



PO Box 10013, Raleigh, NC 27605

www.ncwu.org

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Contact: Jina Dhillon

Phone: 919 260-4761

NC Women United Looks Back at 2011 Legislative Session and Calls for an End to Attacks on Women's Rights, Urges Pro-Active Steps in 2012

Report Card shows little progress on improving women's status; highlights major setbacks in improving access to health care and equality

Raleigh- State legislators and advocates for women gathered today to release the results of NC Women United's 2011 Legislative Report Card, an assessment of progress made on the 2011 Women's Agenda. NC Women United members--a coalition of organizations and individuals working to achieve the full political, social, and economic equality of all women across North Carolina--gathered with legislators to call for an end to the attacks on women's rights, and urging pro-active action in 2012 towards improving the status of women in North Carolina.

The 2011 legislative session marked a dramatic shift in the NC General Assembly's approach to public policy that promotes the health and security of women and their families. NC Women United evaluated the progress of the 2011 General Assembly and flagged unfinished business.

Of the 18 policy initiatives, bills, and appropriations items that NCWU supported, only one bill was passed, 2 failed, and 3 are pending. On the other hand, 3 bills were passed that have a negative impact on women's rights (one was vetoed but is up for reconsideration in the 2012 session), and 1 additional negative bill is pending.

"Lawmakers in the NC General Assembly need to know that we see what can only be described as a steady erosion of the rights and protections that women and their families have come to rely on for the past several years," said Jina Dhillon, President of NC Women United. "We're here today to further expose the attacks on our rights, and to make our call for pro-active action in 2012 loud and clear. Women across this state need and deserve action promoting comprehensive access to health care, family-friendly workplaces, and freedom from gender-based violence; they deserve action to remove barriers that keep women from entering public office and attaining economic self-sufficiency."

The President of NC Women United was joined by members of the N.C. General Assembly, including Representatives Rick Glazier (D-Cumberland), Verla Insko (D-Orange), Diane Parfitt (D-Cumberland), Deborah Ross (D-Wake), and Senator Ellie Kinnaird (D-Orange). State lawmakers reviewed the good and the bad from the Report Card, which evaluates legislation pertaining to access to health care, civic participation and equality, economic self-sufficiency, and violence against women.

One of the bills passed into law aiming to restrict women's reproductive freedom highlighted on the Report Card is the so-called "woman's right to know" Act (HB 854), which presumes that women are incapable of deciding for themselves what is best for their health and life. This law has been found so egregious that key components have been blocked by federal courts.

“This should not be what a great state like North Carolina is known for,” said Rep. Diane Parfitt. “We should be focusing on what we can provide women, not what we can deny them. 2011 was a damaging session for women’s rights, but we call on the General Assembly today to turn their attention in 2012 and beyond to what we were all elected to do.”

Rep. Rick Glazier spoke to attendees on the importance of blocking legislative attacks like the ballot initiative, Amendment One (SB 514), which would amend the State Constitution to state that marriage between a man and a woman is the only domestic legal union that is valid and recognized in this state. “Amendment One could strip precious health care coverage and prescription drug benefits from unmarried mothers and their children, and has the potential to threaten North Carolina’s domestic violence laws, placing unmarried women and their children in jeopardy,” Rep. Glazier said.

A bill requiring voters to show a government-issued photo ID in order to vote was passed by the General Assembly, but eventually vetoed by Gov. Purdue (HB 351). The veto is up for reconsideration in the 2012 session. “The combination of restricting access to the ballot box while giving corporations and the wealthiest individuals an amplified political voice is not only anti-democratic; it’s un-American,” said Rep. Glazier. “Data shows that voter fraud is extremely rare. The data also shows that 450,000 active, registered NC voters lack this kind of ID; those voters are overwhelmingly seniors, women, youth, African Americans, and low-income voters.”

The Report Card also highlighted the significant budget cuts that will have a negative impact on the economic self-sufficiency of many low-income women and their families, especially in the areas of housing, childcare subsidies, and the NC Earned Income Tax Credit.

“My colleagues and I worked hard to establish a state Earned Income Tax Credit, which in 2010, pumped nearly \$53 million into local communities and provided over 883,000 North Carolina working families with a much-needed income boost,” said Rep. Deborah Ross. “Thankfully, the General Assembly did not act on movement to weaken North Carolina’s Earned Income Tax Credit last session; however, today the state EITC is in peril. If the General Assembly doesn’t act, it will sunset at the end of the year. I urge all of you to speak out and urge policy makers to save our credit--working families earn it.”

Victories from the 2011 legislative session include passage in the House of legislation requiring review of domestic violence offender’s participation in court-ordered abuser treatment programs (HB 176). However, while funding levels for domestic violence programs were not cut in the State budget, the Rape Crisis Center Fund was cut by 5 percent. Funding for the Home and Community Care Block Grant, aimed at preserving home-delivered services for low-income and elderly persons so they can remain at home, was maintained at current levels.

NC Women United (NCWU) is a coalition of progressive organizations and individuals working to achieve the full political, social, and economic equality of all women across North Carolina. NCWU works to build women's power through grassroots activism, community organizing, legislative advocacy, and engagement in the political process.

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