May 16, 2019 Newsletter – Update on Issues and Awards Dinner

Since we published our Mid-Legislative Review we wish to highlight a few important pieces of information to assist congregations in their advocacy efforts in light of an ever changing and fast moving legislative calendar. In this newsletter we highlight actions needed on the following:

1. Separation of Children Accountability Response Act
2. Driver's Licenses for Immigrants--Action Day on May 21
3. Faith Leader sign on for Climate and Community Protection Act
4. Resolutions in favor of the Green New Deal being considered by the New York Conference of the United Church of Christ
5. Faith leader and community sign ons for Fossil Fuel Divestment
6. Support of the New York Health Act--Public Hearing on May 28
7. Creation of a Commission to create a Small Donor Matching System
8. Voting Rights for Parolees

We continue to invite people to purchase tickets for our Annual Awards Dinner on May 29.

FOURTH ANNUAL AWARDS DINNER
MAY 29, 2019

Order tickets by Monday for our Fourth Annual Awards and Fundraising Dinner to be held Wednesday, May 29 in Albany, NY. from 5:30 – 8:30 PM at St. Sophia’s Greek Orthodox Church, 440 Whitehall Road, Albany, NY 12208. 5:30 to 6:30 PM is a reception with cash bar followed by dinner and awards presentations from 6:30 to 8:30 PM.

Tickets for the reception and dinner are $60 each, please be sure to make your meal selection at this link. Click here to purchase tickets. There is a place for listing additional names and meal choices on the form. Deadline for purchasing tickets is May 20, 2019. You may also send a check payable to New York State Council of Churches for tickets (1580 Central Ave. Albany, NY 12205). Contact our office with any questions, office@nyscoc.org or call 518 436-9319.

We proudly present the following awardees from across New York State:

CHAPLAINCY

The Reverend Petero Sabune, Retired Chaplain, NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision

Kairos Prison Ministries
ECUMENICAL
The Reverend Ann Akers, Pastor, First Presbyterian Church, Port Jervis
The Reverend Aaron Baughman, Pastor, St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, Port Jervis
Zachary Pearce, Deerpark Reformed Church, Port Jervis

FAITH FORMATION
The Reverend Kate Forer, Senior Pastor, New England Congregational and Presbyterian Church, Saratoga Springs

SOCIAL WITNESS
Brigit Hurley, Policy Director, Children’s Agenda, Rochester

Hotel Trades Council of New York

Ravi Ragbir, Executive Director, New Sanctuary Coalition

We give thanks to the following organizations/individuals for the Sponsorships we have received in support of the Council and its ministries.

Visionary Level Sponsorship - $5000

Episcopal Diocese of New York

Hotel Trades Council

Empowerment Level Sponsorship - $1,000

New York Disaster Interfaith Services

New York State Nurses Association

SEIU 1199

Sustainer Level Sponsorship - $500

CSEA New York

New Sanctuary Coalition

New York State United Teachers

Public Employees Federation

Ally Level Sponsorship - $250

Benchmark Title Agency, LLC

Children's Agenda

Darius Shahinfar, Albany City Treasurer
IMMIGRATION

SEPARATION OF CHILDREN ACCOUNTABILITY REPORTING ACT (SCAR ACT)

The Interfaith Center of New York, The New Sanctuary Coalition, Union Theological Seminary, The Micah Faith Table, New York State Council of Churches and our faith partners statewide are calling on all New York State politicians of moral conscience to join us in support of the Separation of Children Accountability Reporting Act.

As countless separated families continue to await answers and reunification, the Separation of Children Accountability Response Act has been introduced in the State Assembly by Assembly Member Harvey Epstein and in the Senate by Senator Brian Benjamin. This bill requires greater transparency from New York state foster care organizations that hold separated and unaccompanied children and receive Federal funding from the Office of Refugee Resettlement/HHS for this work.

The SCAR Act asks that basic information about separated and unaccompanied children in care of these agencies be reported to the state, as well as to the federal government. Given the current administration's secrecy and deceit on its family separation policy and its abuse of federal non-disclosure agreements with contractors in order to hide its inhumane policies, the SCAR Act seeks transparency through state accountability. Finally, the SCAR Act is envisioned as a check on non-transparent and inhumane immigration policies of the Trump administration.
We are urging you to contact both your Assembly Member and State Senator right away to urge them to be a co-sponsor. The SCAR Act has been considerably amended since it was first introduced. We understand that the SCAR Act at present is not moving out of committee given the reluctance by the chair, Assembly Member Ellen Jaffee. We need to secure at least 25 more co-sponsors for SCAR in hopes the bill can garner enough co-sponsors to be reported out of the committee and brought to the floor for a vote.

We also urge you to write letters to the editor. Click here for a sample. To further aid you in shaping your arguments, take note of this editorial which appeared in the New York Daily News which was authored by The Reverend Chloe Breyer, Executive Director of the Interfaith Center of New York. For more background on the SCAR Act click here to see it on the New Sanctuary Coalition web site.

**DRIVER’S LICENSES FOR IMMIGRANTS**

Join the #GreenLightNY campaign in our FINAL PUSH to win #DriversLicensesNOW before the end of the 2019 legislative session in June! Register today at http://bit.ly/GL5-21 and stay tuned for more details about our program of activities. The political climate is rapidly changing so we ask for your flexibility in the nature of the action as well as our capacity to provide transportation. Please note that time indicated for this event represents the start and end time of our activities in Albany. Bear in mind that each bus will depart at different times from various pickup locations across the state. All buses will leave Albany no later than 3:00. The presence of faith leaders at this action are very important. It would also be a good day for faith leaders to meet with assembly members and senators. If you cannot attend, we strongly urge you to be in touch with your state senator and assembly member by phone, e-mail or appointment and ask them to support the Green Light bill. Democrat Senators on Long Island and some upstate Senators up state are more reticent to support the bill. They need special encouragement from the faith community.

For encouragement and perspective on the need for Driver’s Licenses, read this editorial by The Right Reverend Lawrence C. Provenzano, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island, which appeared in Newsday.

**Passing the ‘Green Light Bill’ is a Moral Obligation for NY**

Right now, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers are barred from obtaining a driver’s license due solely to their immigration status. That lack of access causes undue hardships on hardworking immigrant families across the state.

New York lawmakers are considering a solution: the Driver’s License Access and Privacy Act, more commonly known as the Green Light Bill.

Under the proposed law, New Yorkers who are in the country without legal status would be able to take driver’s education courses and pass a road test to obtain a license. This process would be no different from any other eligible individual applying for a license, and would, in turn, produce more educated, insured and licensed drivers and increase the safety of our roads.

For me and for my faith community, this is personal. I myself am a second-generation American, and our diocese -- which spans from the Brooklyn Bridge to Montauk -- is the most diverse Episcopal diocese in the country. The vast majority of our members are themselves immigrants, or first-generation Americans. Our parishes are filled with worshippers from the Caribbean, Central and South America, Asia, and many sectors of the African diaspora. But as the spiritual
leader of this flock, it is my obligation to protect and care for not only our members, but also everyone in our corner of God’s vineyard.

As any resident of Long Island could attest, the ability to drive is essential to get around in suburban and rural areas like these. Limited public transportation in our communities makes it highly difficult, if not impossible, for undocumented immigrant families to purchase groceries, bring their children to and from school, attend their place of worship, and even make it to critical doctors’ appointments.

For those who drive unlicensed for the sake of their families, they risk being stopped by police and face possible deportation. This protracted, inescapable fear of deportation is then combined with the potential for their families to face irreversible damage if they are separated. This reality is tearing apart communities, barring immigrant families from fully participating in the local economy, and erecting barriers to access for basic services. And this bill would lift up thousands of families throughout the state, eliminating fears of deportation while generating an estimated $57 million in new annual state revenue.

Similar bills have passed in 12 states as well as in Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., improving the quality of life for hardworking immigrants and protecting communities by increasing road safety. In New Mexico, the rates of both fatal traffic accidents and uninsured drivers decreased sharply in the years following the law’s passage, and in California, hit-and-run rates fell.

This legislation is a commonsense proposal that offers us an opportunity to uphold our values as a welcoming and just state, while fulfilling our moral obligation to protect the most vulnerable members of our community from harm and persecution.

The passage of this bill is sensible, and it is the right thing to do.

The Right Reverend Lawrence C. Provenzano is bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Long Island.

ENVIRONMENT

CLIMATE AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION ACT

The New York State Council of Churches is joining with Green Faith and many others to invite faith communities to support the Climate and Community Protection Act. Both Green Faith and the Council are among approximately 170 co-sponsors of the act as part of the New York Renews coalition. For the past two years, our state government in Albany has had the chance to adopt climate legislation - the Climate and Community Protection Act (CCPA) - that embodies our values of compassion, love and justice.

Sign a letter to Gov. Cuomo and the state legislature calling for climate action now.

The CCPA sets an ambitious emissions reduction goal, invests in frontline and vulnerable communities, and protects workers. It is aligned with our values and is a beacon of hope.

Now, we need the legislature to act. Sign Faith Leaders for Climate Action Now and urge our state government to pass the CCPA this legislative session.

Recently, the governor has been considering watering down this landmark bill. He’s thinking about removing the ambitious emissions reduction goal. Dropping any investment in workers.
Eliminating protections for frontline communities. This is wrong. We need to let our leaders know that we demand legislation that reflects our values.

The time has come for climate action that’s ambitious, compassionate, loving and just. The answer is at hand. We need our state leaders to act. Sign Faith Leaders for Climate Action Now. Share this link with your colleagues and friends. Let’s send a message that is unequivocally clear: people of diverse faiths from across New York are united for climate action.

Ken Scott
Green Faith Capital Region Organizer

Peter Cook
New York State Council of Churches

GREEN NEW DEAL

The New York Conference of the United Church of Christ will be considering at its annual meeting, May 17 and 18 in Poughkeepsie whether to lend its support for resolution in favor the Green New Deal which will be considered by the General Synod. Click here for a copy of the resolution and click here for frequently asked questions.

This may be the kind of resolution that needs to be considered by other denominations if they wish to support the Green New Deal. Click here for a back ground piece from the Christian Century.

FOSSIL FUEL DIVESTMENT

The Interfaith Climate Justice Community of Western New York is also conducting a sign on letter campaign for divestment of fossil fuel stocks from the state pension fund.

Make a copy of this letter and ask others in your place of worship to sign the letter (a sign on sheet is enclosed). Organizations can also sign (for example, your Social Justice Committee).

If you are in Western New York and wish to sign on click here. Here is the growing list of signers from Western New York. The goal is to collect hundreds of names and WNY faith affiliations and send them to Comptroller DiNapoli. Please mail the names and congregational affiliations to Riverside-Salem UCC/DC, P.O. Box 207, Grand Island, NY 14072-0207. We will add the names to the growing list. Mail your list by Monday, May 19th.

We also continue to collect signatures for the statewide Faith Leader Fossil Fuel Divestment letter: You can sign on by clicking here.

NEW YORK HEALTH ACT

This news about the New York Health Act comes to us from Mark Hannay, Director of Metro New York Health Care for All. The New York State Council of Churches will be submitting testimony in favor of the New York Health Act on May 28.
We're excited! For the first time ever, the New York State Senate Health Committee is holding an official public hearing on the "New York Health Act" (NYHA), a bill to create a fully-public universal health care program covering all New York residents. The hearing will be held on Tuesday, May 28th starting at 10 a.m. in Hearing Room A of the Legislative Office Building in Albany, and will be joint with the Assembly Health Committee. The Committees chairs are encouraging all groups and entities with statewide scope to present testimony on the bill. The official hearing notice can be found here.

Advocates for universal health care are mobilizing to turn out for the hearing, bear witness to the proceedings, and show support for this bill. Buses and car pools are being organized from across the state. People can learn more and RSVP for travel here. Earlier this decade, the Assembly held hearings around the state on the bill, and many everyday New Yorkers showed up for and testified at them, and they also organized press conferences for local media outlets, Now it is the Senate's turn in the spotlight.

With the new balance of power in the Senate this year, prospects for the bill moving forward in the Chamber have increased greatly. So far, 30 Senators are co-sponsoring the bill, and another 2 are needed for a simple majority to be on board. Once that happens, it will be taken seriously by the body and its leaders. This hearing will begin that process.

The substance of the bill itself has evolved quite a lot since its introduction some 25 years ago, to reflect various changes in health care and coverage that have happened over the years, most notably the State Child Health Insurance program created by Congress in the mid-1990s, and the enactment of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) a decade ago, along with more modest incremental reforms enacted here in New York.

The big change in the bill this year has been the inclusion of a new "Long-Term Care Amendment" to provide coverage for people who need nursing home care and/or health and personal care services at home or in the community. This new provision has generated much excitement and support in the senior citizen and disability rights communities, as well as from long-term care workers and informal family caregivers.

Advocates view this bill as a template to work from to craft the best possible legislation that can pass through both houses of the Legislature and be signed by the Governor, a process that often takes a bit of time. Then the state will apply for waivers from the federal government to use the many current health care funding streams from it that come to the state to help fund the new program, as allowed under the ACA. Simultaneously, a process will begin here to craft all the necessary rules and regulations, followed by a transition process to phase-in the new system, hopefully by the middle of the next decade if not sooner. All that said and done, New York will be a model for the nation on "what's next for health care", and continue our proud, decades-long tradition as a "leader state" on health care issues.

We look forward to seeing you "on the bus" for universal health care in New York!

In solidarity, Mark Hannay, Director

ELECTION REFORM

SMALL DONOR MATCHING

The Syracuse Post-Standard Editorial Board wrote recently about how New York's big-money-dominated elections discourages everyday people from participating. This isn't news to most
people, but what's important is their solution: small donor matching for elections. We have a critical opportunity right now to create a small donor matching system. We have to take action.

Elected officials in Albany didn't pass a small donor matching program in this year’s state budget, but they committed to forming a commission that would outline New York's small donor matching program by December 1st. Now a month later, we're still waiting for the commission to be set up!

Don’t let our leaders off the hook. Email your state legislators now to ask: Where’s the commission on public financing of elections? >>

Small donor public financing will empower all under-represented New Yorkers in the political process instead of letting big donors, who tend to be white, wealthy, male, and hold different priorities than the rest of us, set the agenda.

If the Legislature and the Governor are serious about creating fair elections in New York, they will act quickly to seat a strong, independent, pro-public financing commission.

With the clock ticking on the public financing commission, urge your state legislators to act. Email them now. >

Following a surge of grassroots activism across the state campaign finance reform became a top budget issue. Now we have to keep up the pressure to make sure our leaders stick to their promises.

While we seek to have the legislature seat the commission, there is a companion effort to encourage the Senate to introduce a bill for small donor matching which will offer guidance to the commission about what we would like to see in their final recommendations. The bill will also be important in shaping deliberations of the deliberation if they choose to convene in December to revise any recommendations made by the Commission.

Together, we can ensure New York has fair elections that work for all of us, not just big donors. Thank you for helping keep up the pressure when it counts.

PAROLLEE VOTING

Join the Restore the Vote coalition in Albany on Wednesday, May 22 as we advocate for voting rights for people on parole

Our work reforming New York’s antiquated voting laws is not complete if we leave Jim Crow laws on the books, disenfranchising thousands of New Yorkers. Because of our advocacy this year, we were able to achieve historic victories. Your voice will be the catalyst for change, once more, as we urge our representatives to pass voting rights for people on parole and finally kick Jim Crow out of New York.

Join people from across the state on May 22 as we gather in Albany to meet with our representatives and urge them to restore the right to vote to people on parole. Sign up online or call 877-626-4651.

Over 30,000 New Yorkers are on parole at any given time. Criminal disenfranchisement laws disproportionately impact people of color, removing the voice of entire communities. Last year
at the NAN convention, the Governor announced an executive order restoring voting rights to people on parole. The Governor’s 2018 executive order was a good temporary measure, but S1931/A4987 would make restoration permanent and simpler and would enact education measures to make sure people know their rights.

Please RSVP so we can assess transportation needs and set up meetings.

Or call 877-626-4651 to sign up!

Ps…. Can’t join us? Call your legislators to let them know you care! Tell them:

“I’m grateful to the New York State Legislature for your work on voting rights so far this year. Our work is not complete if we leave people behind, disenfranchised and unable to cast their votes. Please step up to support — and also to co-sponsor — Voting Rights for People on Parole, Bill [S1931/A4987] and pass it this year.”

Contact Information

Albany Senate Switchboard 518-455-2800

Albany Assembly Switchboard 518-455-4218

* Find sponsors and targets, as well as direct phone numbers here

* Find out who your rep is here

In faith,

Peter Cook

Executive Director