

## El Centro's Legislative Priorities 2007

El Centro staff believe that these issues support our work to help families create and sustain educational, social, and economic opportunities, and we request the support of the Board of Directors to authorize work on these issues with the Kansas Legislature and/or U.S. Congress<sup>1</sup>, as appropriate, as well as with our allies, and to assist in this advocacy through your own participation in our campaigns. While this document outlines our 2007 advocacy priorities and where we expect to expend considerable energy, we will continue to take action in response to specific legislation, congruent with these policy areas, in consultation with the Board. This will include, but is not limited to, action on the Kansas and U.S. budgets, especially as they relate to social services, protection of the Earned Income Tax Credit, opposing anti-immigrant restrictions on benefits and use of foreign languages in Kansas, and the discussion of school finance in Kansas, relating to Limited English Proficient and at-risk children. We will also be busy defending some of the significant victories that we have secured in the past, particularly related to payday lending regulations and in-state tuition for immigrant high school graduates. As in past years, our legislative advocacy efforts will include not only direct lobbying but also media work, organizing, education to community members, and connection to other entities in Kansas and around the country. We will also take specific measures to increase staff understanding of these legislative priorities and to utilize their expertise to enhance the effectiveness of our advocacy.

Those items identified as Level One priorities will occupy most of our lobbying energies, and we will play the lead role on these issues. Level Two priorities are those for which we will support other partners' efforts, and Level Three priorities are either those in which we are just building awareness and/or those that are not expected to see significant legislative action this year.

### Affordable Housing

#### **Johnson County Housing Trust Fund and Other Strategies (Level Two)**

The Johnson County Commission is in the process of studying the issue of affordable rental and homeownership opportunities within the county, particularly as they relate to workforce housing needs. El Centro will seek to influence these discussions as they develop, including discussing the particular concerns of the immigrant and low-income working families with whom we work most closely.

**Strategy:** Work with Commission task forces, other nonprofit organizations, the Kansas City Homebuilders Association, and other partners to explore affordable housing strategies.

#### **Dedicated Revenue Source for State Housing Trust Fund (Level Three)**

It has been difficult to identify politically viable options for dedicated revenue for a state housing trust fund in Kansas. Still, we are committed to working with entities around Kansas and with legislators to find revenue sources that could fund our state housing trust fund, thus providing important resources to support homeownership promotion and other affordable housing goals in Kansas.

**Strategy:** Incorporate funding for the state housing trust fund into our overall asset-building legislative strategy, and work with partners such as United Community Services, Kansas Catholic Conference, and grassroots housing advocates to build support for a dedicated funding stream.

### Wealth Promotion and Protection

#### **Restrictions on Open-End Credit and Consumer Credit Sale Rates (Level One)**

Currently, there are no interest rate caps on open-end credit, including car title loans, or on consumer credit sales, where there is both a loan and a sales transaction involved. There is concern that these loopholes in our lending regulations are exploited to consumers' disadvantage, and that less financially savvy consumers are particularly vulnerable. Legislation that established reasonable rate caps on these types of transactions would standardize the lending industry and protect consumers.

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<sup>1</sup> \* Designates federal legislative issue, with advocacy to be directed at Kansas' Congressional delegation and through participation in national coalitions.

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**Strategy:** We will work with the Kansas State Banking Commissioner, legislators on key committees, and other nonprofits working with low-income Kansans to support these legislative changes. This will include presenting testimony, direct lobbying, and coalition building. We will aim for rate caps but will also be willing to accept increased disclosure requirements and other consumer protections as a compromise.

### Immigrant Inclusion

#### **The DREAM Act\* (Level One)**

The DREAM Act is legislation that would make immigrant students eligible for instate tuition and also provide a path to conditional and then Lawful Permanent Residency, contingent upon their continued academic success.

**Strategy:** El Centro is a member of the United We Dream campaign, and we will continue to support this legislation through our participation in national efforts and through building local support, particularly building on the allies cultivated during the struggle for instate tuition in Kansas. This will include defense of HB2145 in the event of further repeal attempts, and continued development of immigrant student leaders.

#### **Comprehensive Immigration Reform\* (Level One)**

While we have certainly seen significant progress in the national debate over comprehensive immigration reform, passage of meaningful legislative change remains elusive. We continue to support the principles of family reunification, a path to citizenship for immigrant workers, protection of workers' rights, and immigrant inclusion into the fabric of our nation. This also requires opposing the punitive, short-sighted, and fundamentally flawed enforcement-only bills that have also circulated, particularly in the U.S. House.

**Strategy:** Through the New American Opportunity Campaign, continuing leadership development with immigrant leaders, and direct lobbying of Kansas' Congressional delegation, we will continue to publicize the problems with our current immigration system and to outline solutions to make immigration fair, orderly, humane, and safe.

#### **The REAL ID Act (Level Three)**

The REAL ID Act creates strict national standards for driver's licenses, requires verification of documents, significantly raises issuance cost, forbids some lawful immigrants from obtaining a license, and bars all undocumented immigrants. We have great concerns about the implementation of this legislation, which Kansas will be undertaking in the 2007 legislative session in order to comply with a federal May 2008 deadline, both on immigrants and on other vulnerable populations, including older adults, victims of domestic violence, and religious minorities.

**Strategy:** We will work to push for repeal nationally, while simultaneously engaging policymakers and bureaucrats at the state level to minimize the negative impact in Kansas. This will include community education about the REAL ID Act's effects, meetings with officials from the Department of Revenue, and participation in a national coalition.

### Working Families

#### **Equitable Access to Affordable, Quality Health Care (Level Two)**

Lack of access to health care, rising costs, and high rates of uninsurance among many populations continue to be a concern for El Centro. While we are in the initial stages of exploring how our increased programming in the area of health may include increased advocacy as well, we are exploring such issues as language accommodations for Limited English Proficient health care consumers, outreach about state insurance options, and sustainability of safety-net clinics. We will participate in coalitions to educate ourselves on this issue and look for opportunities to make an impact in the arena of health care policy.