

WI Social Action Position Papers

Delta Days at the Nation's Capital

February 22-25, 2020

Ensure Fair Voting Rights by Ending Voter Roll Purging

Wisconsin is a state where fair voting rights continue to be adversely impacted by gerrymandering, voter ID restrictions that burden many eligible voters, and voter disinformation. In December 2019, a Wisconsin county judge ruled that roughly 234,000 or 6% of eligible voters should be purged/removed from the voter rolls across the state. Many county officials across the state have refused to remove eligible voters from their county rolls and have faced the threat of criminal prosecution and civil sanctions. The issue remains unresolved and is currently being challenged in state and federal courts.

Delta Sigma Theta has always been an advocate of civil rights and civil liberties for all people, especially when it comes to exercising our right to vote. We are calling on federal legislators to support federal legislation that would find voter roll purging to be unconstitutional.

Questions for legislator or legislative staff:

- 1) Are you willing to support federal legislation that would ban voter roll purging?
- 2) What other steps have you taken to ensure fair elections occur?
- 3) What can we do in our areas to partner on this important initiative?

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Affordable Housing and Eviction

Decent, affordable housing is important to families. Certainly, it fulfills a basic human need for shelter, but it also contributes to the well-being of both parents and children. Studies show that children in stable housing do better in school and are less likely to experience disruption in their education due to unwanted moves. Decent, affordable housing reduces stress, toxins, and infectious disease, which leads to improvement in both physical and mental health. Affordable housing also frees up funds within families' tight budgets to spend on health care and food. Studies have shown that children whose parents receive housing assistance benefit from better nutrition and life. Affordable housing is defined by the National Low Income Housing Coalition as costs that are at 30% or less of household income. Across the entire state of Wisconsin, there is a shortage of affordable housing, whether rental or homeownership properties, for too many residents. Residents from low income households, whose incomes are at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income struggle to afford housing. Many of these households are working full-time in the workforce. Many Wisconsin residents are severely cost-burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing. Severely cost-burdened households are more likely than other renters to sacrifice other necessities like healthy food and health care to pay the rent, and to experience unstable housing situations like evictions. The combination of factors especially hits African-Americans, who experience racism and disparities in poverty, unemployment, school achievement and incarceration.

Facts on the Lack of Affordable Housing Across the State of Wisconsin:

- Homelessness is acute in Dane County, where blacks represent 5.1% of the population but account for 53% of those seeking homeless services in 2018.
- According to data recently released by the Wisconsin Policy Forum, in 2016, one out of every 24 renters in the City of Milwaukee was formally evicted and in some census tracts, more than one in 10 renters was formally evicted.
- According to data released by Legal Action of Wisconsin, there were 14,077 evictions filed in Milwaukee in 2017, up 4.6% from the 13,457 filed in 2016.
- As of April 2018, Milwaukee placed #59 out of 100 large cities for evictions according to Eviction Lab at Princeton University.
- The Madison (WI) School District's Transition Education Program, which provides services to homeless students, reports more than 61% of those students are black, 16% Latino, 16% multiracial, and 6% white in October 2019.

There is bi-partisan support in Congress to strengthen affordable housing opportunities across the country. Notably, there is legislation that would expand and strengthen the low-income housing tax credit, a solution that has financed the construction and preservation of more than three million affordable homes since 1986. It is one of only a handful of tax bills in Congress with a similar level of support.

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Called the **Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2019 (US Senate Bill 1703)**, the bill would allow affordable homes to be built or preserved in the country over the next decade than would otherwise be possible. It would also simplify regulations, increase resources, and broaden the reach of the housing credit to better serve rural areas and our veterans.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated has always been committed to affordable and fair housing initiatives, especially for low-income, elderly, and minorities. We support the passage of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act as it will ensure affordable housing for millions of people and cut down on the devastating impact that evictions have on families, especially children.

Questions for legislator or legislative staff:

- Are you in support of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2019?
- If you are not in support of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2019, why do you not support it and what do you propose as an alternative for dealing with the growing lack of affordable housing in our state and across the nation?
- Are you willing to support additional legislation that will increase affordable housing initiatives especially in Wisconsin?

WI Social Action Position Papers

Delta Days at the Nation's Capital

February 22-25, 2020

U.S. Census 2020

Background information

It is well known that the U.S. Census is mandated by Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution and conducted every 10 years ending in 0 to count every resident living in the United States. Many times, allocation of government resources are dependent on census data, such as funding for Medicaid and Head Start. As the U.S. population has grown and become more diverse, there has been a development of vulnerable populations in Hard to Count Areas. Hard to Count (HTC) communities are defined as populations for whom a real or perceived barrier exists to full representative inclusion in data collection processes.¹ These populations are hard to locate, contact, persuade and interview. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has prioritized the inclusion of marginalized populations in international development, and the United States Census Bureau has designed a plan to reach HTC populations.^{2,3}

It is important that the Census 2020 accurately count resident in order to draw districts, enforce voting right, distribute federal funds, inform government planning, and benchmark the national population. Thus, it is the responsibility of our leaders to promote the U.S. Census in ways that reaches our HTC populations, such as people of color, rural residents, low-income residents, complex households, young children, frequent movers, persons who distrust the government, residents with disabilities, foreign-born residents, and non-English speakers.

Facts:

- In the 2010 Census, over 2 million children aged 0 to 4 were not counted.⁴
- The 2020 Census plans to use the internet as the primary mode of data collection from U.S. households.⁵ However, only 78 percent of households with incomes below \$30,000 use the internet, 10 percent less than the next income group (\$30,000-\$50,000) and almost 20 percent lower than households with incomes of \$50,000-70,000.⁶
- The 2010 Census missed about 2.1 percent of African Americans.⁷
- Approximately 5 percent of American Indians living on reservations were undercounted.⁷

Questions for legislator or legislative staff:

- What will you do to ensure that vulnerable populations are counted in the Census 2020?
- Historically, the Census has been used as a political tool and a means of oppression. What barriers do you expect your communities to face related to the Census 2020 and how will you work to remove these barriers to being counted?

WI Social Action Position Papers

Delta Days at the Nation's Capital

February 22-25, 2020

Colorectal Cancer Loophole

Background information

Colorectal cancer is one of the few cancers that may be prevented through screening. Yet, colorectal cancer remains the second leading cause of cancer death in men and women combined in the U.S.

Approximately 90 percent of all individuals diagnosed with colorectal cancer at an early stage are still alive five years later, which means that a colonoscopy can literally save a person's life when a polyp is found and removed. Colonoscopy has an A-rating from the United States Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), requiring most private insurers to provide *screening* colonoscopies for individuals between the ages of 50 and 75 without cost sharing. However, regulations currently require Medicare beneficiaries to pay a 20 percent coinsurance for colonoscopies if a polyp is removed. **This loophole places an unfair financial burden on Medicare beneficiaries, but not adults with private insurance, for this life-saving screening.**

When seniors on Medicare go in for a screening colonoscopy they assume there is no cost sharing because it is a screening procedure. However, if a polyp is detected and removed during the procedure, the patient may face a surprise bill. **This is because the removal of a polyp changes the designation of the colonoscopy from a screening to a diagnostic procedure and Medicare beneficiaries are required to pay a 20 percent coinsurance.** A colonoscopy with polyp removal could cost a Medicare beneficiary as much as \$365, depending on the removal procedure and facility used.¹¹ Out-of-pocket expenses for Medicare beneficiaries can be important deterrents to screening.

Major Issue:

Medicare beneficiaries are required to pay a 20% coinsurance, if a polyp is removed during colon screening because the removal of a polyp changes the designation of the colonoscopy from a screening to a diagnostic procedure.

Facts:

- The majority of those diagnosed with colorectal cancer will be Medicare beneficiaries.¹
- 1,155,086 of Wisconsin residents are Medicare beneficiaries.²
- 145,600 Americans will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer and over 51,000 of them will die from the disease this year.³
- In 2019, Wisconsin had an estimated 2,450 new colorectal cancer diagnoses and 990 deaths due to colorectal cancer.⁴
- Five year relative survival rate for colorectal cancer is only 14% when caught at a later stage. If caught at an early stage with screening the survival rate improves to 90%.⁵
- Over \$240,000 a year is how much the treatment costs are for an individual with stage IIB colorectal cancer.⁶
- Despite the fact that colonoscopies can prevent cancer, 58% of all colorectal cancer deaths in 2020 will be due to "non-screening."⁷
- An estimated \$14 billion is spent annually on colorectal cancer treatments in the U.S., with projections increasing to \$20 billion by 2020. Medicare will spend as much as \$7 billion.⁸
- Preventing colorectal cancer through polyp removal or catching it at an earlier stage saves lives and can reduce costs for the Medicare program.

WI Social Action Position Papers

Delta Days at the Nation's Capital

February 22-25, 2020

Bill support:

H.R. 1570 and S. 668 - the Removing Barriers to Colorectal Cancer Screening Act, sponsored by Representatives Donald Payne, Jr. (D-NJ-10) & Rodney Davis (R- IL 13) and Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and Roger Wicker (R-MS).

Wisconsin Legislator support:

District 1 – Rep Bryan Steil	No
District 2 – Rep Mark Pocan	Cosponsor
District 3 – Rep Ron Kind	Cosponsor
District 4 - Rep Gwen Moore	Cosponsor
District 5 – Rep James Sensenbrenner	Cosponsor
District 6 – Rep Glen Grothman	Cosponsor
District 7 – Rep Sean Duffy	Cosponsor
District 8 – Rep Mike Gallagher	Cosponsor
Senator Tammy Baldwin	Cosponsor
Senator Ron Johnson	No

Questions for legislator or legislative staff:

- Will you continue to support this bill which can make a huge difference financial difference to a Medicare recipient?
- Will you help to influence your legislative counterparts to also support this bill - a personal request is always means more?

WI Social Action Position Papers

Delta Days at the Nation's Capital

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School to Prison Pipeline

Rather than having a common-sense approach to discipline, too many schools are using overly harsh discipline policies and practices that are ineffective, unfair, and detrimental. Research shows that this zero-tolerance approach does not work. It doesn't make schools safer. Instead, this approach lowers educational outcomes, damages relationships within schools, and diverts funding from providing high quality educational experiences. These systems of discipline and prison-like environments are not preparing young people for success; they are conditioning them for a life of incarceration. All students deserve better; they deserve safe, quality schools.

Facts about Suspension & Exclusionary School Discipline Policies and Youth Incarceration

- Children of color and children with disabilities are disproportionately suspended.
- Of children of color with disabilities, more than 1 in 4 boys and nearly 1 in 5 girls of color receive an out of school suspension.
- The most significant indicator of which children will be suspended is not the type of offense but the color of their skin, their special education status, what school they go to, and whether they have been suspended before.
- 1.6 million (k – 12th grade) students attended a school that employed a law enforcement officer but no counselor.

Recommendations:

1. Join with other partners to conduct Town Halls discussing solutions and offering training on implementation.
2. Support legal representation for students at point of exclusion from school, including development of model best practice training modules for lawyers and law students for representation for students facing suspension or expulsion.
3. Support ongoing convenings where educators, School Resource Officers, law enforcement, and juvenile justice decision makers meet to develop strategies to reverse the School-to-Prison- Pipeline.
4. Develop training modules on Implicit Bias and De-Biasing for decision makers along the including teachers and administrators, school resource officers, police, juvenile judges and others dealing with juveniles, to reduce disproportionalities.
5. Focus on addressing inequalities by providing urban students with equitable access to resources by being committed to providing educational and social support to students and their families. Such as but not limited to:
 - a. Fair and equitable school funding for all
 - b. Transportation
 - c. Qualified, effective and diverse administration and faculty
 - d. Develop initiatives to secure equity in access to educational opportunities.
 - e. Encourage STEAM based academics targeting specific neighborhood schools

WI Social Action Position Papers

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Questions for legislator or legislative staff:

1. What related legislative and/or policy initiatives have you authored or co-sponsored?
 - a. Examples:
 - i. Remove zero-tolerance policies from schools
 - ii. Eliminate criminalizing student misbehavior that does not endanger others School-to-Prison Pipeline (i.e. eliminate the use of suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to law enforcement for lower-level offenses)
 - iii. Support demonstrated alternative strategies to address student misbehavior, including Restorative Justice 13.
2. What steps have you taken to eliminate the school to prison pipeline?
3. How can we partner with this office on this important initiative?