



LSA Washington

July 16, 2007

LSA Public Policy Call Scheduled for Thursday, July 19, 2:00pm (Eastern)

The next LSA Public Policy conference call, *Becoming an Effective (or More Effective) Public Policy Advocate*, will focus on strategies and models of grassroots public policy advocacy. The call will be facilitated by Kathy Saile, Associate Director of Public Policy. Public policy advocates from Lutheran Social Service of Minnesota and Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois will present models used by their social ministry organizations. They will address ways to engage congregations in advocacy, to develop a public policy advocacy agenda for the organization, and to use creative tools for furthering advocacy efforts. Kathy will give an overview of resources in the *LSA Public Policy Advocacy Toolkit*. Because of the vast amount of legislative activity on the Hill, a brief update on LSA's public policy priorities will also be included.

If you wish to join the call, please RSVP by e-mail to Lisa Carr at lcarr@lutheranservices.org by 5:00 pm Eastern time on Wednesday, July 18. Call-in information and materials will be sent to participants prior to the call.

National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Bill Introduced in the House

House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank (D-MA) announced the introduction of the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act of 2007 (H.R. 2895) on June 28 at a news conference. Kathy Saile, Associate Director of

Public Policy for LSA, participated in the news conference.

She highlighted the significant interest that LSA member organizations have in developing and providing affordable housing units saying, "Lutheran Services in America (LSA) has identified creating and preserving affordable housing as one of the highest public policy priorities for this Congress. LSA member organizations currently offer over 16,000 affordable housing units for low income people throughout the United States and the Caribbean."

Saile further stated that "LSA supports legislation establishing a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund for the production of new housing and the preservation or rehabilitation of existing housing that is affordable for people with low incomes. We applaud the goal of the proposed Trust Fund to produce, rehabilitate, and preserve 1.5 million units of housing over the next 10 years."

Chairman Frank has scheduled a hearing on the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act of 2007 before the House Financial Services Committee on Thursday, July 19, 2007. LSA has been invited to testify at the hearing in support of the bill. In the meantime, LSA and other housing advocates are encouraging House members to co-sponsor the legislation.

House and Senate Committees to Vote on SCHIP bills

The House Committee on Energy and Commerce is working on language for a State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) reauthorization bill to be marked up (debated and voted on) by the subcommittee and full committee during the week of July 23.

Preliminary information disclosed by Chairman John Dingell (D-MI) indicates that the House will increase SCHIP spending by \$50 billion over five years in order to reach out to and enroll the six million children who are uninsured but currently eligible for SCHIP or Medicaid. Discussions are ongoing about the inclusion of dental health, mental health care, and eligibility for legal immigrants regardless of date of entry.

The Senate Finance committee announced that it has reached a bi-partisan agreement for a \$35 billion increase in SCHIP. Similar to the House proposal, the increase would be used to enroll eligible but uninsured children into SCHIP or Medicaid. The Senate version has no provisions for additional dental health care, mental health care, or fixes the immigrant five year bar date. The Senate has scheduled a mark up for July 17. The mark up will be a “conceptual mark up” meaning that an actual bill will not be provided to members or the public. The committee will debate and vote on concepts and provisions. The Chairman’s mark up is at <http://finance.senate.gov/sitepages/legislation.htm>. Advocates are communicating to Senate Finance Committee members that SCHIP works to provide health coverage to uninsured, low-income children and the program is a bipartisan success.

On July 11, President Bush said that he would veto any bill that expands SCHIP or increases the funding above the baseline. Senators Grassley (R-IA) and Hatch (R-OR) issued a strong statement on July 12 admonishing the president for threatening to veto the bill before the bill has been introduced and debated. The Senators said “We think it’s worth getting the right policy and a focused program for this \$35 billion.”

Nutrition Title Moves Forward in Farm Bill Debate

On June 14, the House Agriculture Subcommittee on Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry passed the

nutrition title of the Farm Bill. The bill contains \$5.4 billion in new five-year investments for the Food Stamp Program (to be renamed the “Secure Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program”) and The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP). A significant portion of the new provisions are contingent on financing made available for the Farm Bill reserve fund.

The subcommittee nutrition title would make a modest start on addressing the inadequacy of food stamp allotments by increasing and indexing the standard deduction for households of three or fewer persons and removing the cap on the amount of child care costs that food stamp households can deduct from income in determining benefits. It would exempt certain education and retirement savings accounts from counting against household food stamp asset limits and would start to index the resource tests. The bill also sets TEFAP mandatory purchases at \$250 million a year.

While a good start, the subcommittee’s bill could be strengthened by more fully addressing benefit inadequacy (especially the minimum monthly benefit), setting more reasonable asset rules (significantly raising and indexing the current limits, which have been unchanged for many years), and increasing access for more vulnerable populations.

The full House Committee on Agriculture may vote on the Farm Bill the week of July 23. However, there is still no agreement on how to pay for spending increases and some provisions for farmers, crop subsidies and conservation issues are still being discussed. Two bills are being considered – one will include the unfunded provisions and the other will comply with the pay-go rules and provide no changes to the nutrition programs. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Charlie Rangel (D-NY) is working to get \$4 billion over five years out of Ways and Means and give it to the nutrition title of the Farm Bill.

Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA), chair of the Senate Agriculture Committee, has said that his committee will take up the Farm Bill later in July.