

JULY 1, 2023

GHIAA Updates

Recapping and Looking Ahead



THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION ENDED LAST MONTH

Gun Violence

In Connecticut, victims of gun violence are disproportionately people of color. While Black individuals make up only 10% of the state's total population, **56% of the state's gun homicide victims are Black**. Latinx individuals represent 14% of the state population, yet **make up 23% of gun homicide victims**. Young Black men are profoundly vulnerable, killed by guns at 39 times the rate that young white men are.

During the 2023 legislative session, GHIAA called on our leaders to follow the recommendation of the Commission on Community Gun Violence Intervention and Prevention and allocate \$20 million over the biennium, to be disbursed to community-based organizations doing life-saving work on the ground in our major urban centers. Initially the Governor's budget included just \$2.5 million for this work.

We are pleased to share that the bipartisan budget passed by the House and Senate, and signed by the Governor, included \$22 million over the biennium for gun violence prevention. The advocacy of GHIAA leaders and our coordinating role among our many allied organizations were essential to achieving this success.

Mental Health

Here in Connecticut, there are more than **561,000 adults living with mental health challenges**, 160,000 of whom are not able to access the care they need. More than 40,000 youth ages 12-17 in Connecticut struggle with depression, and 49% of them did not receive any care in the last year. It is difficult to access mental health care in the best of circumstances. But it is nearly impossible for people who do not have insurance. While only 5% of the overall population of Connecticut is uninsured, among undocumented residents of our state, that figure skyrockets to 58%.

During the 2023 legislative session, GHIAA joined with our partners in the HUSKY 4 Immigrants Coalition to call on our leaders to pass HB 6616 and expand HUSKY eligibility for income-qualified people regardless of immigration status beyond the current age limit of 12. Our goal was to reach age 25, or age 18 at bare minimum.

HB 6616 was passed in amended form by the Human Services and Appropriations Committees. While the bill was not called for a vote by the full legislature, the final budget incorporated these provisions and expanded eligibility to age 15. While this falls short of our goal of covering all children and young adults, it nevertheless represents progress, as thousands more young people who have been excluded will now have access to physical and mental health care. This was only possible because of the tireless advocacy of GHIAA leaders and our coalition partners.



Educational Equity

The Connecticut state constitution guarantees an adequate education to every child growing up in this state. For decades, our state has recognized that our public education systems are inequitable, and that the root of the problem is funding, as 67% of public school students don't receive full funding for a high-quality K-12 education. In the 1980s, state leaders designed the Education Cost Sharing formula to address the glaring disparities in the opportunities our children receive. Over 30 years later, this formula has never yet been fully funded.

Legislative Wrap-Up 2023

In 2023, GHIAA took on five legislative priorities. These issues were identified based on more than 1,000 stories shared by leaders in our member institutions during our 2022 house meeting campaign. From the themes of these stories, our research teams developed concrete actions we could take toward justice. Hundreds of GHIAA leaders participated in our advocacy by writing testimony, attending press conferences, contacting legislators, and more. Here we share an update on what we achieved together.

JULY 1, 2023

During the 2023 legislative session, GHIAA called on our leaders to support HB 5003 to decrease the racial funding gap in public education by fully funding the ECS formula, and to allocate sufficient resources for its full implementation.

HB 5003 was passed, and the final budget included \$150 million toward fully funding the ECS formula. Furthermore, ECS implementation was accelerated and will be fully funded as of FY 2026. GHIAA leaders and our allies achieved remarkable forward movement toward equitable education for all Connecticut children.



Affordable Housing

In Connecticut, there are 130,000 households that are extremely low income and severely cost burdened. What's more, Connecticut is one of the most racially segregated states in the nation. Our state's zoning regulations play a huge role in maintaining both segregation and unaffordability in our communities.

During the 2023 legislative session, GHIAA called on our leaders to pass HB 6633 and implement Fair Share Planning and Zoning, a new approach to land use in Connecticut that asks each town to plan and zone for an equitable portion of its regional need for affordable housing.

HB 6633 was passed by the Housing Committee but ran into major opposition in the full legislature. A stripped-down version of Fair Share was included in the omnibus housing bill that was debated for many contentious hours in the final week of the session before finally being passed. While this falls short of our goal of meaningful zoning reform, it does represent important (though incremental) progress toward a more thoughtful, equitable, and economically sustainable approach to housing in Connecticut. GHIAA's advocacy was particularly important because of our constituent engagement with legislators from urban, suburban, and rural districts.

Environmental Justice



In July 2022, the MIRA incinerator plant in the South End of Hartford ceased operation, but the board of directors continued to squander its remaining financial reserves by paying executive salaries and providing subsidies for suburban communities to truck their trash out of state. Hartford has borne the brunt of this regional service for decades, at the cost of high asthma rates and low life expectancies for residents of the neighboring communities, who are mostly lower-income Black and Brown folks.

During the 2023 legislative session, GHIAA called on our leaders to pass HB 6664, which would dissolve MIRA and create a new oversight body to manage the remediation and redevelopment of the South End site. We also called for meaningful representation from the City of Hartford in the leadership of the new waste authority, and for long-term community engagement to determine the future of the site.

HB 6664 passed in amended form and was signed into law, and as of July 1, 2023, MIRA will cease to exist. What's more, the Hartford city council will appoint five members of the new waste authority's board. This is a remarkable win for GHIAA and our allies as we seek to responsibly and equitably remediate the incinerator site and rectify decades of environmental justice.

Next Steps

1. Please share these updates with your congregation and thank them for their leadership! And please accept our gratitude for all you have done.
2. We know that policy change is the first step, and that the implementation of these policies will require vigilance and accountability if it is to happen in meaningful and effective ways. We will keep you posted about further opportunities for action!
3. This summer, GHIAA staff and leaders will engage in discernment about our next steps on these and/or other issues.
4. None of these crucial wins could have happened without our strong foundation of authentic relationships. Please invest in expanding and deepening your relationships both within and beyond your congregation. This is how we will continue to identify our issues and build the power to continue making concrete change toward justice.