



Friends Committee on Washington Public Policy (FCWPP)

— A Quaker Organization

P.O. Box 452, Olympia WA 98507-0452

fcwpp@quaker.org
www.quaker.org/fcwpp

2007 Legislative Report

The 2007 legislative session was both busy and successful for FCWPP. We succeeded in passing significant legislation in two of our three priorities: criminal justice reform and economic justice. In the third area, peace, we have legislation ready for progress early in the next session. We are writing to share some highlights of the session with you, and to ask for your continued support – in prayer, action and finances – as we prepare for next session.

In this session, FCWPP engaged two new lobbyists. Carol Estes worked on criminal and economic justice, while Ric Power of UFM worked on peace. Both cooperated with members of our Legislative Committee and our allies, including friendly legislators, the new Religious Coalition for the Common Good (RCCG), and the Transition & Reentry Reform Coalition (TRRC).

Successes

Criminal Justice Reform saw our greatest success, with passage of the significant omnibus re-entry bill, **SB 6157**. This bill encourages the Department of Corrections (DOC) and local governments to collaborate in establishing networks and providing services to offenders returning to our communities. It requires the DOC to assess offender risks and deficits, and provide programming such as education, employment services and treatment. It also provides greater opportunity for employment and housing in the community during the reentry period. While the bill as adopted represents significant progress in helping offenders succeed in their communities and avoid reoffending, it does not do everything we hoped. Provisions were deleted on voting rights, higher education, and an ombudsman or other independent oversight system for the prison and correctional system. All three of these pieces are important to successful reentry, and we will continue to work on them with our allies in next year's session. Three years of hard work led to passage of the omnibus reentry bill, including:

- ♦ Creating a broad, state-wide reentry coalition (2003), initiated by Dan Clark (Walla Walla).
- ♦ Advocating for a Washington State Institute for Public Policy study (2005).
- ♦ The enlightenment of a conservative, tough-on-crime senator, Mike Carrell (28th, Lakewood), aided by his Police Chief, Larry Saunders, as to the necessity to provide proven, evidence-based structures for releasing offenders to prevent further crime, following years of “just lock ’em up” mentality.
- ♦ A hardworking Senate and House Joint Task Force studying reentry.
- ♦ A hard fight by FCWPP and our allies to eliminate draconian sanctions from the bill and to include housing funds.
- ♦ Intensive work by several legislators, the governor's commitment and the Senate's determination to address recidivism, as well as a *New York Times* editorial (enclosed) describing an earlier incarnation of the bill as far-sighted and a model for the nation.

Housing for the Homeless. Friends, through FCWPP and individually, supported and contributed to passage of **SB1359**. In its final form, this bill adds \$8 to the recording fee for certain documents. The resulting \$13 million will support housing for homeless persons.

Continuing Work

A major focus for FCWPP this year was on companion bills **SB 6047/HB 2321** on **Military Recruiting**. They addressed issues of selective opt-out from recruiting, recruiter misconduct and disclosure of students' results and profiles in standardized military aptitude tests given in schools. Although these bills did not receive hearings, several of their provisions were incorporated in a Senate revision to HB 2026, a more narrowly focused bill, which was reported out of committee with bipartisan support, and remains in the Senate Rules Committee, where we will try to move it in January.

Several issues will continue to hold our attention in **criminal justice reform** next year:

- ♦ Reducing the burden of legal financial obligations for returning offenders by reducing the 12% interest rate or by having interest not accrue while the offender is in total confinement.

- ♦ Creating an ombudsman system for the Department of Corrections. A system of independent oversight is a recommendation of the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons. The proposal had considerable support in the Senate but ran into trouble in the House. However, the governor has indicated an interest in working on this before the next session.
- ♦ Simplifying and extending the provisions for restoring an offender's right to vote upon release.
- ♦ Moving forward higher education provisions that were deleted from the omnibus re-entry bill.

The necessity of changing the political climate to improve legislative receptivity to criminal justice reforms has become increasingly apparent. The reforms we advocate for not only recognize that of God in those caught in our criminal justice system, but are also proven to reduce crime, making our communities safer. If your representatives are thought of as tough on crime, check their votes on SB 6157 (see below). If they voted against it, you might consider talking with your Police Chief about persuading your representatives to support reforms to prevent further crime and to support public safety the way Chief Saunders persuaded Sen. Carrell. FCWPP is organizing a broad outreach effort seeking to change attitudes on offenders and criminal justice. Please contact us about suitable forums for presentations.

We remind ourselves to look for that of God in excessively punitive legislators, as well as in offenders and in each other.

Friends' Partners

Friends' work and ultimate success in our legislative advocacy is based in ongoing work and relationship building with both policy makers and other advocates across the state. In addition to working with policy makers directly, FCWPP and Friends have joined successfully with allies to collaborate on lobbying and advocacy.

- ♦ At the joint February 28 Faith Advocacy Day, Terry Thorsos (Eastside) and Sam Merrill (Olympia) collaborated with Carol Estes in two criminal justice sessions to prepare 25-35 attendees for visits with their legislators. About half the working participants were Quakers.
- ♦ The Washington Association of Churches took the lead this year in forming the progressive Religious Coalition for the Common Good (RCCG). At FCWPP's request, criminal justice is included among its priorities, along with housing, health care, poverty reduction, environmental stewardship, and tax fairness—all traditional concerns for Friends. Clerk Terry Thorsos represented FCWPP in a March 7 meeting with Governor Gregoire and 12-15 religious leaders, speaking briefly about the convergence of public safety, evidence from studies, and compassion in reducing recidivism. The Governor asked RCCG's help in educating the public about the need to better prepare inmates for successful reentry.
- ♦ On March 19, a group of seven from RCCG, including Carol Estes and Terry Thorsos, met separately with the leaders of both houses: Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown (3rd, Spokane), House Speaker Frank Chopp (43rd, Seattle), and Rep. Richard DeBolt, House Minority Leader, (20th, Lewis & Thurston Co's), again emphasizing the need for reentry reform.

How You Can Help

As FCWPP prepares for next year, we need your help in several areas.

- ✓ Most importantly, check your legislator's voting record and thank or educate them as needed. Look up votes on bills from the bill search tab on the right at www.leg.wa.gov. Contact us for more information. Key bills this session were: SB 5070/ SB 6157/HB 1874 – Omnibus Re-Entry Bills; SB 6047/HB 2321/HB 2026 - Military Recruiting; HB 1474/SB 5346 – Reducing Legal Financial Burdens; SB 5295 – Ombudsman for Department of Corrections; SB5530 – Simplifying restoration of offender voting rights.
- ✓ Share this report, our successes and challenges and encourage Friends' participation in FCWPP's work.
- ✓ Let us know of suitable forums for outreach and education about offenders and public safety
- ✓ As you are able, support FCWPP financially to enable planning and outreach efforts between sessions, and to increase our lobbyist's hours during the legislative session as we continue to work to reflect Friends' testimonies in public policy. Send contributions to FCWPP, 1333 Alvarado Terrace, Walla Walla, WA 99362.

Thank you for your care for the faithful stewardship of the Friends Committee on Washington Public Policy!

Dan Clark – Legislative Committee Clerk, clarkdn@charter.net, 509-522-0399

Carol Estes—Lobbyist, redtuffy@earthlink.net, 206-276-9128

K. Terry Thorsos—FCWPP Clerk, thorsoset@earthlink.net, 425-883-7304