

Turning the Tide towards Justice:
2010 Report on the State Legislative Session
Voices for Justice & Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-Colorado

Poverty

Senate Bill 06 provides a free birth or death certificates for people referred from Department of Human Services, free ids for people released from corrections or jail, and allows a judge discretion in name changes for people with a felony. This bill will help those exiting corrections get back on their feet since many people lose their ID documents while incarcerated. This will help people attain social services and assist them towards getting proper documentation for work.

End Result: Passed House & Senate, signed by Governor

Senate Bill 68 (TANF Reform-Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) removes the asset test requirement to be eligible for the Colorado Works program (TANF). This bill expands the amount of people who can qualify for assistance (TANF).

End Result: Passed House & Senate, signed by the Governor

House Bill 1022 (Food Stamps Reform) creates a state outreach program and eliminates the asset test requirement for participation in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This program will help get more low-income people who need assistance enrolled in the Food Stamps program.

End Result: Bill passed House & Senate, signed by the Governor

House Bill 1384 makes noncitizens wait five years before receiving Old Age Pension (OAP), counts sponsor's income against them for eligibility, makes retroactive to current people on OAP. This was part of the JBC's cost-savings plan for the State Budget.

End Result: Passed both House and Senate, and Signed by the Governor. Voices for Justice & Lutheran Advocacy Ministries opposed this bill because of its negative effects on elderly, legal immigrants. The bill was amended to allow an abandonment provision that would protect legal immigrants if their sponsor was no longer able to assist them financially.

Health Care

House Bill 1008 eliminates gender rating in the individual health insurance market. Women use to pay 59% more for the same plan as same-aged men. This practice is now against the law in Colorado.

End Result: Passed House & Senate, signed by the Governor

Housing

House Bill 1017 allows a public entity and private developer to enter into a voluntary agreement to provide affordable housing on a private residential housing unit in exchange for tax credits and waivers. This bill will help expand affordable housing across Colorado and clarify that voluntary agreements are not rent control, which is unconstitutional in our state. Without this clarification, such voluntary affordable housing agreements could be construed as rent control by state courts.

End Result: Passed the House, Senate, & signed by the Governor

Senate Bill 185 would have given more protections to tenants in Colorado by: (1) eliminating the written notice for breach of warranty, and (2) local government notification, (3) expanding courts where tenants can go for relief, and (4) changing the retaliation provisions in the law. Currently, a landlord is afforded more protections than tenants, allowing few mechanisms to bring the landlord in accordance with the law, and protection from retaliation by a landlord for tenants filing grievances. This bill would have helped many low-income renters who are more vulnerable to inhabitable living situations and retaliation from landlords.

End Result: 185 passed the Senate, but was killed in the House Business, Labor, & Affairs Committee. This is a bill that will most likely come before the legislature again.

Payday Lending Reform

House Bill 1351 puts a cap on payday loan interest rates at 45 % and restructures fees and loan terms.

Payday loans can now be paid back in six months, rather than two weeks. Borrowers will now have a reasonable amount of time to pay back their loan without the two week time bomb constantly ticking, forcing them to take loan after loan.

HB 1351 includes an entirely new fee structure. The six month loan term and 45% APR does come with an origination fee and monthly processing fee. The borrower can pay back the loan at any time during the six month period and pay only the fees and interest due.

Borrowers will pay 67% less in fees on a \$300 loan than they did before! HB 1351 provides hardworking Colorado families with access to emergency cash that includes both a reasonable interest rate and realistic loan term. The payday lending industry will no longer be collecting \$75 fees every two weeks!

End Result: Passed House & Senate, Signed by Governor

Criminal Justice Reform

House Bill 1352 lowers the penalty for unlawful use of a controlled substance, separates possession from manufacturing or distributing, specifies that part of the savings to the state from jailing fewer people be directed toward drug rehab programs. This bill will help many drug addicts and users get the treatment they need, and also discourage drug distribution and trafficking with stiffer penalties.

End Result: Passed House and Senate, Signed by the Governor

House Bill 1360 reduces time allowed to serve for technical violations, sets up a recidivism reduction grants program within DOC, and allows for people who have had technical violation of parole to enter mental health or substance abuse treatment programs. This bill will help reduce recidivism and help people into the treatment programs they need that often contribute to their reoccurring criminal offenses.

End Result: Passed House & Senate, Signed by Governor

Senate Bill 189 legalizes clean syringe exchange programs with local control and oversight. Facilities can exchange clean syringes for dirty or contaminated syringes from drug users & addicts to prevent the transmission of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis-C. This program also helps drug addicts and users establish relationships with service providers and through harm-reduction measures will help transition people from addiction to treatment.

End Result: Passed House & Senate, Signed by Governor