

RI State House Watch

There are a number of bills that AFSC-SENE is watching this year. Below is a list of upcoming hearings, and below that is a short summary of each bill.

Democracy, if it is to be real, is a labor intensive process. At the federal level it feels hard to compete with highly paid lobbyists, but at the local and state level it is more possible to have an impact as ordinary citizens. There are still plenty of competing interests (some of which are definitely powered by money and corporate might) , not to mention differences of opinion, but working together we can make a difference.

We hope you will add your voice on these or other issues you care about. Call your legislator or better yet, ask to meet with them. At a meeting you can discuss several bills at once. Take a few other people with you. The General Assembly website is <http://www.rilin.state.ri.us/>. At the top of the page are buttons to take you to contact information for house and senate members. You can also search for bills, get the text, and find out where it is in the legislative process.

LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR:

Wednesday, Feb. 8 3:30 Payday Loan Press Conference.

Thursday, Feb. 9, 3pm State House Soup Kitchen. It will be accompanied by a press conference that will introduce the soup kitchen, speak to the increasing need for food assistance and the homeless advocacy legislative agenda. After this first event all there will be a soup kitchen at the State House every Wednesday at 3pm.

Legislation we are following:

- **Just Cause/Right to Rent:** H7136/S2212 RI has very high foreclosure rate. Some of those are the result of predatory loans. Some are the result of falling property values, with the loans for more than the current value of the home. Some are because of unemployment. And some are rental units in which the tenants have continually paid their rent but the landlord is foreclosing. This bill would require that tenants be permitted to stay in their home after foreclosure, paying rent to the bank and provide a path for people to rent their home after foreclosure – all of which help prevent homelessness and provides stability for families. DARE is the lead organizer on the bill.
- **In-state Tuition:** In September the Board of Higher Education approved a policy allowing al youth (including students without proper immigration documents)who , after at least three years in a RI high school, graduate from a RI high school and otherwise meet admission criteria, to attend any RI college at in-state tuition levels. There is a bill to codify that policy into law and a bill to reverse the policy. CASO is the lead organizer.
- **Pay Day Loans:** Pay day loans are short term (usually 2-4 week)loans that roll over with new charges each pay period. Very few people are able to pay them back at the end of that first two weeks. 250% APR are common. Interest like that is called usury, and an increasing number of states are prohibiting such loans. This bill would add RI to the list and protect vulnerable people who get sucked into easy access to money without real hope of being able to pay it back (and often without the terms being made clear).
- **Ban the Box:** Many application forms, especially the online forms for jobs in retail etc, often have a check box with the question, have you ever been convicted of a felony. Applicants face

the choice of lying in hopes of getting an interview (which can cause its own problems later) or being honest and knowing that their application will go straight to the trash. If we want people coming out of jail/prison to successfully reenter society, they have to be able to get a job, which means at least having a chance at getting an interview. Potential employers can still ask applicants about their history. DARE is the lead organizer along with the RI Coalition to End Homelessness, RI HAP.

- **Racial Profiling:** Once again there is a bill to curtail some aspects of racial profiling, both for people in vehicles and for people on foot (stop and frisk practices). It came close last year. Lots of community support this year could make it happen. Watch the video made by Youth In Action and PrYSM. <http://vimeo.com/35659546> RI Coalition to End Racial Profiling is the lead organizer.
- **Funding for Neighborhood Opportunities Program:** Rep. Slater and Sen. Tassoni have introduced legislation, [2012-H 7265](#) and [2012-S 2203](#) , to provide \$12.5 million for the NOP within the fiscal year. The new funds will be used to support three areas: the family affordable housing program, the permanent supportive housing program, and the neighborhood revitalization program. RICEH and RIHAP are lead organizers on this.