

COMMUNITY FORUM FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE REPORT TO THE MEMBERSHIP, 2016

**“THROUGH EDUCATION, ORGANIZING, AND ADVOCACY WE INTEND TO
PROMOTE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EQUITY
AND TO ENCOURAGE GREATER PARTICIPATION IN DECISIONS THAT AFFECT
PEOPLE’S LIVES.”**

Education:

During the past year, we have continued to offer public forums monthly. These meetings characteristically are both informative and interactive. Presenters include both Community Forum members and representatives of other organizations with the common goal of social and economic justice.

Four of these forums addressed issues important to the 2016 Election –a project we called “Making Informed Choices.” As a non-partisan organization, we could not endorse or advocate for a particular party or candidate. We could, however look at policies that impact justice and provide information to stimulate discussion of those policies.

PUBLIC FORUMS in 2016

Jan.	West-Side Revitalization – What about the Neighborhoods?
Feb.	Alternatives to Predatory Lending
Mar	Good Health: An issue of social and economic justice (focus: tobacco use)
April	How healthy are residents of St. Joseph County?
May	Making Informed Choices (MIC) -Focus on tax policy, education and health
June	“MIC” – Focus: racial justice, gender equality and immigration rights
July	Tax Sale Forum
Aug.	“MIC” – Focus: affordable housing, neighborhoods and consumer protection
Sept.	“MIC” – Focus: labor, the Justice System, and American Muslims
Oct.	New Data on Poverty and Income – Implications for struggling Hoosiers

Organizing and advocacy:

During 2016, we continued to address current goals of the Community Forum, improved living standards for area residents, a public education system that provides a quality education for all of our students, and the revitalization of South Bend’s West Side. Wherever possible members of the Community Forum worked in collaboration with organizations and individuals who shared our goals. Here are some examples of the organizing efforts for this past year.

1. Improved living standards require quality jobs paying an adequate income. In Indiana, an increase in the minimum wage is controlled by State legislation. The Community Forum was part of a Raise the Wage Coalition that successfully lobbied for an increase in the minimum wage paid to South Bend city employees. Future plans include a campaign to

revise the South Bend tax abatement ordinance to require businesses that receive abatements to pay the same minimum wage to their employees.

Other examples of projects to improve living standards for area resident include ongoing involvement in the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) and support for the locked-out workers at Honeywell.

2. A strong system of public education requires community support for adequate resources and just policies that prepare all students for future success. What is commonly described as the “School to Prison Pipeline” limits access to future success through policies and practices that result in an intolerable achievement gap for students of color.

During 2016, building upon several successful events in the Spring and Fall of 2015, we continued to build the movement to expose and interrupt the School to Prison Pipeline, primarily working through the Community Action for Education (CAFÉ). One focus was the disproportionate rates of suspension and expulsion for students of color, particularly Black males. We worked closely with the Indiana NAACP to organize their yearly Education Summit. This year the Summit focused on the School to Prison Pipeline, calling attention to other school policies that contribute to the pipeline, including the denial of driving permits as a form of school discipline.

We were active participants in the process of hiring a new Superintendent of Schools, stressing the necessity of community involvement. We also have provided support for students and parents who were confronting the consequences of the policies and practices that must be changed to provide for a just and equitable system of education.

3. Since our founding in May of 2006, a central concern of the Community Forum has been the revitalization of the West Side and we continued addressing that concern during 2016. Our January public forum featured a panel of grass-roots leaders who represented residents of the Near Northwest and Far Northwest, of LaSalle Park and Kennedy Park, and of areas throughout the West Side of South Bend. The conversation identified specific needs that needed to be addressed in order to improve the quality of life for residents of these communities.

Throughout the year, we’ve mobilized participation at public hearings and committee meetings of the South Bend Common Council, where both residents and supporters of the West Side shared their concerns with elected officials. Our organization will continue to gather and analyze both quantitative and anecdotal data on City practices and policies that can have a profound effect on the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Conclusion:

These were some of the major activities of the Community Forum for Economic Justice during 2016. We anticipate that 2017 will provide many new opportunities to *“promote the development of a just economy that provides equal opportunities for all and enables everyone to obtain a living standard sufficient to sustain life in dignity.”*