



2023 Legislative Wrap Up

The 2023 legislative session is behind us. Now, we are hard at work building momentum for future victories! Democracy was a big winner, with years of work paying off and the passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Act and of early voting. You have no doubt read that the session was a big disappointment for environmental justice. While this is true, please read below for several significant victories, including resources for weatherization and energy efficiency resources for environmental justice communities. We saw some modest wins in health care and education, and continue to build upon these victories.

None of this would be possible without you, our members! Please enjoy the highlight summaries below and reach out to us with any questions. Thanks for all you do!

DEMOCRACY

Victory. [SB 1226](#) The Connecticut Voting Rights Act. The right to vote is precious, this bill makes our democracy stronger by protecting and strengthening access to the ballot box. The U.S. Supreme Court has turned its back on the federal Voting Rights Act. With that gap in protection it's up to states like Connecticut to step up to defend voting rights.

We applaud our elected officials for passage of the John Lewis Voting Rights Act of Connecticut which makes our state a national leader in protecting voting rights and combating barriers to equal participation in our democracy.

Victory. [HJ No. 1](#) Resolution Approving a State Constitutional Amendment to Allow No-Excuse Absentee Voting. Passage of this resolution means that voters will have the chance next year to decide whether Connecticut will allow no-excuse absentee ballots in future elections. The question will now go to a statewide referendum on the ballots in 2024.

Victory. [HB 5004](#) AAC Implementing Early Voting. Connecticut is one of the last few states that hadn't allowed early voting, which has changed with the passage of this bill.

Now we will have 14 days of early voting for general elections, 7 days of early voting for most primaries, and 4 days of early voting for special elections and presidential preference primaries. It will apply to elections and primaries that occur on or after January 1, 2024.

We were disappointed at the amount of funding provided through a bond package to implement early voting; what will be funded are the purchase of new tabulators, expansion and integration of the Office's voter registration information systems, and improvements to the Office's business registries.

Citizens Election Program. The Connecticut state legislature passed an omnibus bill that included funding that will double public financing grants for gubernatorial campaigns. We're glad to see our lawmakers' commitment to making campaigning accessible to all Connecticut residents — not just the wealthiest among us. Though this is a victory; next time around we'd like to see this pass as a standalone measure instead of an omnibus addition.

The reference to elections in the omnibus bill title was a provision aimed at restoring the relevance of public financing to Connecticut's gubernatorial campaigns after two elections dominated by wealthy self-funders.

CLIMATE & ENVIRONMENT

[SB 4](#) AAC Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs. Leadership failed to call this bill for a vote. However, in large part due to the efforts of Senator Marilyn Moore, a bonding bill, [HB 6942](#) passed and included funding detailed below.

Sections 90 and 91 of HB 6942 create a \$125 million low-interest "Housing Environmental Improvement Revolving Loan Fund" to provide funding for multi-family, tenant-occupied housing in Environmental Justice communities for retrofitting projects 1) that improve energy efficiency including heat pumps, solar power generating systems, and insulation, 2) remediate health and safety concerns like mold and asbestos, and 3) provide assistance to access other state and federal energy efficiency programs. [SB 998](#) establishes limits on late fees and application fees, creates a model rental agreement, increases incentives for more affordable housing, and strikes some eviction records, along with other measures to help tenants.

Victory. [SB 1147](#) AAC the Environmental Justice Program of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. Will strengthen the state's environmental justice law. It provides DEEP and the Connecticut Siting Council with the ability to deny permits for facilities that would worsen pollution in already overburdened areas. It also enables more meaningful participation by residents on the public health and environmental stressors in the community.

Victory. [SB 100](#) AAC Establishing an Account in the General Fund to Provide Grants to Towns that Need PFAS Testing and Remediation. This will be very helpful for dealing with earlier problems. But failing to do more to prevent future poisonings will only necessitate the allocation of more resources in the future while unnecessarily impacting the health of countless people. We strongly urged that this bill be amended, but still consider this a victory.

Partial Victory. [SB 7 AAC Strengthening Protections for Connecticut's Consumers of Energy.](#) CCAG had been supporting this bill, which is supposed to help ratepayers. And while it does have some good things, it now contains a totally unrelated rat: an amendment which makes new nuclear plants Class I renewable energy sources for the next 2 years.

The amendment changed the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard, a mechanism designed to promote solar power and other renewable energy sources, to include new nuclear power plants built in our state (new nuclear reactors on the Millstone site were authorized in legislation in 2022) Regardless of how you feel about nuclear energy, support should not come at the expense of renewables.

HEALTH CARE

Community Health Workers: Community Health Workers (CHWs) are a proven and effective way to improve outcomes for many groups, especially for low-income people. Medicaid reimbursement for Community Health Workers was ultimately passed this session as part of [SB 989](#). CCAG was part of a coalition that worked to accomplish this, and to stop discrimination in HUSKY C. The bill as passed includes important elements moving forward to prevent disincentives to provide care by ensuring that diverse voices are included in determining the payment model for CHWs.

Partial Victory. [HB 6630: AA Increasing HUSKY C Asset and Income Limits](#) As part of the Stop HUSKY Health Discrimination Coalition, CCAG was engaged in extensive advocacy to raise the income limits for people with disabilities to receive HUSKY C. The budget implementer, while not going nearly as far as we asked, does increase income limits to 105% of Federal Poverty Level in October of 2024, not enough, but reducing the discrimination. We will continue to monitor the impact and fight for a complete end to the discrimination. We do know we would not have gotten *anything* but for the concerted efforts of the Stop HUSKY Health Discrimination Coalition.

Partial Victory. [HB 6616 AAC Expansion of HUSKY Health Benefits to those Ineligible Due to Immigration Status](#) was folded into the state budget and will expand Medicaid coverage to children 15 and younger regardless of their immigration status.

Our work is not done: the budget only included funding for HUSKY for immigrants ages 15 and under, despite a funding request to raise the age to 18 years and under. People who gain coverage in the new laws will keep it until age 18. This is better but still unacceptable! Cutting down the age eligibility disregards the needs of our immigrant youth by excluding them from accessing healthcare at a crucial point in their lives.

Victory. CCAG Opposed [SB 6710 AAC Association Health Plans and Establishing a Task Force to Study Stop-Loss Insurance.](#) This would have splintered the health care market and would have allowed insurers to discriminate against people with pre-existing conditions, and it would have authorized self-funded and fully insured multiple employer welfare arrangements in this state. In reality, this bill was lifted from [ALEC](#), and would have diminished care. This bill failed, after the quick action of CCAG members and allies in the House and Senate.

Victory. [House Bill 6669 AA Protecting Patients and Prohibiting Unnecessary Health Care Costs.](#) Many elements of other bills were ultimately folded into this one. It contains many good elements, including promoting transparency and conducting potentially useful studies. Among its provisions: Allowing Connecticut to join the ArrayRx program. Older adults should not have to choose between paying for the medication they need to stay healthy and paying for other necessities like food and utilities. This program will provide CT residents with a discount card that they can use at the pharmacy to access lower Rx drug prices. The bill also addresses issues of transparency regarding the availability of generic drugs, pharmacy benefits managers' practices related to prescription drug distribution, and hospital facility fees. The bill contains modest improvements to the Certificate of Need process; requires the Department of Social Services to develop a strategy to improve health outcomes for people on HUSKY; requires the Insurance Department to report to the legislature on management and payment practices. It also bans all-or-nothing, anti-steering and gad clauses in contracting.

EDUCATION

Victory. [SB 1 AAC Transparency in Education.](#) This is a comprehensive bill addressing school indoor air quality, classroom safety and school climate, and an audit of statewide mastery testing, among other provisions. The bill also sets up an in-depth commission to address the retention and recruitment of teachers and paraprofessionals, compensation and benefits, and class sizes. There is still work to be done, but we have successfully achieved a requirement for ANNUAL school walkthrough inspections at all CT public schools, extended the School HVAC grant program, and a uniform inspection and evaluation program. There are other important details that need to be addressed, but now that this bill has passed, the School Indoor Air Quality working group will be able to continue that important work until July of 2024.

These are just a few highlights, for more info visit our website, join our email list or contact:

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