

Back from Capitol Hill – Ten is the Magic Number!

Ten Arizonans (seven from Voice of the Poor, two from Catholic Charities and one from the Diocese of Tucson) traveled to Washington, D.C. in mid February to meet with members and staff in *all ten AZ* congressional delegation offices. The visits were made during a freezing ice storm closing schools and government offices.

The Voice of the Poor agenda requested support for (1) A fair share of housing vouchers and emergency utility assistance for low income Arizonans, support for housing and services for the homeless, support for the reauthorization of S-CHIP (federal funding for KidsCare healthcare) and immigration reform addressing the status of undocumented students raised in the U.S. who now must pay out-of-state tuition at Arizona colleges and universities (an increase from \$4900 to over \$16,000). The Arizona group met personally with Congressmen Renzi, Pastor, Grijalva, Flake and Mitchell and with staff from the remaining offices including Senators Kyl and McCain.

The trip to Washington was part of the Annual Catholic Social Ministry Gathering organized by the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops with 18 other organizations including St. Vincent de Paul and Catholic Charities. It is a two and a half day intense schedule of liturgies, presentations and workshops built around the trip to Capitol

Hill. This year six hundred attendees came from all over the U.S.

Meanwhile Back in Arizona....

Voice of the Poor began the session by monitoring some 30 bills significant to the poor based on the results of the Conference survey in October. Most requiring appropriations had little chance of advancement such as bills calling for additional funds for emergency utility assistance, homelessness, or expansion of AHCCCS. The chairman of each committee acts as a gatekeeper in the process and can effectively “kill” a bill by not letting it be heard. A sampling of the status of bills of interest:

Childcare subsidies:

HB 2687 and SB 1314 call for a market survey of childcare rates every other year to bring childcare subsidies for working poor (now at the 2000 level) up to 75% of the market level are waiting to be heard in Appropriations.

Payday loans:

HB 2224 adding consumer protection for payday loans died in the House Finance Committee 5-4-1.

Healthcare:

SB 1440 eliminating the “gag” order on KidsCare allowing outreach by schools and non-profits to eligible children had not been placed on Sen. Harper’s Government agenda.

Arizona Charitable Tax Credit:

HB 2380 eliminating the “baseline year” requirement from the Arizona charitable tax credit for the working poor was waiting to be considered by House Rules.

Voice of the Poor will next meet on Monday, March 26 at 3:30 p.m. in the VSS Conference Room at the Watkins Center. Meetings are open to all. For agenda items, contact Lucy Howell at (602) 695-1604 or by e-mail at Howishome@aol.com.