work program. In addition, the freeze on reimbursement rates for providers in the Child Care Assistance Program was lifted.

Health Care:

Significant new health care policies, many of which require significant new funding, were not going to gain much traction in 2006. Most of our health care priorities were pronounced dead early on. Despite the lack of a highly visible legislative "hook," OSJ's Health Care Action Team sponsored a number of successful forums to highlight the shortcomings of our health care system. This is part of their work to build a base of Catholics advocating for incremental steps to universal health care in Minnesota.

Immigration:

Sadly, the DREAM Act to allow undocumented students to attend MN colleges at in-state tuition rates was defeated again this year. Like last year, the DREAM Act

progressed deep into the process before being derailed near the end. Also losing steam was the effort to outlaw city "sanctuary" ordinances stipulating that it is not the responsibility of city employees to be agents of federal immigration enforcement. Despite the frenzied activity of both pro—and anti—immigrant forces, no immigration-related legislation was passed this year. OSJ was proud to work hard in supporting the dignity of Minnesota's immigrant communities (see *Seeds*, March 2006).

Commission to End Poverty by 2020:

Finally, the session ended with a welcome surprise: approval of the "Commission to End Poverty by 2020." This commission stems directly from recent anti-poverty efforts of Archbishop Harry Flynn and Bishop Peter Rogness of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. The commission will analyze the state's responses to poverty and make specific recommendations for improving them. A similar effort yielded several innovations that assisted thousands of low-income people over the past two decades.

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