



# MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

16 October 2023

Dear Ambassador Rakolta and Governor Stancato,

With greetings and acknowledgment of your role to lead an executive effort to grow the state's population, I write to you on behalf of the Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC). Since 1963, MCC has served as the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state. The organization works with those in the public policy arena, regardless of political affiliation, to support policies that respect human life and dignity and serve the common good.

Your respective capacities as co-chairs of the Growing Michigan Together Council are an important leadership component of the Council's charge to advise Gov. Whitmer "on specific policies to grow Michigan's population." Since the formation of the Council, the Governor and other elected officials and distinguished leaders have spoken to the importance of making Michigan a place where people can raise their families. The Governor has also stated that she wants to ensure Michigan can provide "expanded opportunities for families." On this point, we share a common perspective.

Not only is Michigan in a precarious position with its population growth, it has also entered a disconcerting phase of annual birth rates. As you have likely noted, recently published data indicate the annual birth total in Michigan is projected to be the lowest since World War II, which represents an opportunity to consider policies to help reverse this trend and encourage more people to have children and raise families. Pope St. John Paul II once said as the family goes, so goes the nation. As such, MCC believes the family is the core social unit in society.

We believe, like you, that supporting families in our state is crucial to growing the population. While it is important to make our state attractive for people to move here or stay here, it is also important to consider policies to help directly foster family growth in our state. Michigan Catholic Conference offers to the workgroups that comprise this esteemed Council support for policies that make it easier – financially or otherwise – for families to have and raise children.

Raising children is a rewarding, yet challenging endeavor for every parent. It is especially challenging for those who find themselves on the lower end of the economic margin or are facing difficult circumstances in other areas of life. As part of the Council's goal to recommend policies that grow the population, our state should pursue measures that assist parents – or those who want to become parents - who are facing difficult economic circumstances. By creating a strong culture of support for parents who need assistance with food, housing, childcare, health insurance, material necessities for children, or even

**Officers:** Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron, Archbishop of Detroit, *Chairman*; Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley, Bishop of Kalamazoo, *Vice-Chairman*; Mr. Mark Murray, Grand Rapids, *Secretary/Treasurer*

**Board Members:** Most Reverend Earl A. Boyea, Bishop of Lansing; Most Reverend John F. Doerfler, Bishop of Marquette; Mr. James Epolito, East Lansing; Reverend John D. Fleckenstein, Jr., St. Joseph; Most Reverend Robert D. Gruss, Bishop of Saginaw; Ms. Anne Kennedy, Bloomfield Hills; Sr. Frances Nadolny, O.P., Adrian; The Honorable Michael J. Talbot, Plymouth; Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak, Bishop of Grand Rapids; Most Reverend Jeffery J. Walsh, Bishop of Gaylord

Mr. Paul A. Long, *President and Chief Executive Officer*

finding a job, Michigan should be a place where people can see themselves raising a family, no matter their circumstance.

For several legislative sessions MCC has encouraged both the Legislature and the administration to put forth policies that support mothers and fathers in need as well as their unborn and newborn children. There is more we can do in this area. In recent budget cycles, MCC supported the inclusion of roughly \$17.1 million in proposed state funding for helping mothers and families. Unfortunately, while the state has been flush with financial resources, the Governor vetoed that funding, which included:

- A pregnancy and parenting support services program that would have provided counseling, education, and material assistance to pregnant women and their babies through twelve months after birth.
- Assistance for Michigan's network of pregnancy resource centers, which exist to help parents with the resources they need to start and raise a family, from pregnancy to birth and beyond.
- Creation of a maternal navigator pilot program to refer pregnant women for counseling, substance use disorder services, and pregnancy and parenting resources.
- Grants to help pregnant women who lack a safe home.
- Funding for colleges and universities to establish service centers for students who are pregnant or who are parents to help connect them to needed resources.

As you work to advise the Governor on policy steps needed to grow Michigan's population, the Catholic Church in Michigan encourages you to consider policies that support family life and make it easier to raise children in the state. MCC encourages the Council's workgroups to advise the Governor to support funding proposals such as the ones above that are intended to help families in need. Making it easier to start and raise a family for all people — especially the low-income, marginalized, and vulnerable — is a forward-thinking and long-term approach to help grow Michigan's population. We are reminded as a point of historical reference that both native-born and immigrant persons and families, many of whom were born materially and economically poor, contributed substantially to the growth and development of both our state and nation.

Ambassador Rakolta and Gov. Stancato, please do not hesitate to contact me if you believe we might provide greater insight on the thoughts put before you here today or any other assistance to your endeavors. Thank you for your time and consideration, and especially for your service to the people of this great state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul A. Long". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul A. Long  
President and CEO