



L.E.G. Alert

Legislative Education Group (L.E.G.) ~ CELEBRATING OVER 31 YEARS OF ADVOCACY ~

May 2009

2009 LEGISLATIVE SESSION WRAP-UP

Dear L.E.G. Member:

You have again made a positive difference to Maryland's most vulnerable citizens, even during these very challenging times! The 2009 Maryland Legislative Session was not a time for bold new programs but your work helped to assure that the state and federal budgets did not eliminate programs that support those who have little opportunity to make their voices heard. You also played an important role in creating new policies that benefit those we serve in cost-effective ways.

Here are the outcomes for issues of concern during this legislative session:

Issue: (Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Alert)

Early in 2009, you encouraged your senators and representatives in the U.S. Congress to support a federal Economic Recovery and Reinvestment package that would focus aid to families and individuals living on a low-income. You emphasized the importance of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, Medicaid, Unemployment Insurance, Emergency Food Shelter Program, and other social service programs.

Outcome:



The American Recovery & Reinvestment Act **PASSED** and included support for programs you highlighted.

Issue: (Sustain Human Services Alert)

As Maryland's Governor and General Assembly moved to develop a plan to use those American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars and to finalize the Maryland budget, you asked Governor O'Malley and our State legislators to help preserve and fortify services to vulnerable Marylanders, including at-risk children and those living on a low income.

Outcome:



Most human service programs were held harmless (*no significant increase and no significant cuts*). In its effort to balance the 2010 State budget during these arduous economic times, the legislature worked hard to sustain these services by avoiding decreases in funding since these services continues to increase.

Issue: (Safe from Danger Alert)

As the economy raises difficult choices for people with limited incomes, you asked your delegates to support legislation that would prohibit utilities from shutting off service because of non-payment during times of extreme heat and cold.



Outcome:

PASSED, putting in statute restrictions on terminating utility service for non-payment when the weather is very cold (*32° or below*) or extremely hot (*95° or above*). This will protect the health and safety of our vulnerable Marylanders who are struggling to pay their home energy bills.

Issue: (Keep Seniors Safe Alert/Silver Alert Program)

You wrote to your delegates and senator to support legislation to establish a “Silver Alert Program” that would help locate missing seniors who suffer from cognitive impairments including Alzheimer’s or dementia.



Outcome:

PASSED. This legislation will help keep vulnerable adults safe.

Issue: (Keep Lights On Alert)

In the final days of the session, you asked your senator to pass legislation limiting the authority of a gas or electric utility to shut off service to a residential customer who is having trouble paying the utility bill. For customers facing a service shut-off due to non-payment, we requested that the Public Service Commission (PSC) establish regulations requiring gas and electric companies to offer alternative payment plans for all residential customers.



Outcome:

While this *failed* to pass *as legislation*, **your work proved to be a success!** After considering testimony and a workgroup report, the PSC issued an order requiring Maryland’s largest utilities to offer and negotiate reasonable and flexible payment plans to all residential customers who are subject to termination for non-payment prior to shut-off.

Your efforts are extremely important in helping to create just policies in our state. They directly benefit those served by Catholic Charities and, more broadly, make this a great state for all Marylanders.

Please take another step toward making our network a success.

Find out not only how to make our network more effective

but more efficient as well!

See the following page for more information.

We have heard from many of you that you would like the ease and speed of a web-based advocacy system and could respond more readily and frequently to our Alerts. Others have noted that the rapid turn-around time of legislation in a three-month legislative session causes them to miss deadlines, especially if they are the contacts who pass on this information to a parish, committee, or another organization.

Catholic Charities Legislative Education Group is moving into a web-based program in time for the 2010 Maryland Legislative Session.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!

If you are still receiving Alerts and this wrap-up letter by the U.S. Postal Service, please share your email address with us by emailing it, as well as your name, to legislat@cc-md.org.

We will keep your home postal service address as well so that we know your legislative district and, consequently, have the potential to be more selective with some Alerts. We would direct the selected Alert, for example, *only* to the constituents of legislators on a particular committee.

If you do not use email, some of you will want to know that we are looking into some other forms of social networking. Others may want to continue receiving Alerts via the postal service. Please let us know your preference.

If you change your email address, please notify us. We have been able to find some of you because you had given us your mailing address and phone numbers as well. *(We have had several happy "reunions" where L.E.G. members had wondered what happened to us!)*

Please contact me with any ideas you have to improve and extend our advocacy efforts.

Sincerely,



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We vigorously repeat our call for a renewed politics that focuses on moral principles, the defense of life, the needs of the weak, and the pursuit of the common good. This kind of political participation reflects the social teaching of our Church and the best traditions of our nation.

~Faithful Citizenship, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops