

## Delegates to Raleigh share IFC's values

By Lucy Bryan, The Herald-Sun  
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CHAPEL HILL -- Whether in their personal lives or their political pursuits, the Orange County delegates to the N.C. General Assembly reflect the values of a community that makes social service a priority, a local charity executive says.

Chris Moran, executive director of the Inter-Faith Council, says that Orange County delegates have addressed the issues that the IFC is concerned about, including the growing number of low-income households, the reduction of wages, mental health and the lack of affordable housing.

"I think they pay closer attention to the needs of the people we serve than the common legislator," Moran said.

Moran recalled the proactive spirit of the delegates when they protested the loss of federal dollars for IFC's HomeStart program in spring 2003.

Rep. Joe Hackney, D-Chapel Hill, said that he has advocated monetary assistance to nonprofit organizations like the IFC. He has also supported legislation that would ensure that those organizations have the best regulatory environment possible.

"What I have done is to have a general orientation towards serving members of the population [who are in need] and to be an advocate for increased resources to [service] organizations," Hackney said.

Sen. Ellie Kinnaird, D-Carrboro, said that one of the ways she has supported the IFC is by pushing legislation that will help IFC clients.

Kinnaird also regularly donates food to IFC's Community Kitchen.

"We get gifts from lobbyists, and I don't believe that legislators should be taking gifts from lobbyists," Kinnaird said. "So I just take them down to the shelter."

Kinnaird serves on the N.C. Coalition to End Homelessness, which works with local organizations that provide housing to the homeless.

"We're trying to find out what works -- what, on the state level, will end homelessness," Kinnaird said.

Kinnaird said that she and Rep. Verla Insko, D-Chapel Hill, have worked to introduce a Mental Health Court Bill in the Senate and the House. The bill would give certain people charged with petty crimes the option of going to mental health court instead of district court.

"They could be screened and assigned a team that would provide individual therapy," Kinnaird said.

This would address the needs of many mentally ill people who might otherwise end up at the homeless shelter, Kinnaird said.

Insko has not only fought for better mental health programs, but has advocated tax breaks for daycare centers and direct funding for adolescent pregnancy prevention programs and the Orange County Partnership for Young Children.

Insko -- the current board chairwoman for The Women's Center, which provides women in the Triangle with counseling during major life transitions -- said poverty is of great concern to the General Assembly right now.

"We have a growing poverty class in the nation, and homelessness is part of that," Insko said. "More and more families are threatened. Part of that has to do with our economic structure."

Insko is currently sponsoring the Earned Income Tax Bill, which would give tax breaks on a state level to low-income families.

"It would be very easy to administer," Insko said. "Anyone that qualifies for the federal income tax credit would also get a state income tax credit."

Insko said that in the future, she hopes to see the General Assembly put more money into low-income housing and require new developments to provide a certain percentage of housing for families that earn less than the average income.

"I want to make things better," Insko said. "We can always make improvements. It's very important for public services to be of high quality."

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