

ADVOCACY REPORT ON THE 98TH MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2015-2016 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE



TABLE OF CONTENTS

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2015–2016 SESSION	1
----------------------------------------------	---

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM POLICY..... 3

Conscience Protection for Child Placement Providers	4
Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act	4
Religious Censorship Prohibition	5
Health Care Conscience Rights.....	5

HUMAN LIFE & DIGNITY POLICY.. 7

Abortion Coercion	8
Sale of Fetal Body Parts Ban	8
Parental Rights & Sexual Assault	9
Assisted Suicide.....	9
Death Penalty Resolution.....	10
Licensing & Funding for Abortion	10
Dismemberment Abortion	11
Emergency Contraception	11
Safe Delivery Update	12
State Contracts for Abortion Providers.....	12
Perinatal Hospice & Spina Bifida Information...	13
Vulnerable Adult Abuse.....	14
State Budget On Human Life & Dignity	15

CHILDREN & FAMILIES POLICY.... 17

Presumption of Joint Custody	18
Siblings in Foster Care Placements.....	18
Domestic Violence Package	19
Local Contracts for Victims.....	19
Domestic Abuse Victims & Cell Phone Plans...	20
Human Trafficking Hotline Posting	20
Local Expungement for Human Trafficking Victims.....	21
Felony Penalties for Sex Tourism	21
State Budget On Children & Families	22

HEALTH POLICY 25 |

Kevin’s Law	26
MI-Post.....	26
State Budget On Health Policy	27

EDUCATION POLICY 29 |

Transportation Services.....	30
School Choice for Special Needs Children.....	30

Shared Time for Kindergarten	31
EpiPen Storage & Usage	31
STEM Diploma Recognition Bills.....	32
State Budget On Education.....	32

ECONOMIC JUSTICE & REGULATORY POLICY 35 |

Earned Income Tax Credit.....	36
Homestead Tax Credit Adjustment	36
Charitable & Adoption Tax Credits	37
Tax Credits & Road Funding Legislation	37
Energy Legislation.....	38
E-Cigarettes.....	39
Open Carry Gun Law	39
Unemployment Insurance System	40
State Budget On Economic Justice & Regulatory Policies.....	41

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POLICY... 43

Compensation & Services for Wrongful Imprisonment	44
Criminal Justice Reform — Recidivism	45
Juvenile Justice Reform Package	45
Judicial Parole Veto Authority for Successor Judges.....	46

IMMIGRATION POLICY..... 49

Pause on Syrian Refugee Resettlement.....	50
Sanctuary Cities Ban.....	50
Resolution Halting Refugee Resettlement	51
Refugee Reporting Requirements.....	51
Reciprocity for Foreign Driver’s Licenses	52
Driver’s Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants	53

STATE BUDGET OVERVIEW 55 |

CATHOLIC ADVOCACY NETWORK 57 |

THE WORD FROM LANSING 58 |

FOCUS 59 |

SELECT NEWS ARTICLES 60 |



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2015–2016 SESSION

LAWMAKERS PASSED PRIORITY MEASURES TO:

- Allow faith-based child placement agencies to continue serving Michigan's vulnerable children in a manner that is consistent with their religious beliefs,
- Prevent abortion coercion and the sale of fetal body parts,
- Expand the homestead tax credit,
- Improve protections for the privacy of domestic violence victims,
- Compensate and provide services for those who have been wrongfully imprisoned,
- Expand shared time services to kindergarten, and
- Post national human trafficking hotline number in public areas.

ELECTED OFFICIALS APPROVED FUNDING TO:

- Reimburse nonpublic schools for the cost of state health, safety, and welfare requirements,
- Support women in crisis pregnancies and their children, up through their first year of life,
- Extend the Healthy Kids Dental program to low-income children in all of Michigan's counties,
- Reimburse schools who voluntarily test their water for lead,
- Help more low-income children buy weather appropriate school clothing for children,
- Allow low-income individuals to receive extra food assistance by increasing energy assistance.

MEASURES THAT FAILED TO RECEIVE CONSIDERATION AND WERE OPPOSED BY MCC WOULD HAVE:

- Eliminated the state Earned Income Tax Credit,
- Reinstated the death penalty, and
- Allowed for physician assisted suicide in Michigan.





RELIGIOUS FREEDOM POLICY

DURING THE 2015–2016 LEGISLATIVE session, Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) and local Catholic Charities agencies collaborated to advocate for a significant religious liberty priority: conscience protections for faith-based child placement agencies. Three measures signed into law early in 2015 provide legal protections for faith-based adoption and foster care agencies, ensuring they can continue offering services to Michigan’s vulnerable children, guided by their faith beliefs. The laws maintain the decades-long partnership between faith-based agencies and the State of Michigan that has been successful for children and families. MCC staff led the charge for the measure, advancing the Church’s position with legislators and staff, engaging the Catholic Advocacy Network, and working with the Capitol Press Corps to properly frame the narrative. Enactment of this legislation was a significant victory for religious liberty as people of faith are increasingly swimming upstream against an aggressive secular culture. MCC supported additional religious liberty measures that did not go as far in the process. These include measures to create a state Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), to prohibit censorship of religious references in the study of his-

torical documents in schools, and to protect health care conscience rights.

MCC also aided advocacy efforts on the federal level for religious liberty measures, when requested by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). These measures included the Conscience Protection Act, to protect religious freedom rights of health care payers and providers; the First Amendment Defense Act, to prohibit government discrimination against individuals and organizations who believe marriage is the union of one man and one woman; and the Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act, to prevent discrimination against a child welfare provider due to their religious beliefs. While Congress did not adopt these measures, grassroots response across Michigan was overwhelming. During Pope Francis’s trip to the United States, the Holy Father encouraged all to remain vigilant, “to preserve and to defend freedom from everything that would threaten or compromise it.” Fortunately, a majority of the Legislature shared the pope’s concern for religious liberty and were eager to work on the aforementioned policies.

Conscience Protection for Child Placement Providers

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 4188–4190	Protects consciences rights for faith-based agencies who work with foster care and adoption	 PASSED Families, Seniors & Human Services	 PASSED Families, Children & Seniors	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 53–55 of 2015

FAITH-BASED CHILD PLACEMENT AGENCIES have partnered successfully with the State of Michigan for decades, helping to place vulnerable children in loving homes. Michigan Catholic Conference, in conjunction with faith-based foster care and adoption agencies, led advocacy efforts for the implementation of legislation to preserve this relationship and agency conscience rights. MCC staff, representatives from St. Vincent Catholic Charities in Lansing and Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee Counties, and foster families who have worked with those agencies testified before lawmakers in support of House Bills 4188–4190. The bills were sponsored by Representatives Andrea LaFontaine (R-Memphis), Harvey Santana (D-Detroit), and Eric Leutheuser (R-Hillsdale). MCC staff also collaborated with St. Vincent Catholic Charities, Catholic Charities of Shiawassee and Genesee Counties, and Catholic Charities of Jackson, Lenawee, and Hillsdale Counties to produce a short video

about the work these agencies do and why the legislation is critical. In June 2015, Governor Rick Snyder signed the bills into law as Public Acts 53–55 of 2015.



MCC and St. Vincent Catholic Charities staff testify on behalf of HBs 4188–4190 alongside an adoptive family in a Senate Committee hearing

Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 4	Creates the Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act	 DIED Judiciary	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

IN THE 2013–2014 LEGISLATIVE session, a proposed Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA) received significant consideration. The legislation

would have protected individuals from government interference into their sincerely held religious beliefs without a compelling government interest. A simi-

lar measure received consideration this session, and in April 2015, the Senate Judiciary Committee heard testimony on the bill. Unfortunately, due to significant pushback from organizations that focused more

on scare tactics than policy, Senate Bill 4 did not receive a vote in committee. MCC supported the legislation, which was introduced by Senator Mike Shirkey (R-Clark Lake).

Religious Censorship Prohibition

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 211	Prohibits schools from censoring religious references in the study of historical documents	 PASSED Education	 PASSED Education	 SUPPORT	Died on House floor

SIMILAR TO A MEASURE debated in the 2013–2014 legislative session, Senate Bill 211 would have prohibited the censorship of religious references in historical documents during classroom instruction. School boards and officials would not have been able, for example, to omit the reference to “our Creator” from the Declaration of Independence. MCC testified in support of the legislation, citing the importance of

providing students accurate information about the history of America and of Michigan, including the role religion has played in that history. The measure, sponsored by Senator Mike Shirkey (R-Clark Lake), passed the Senate and House Education Committees but did not receive a vote before the full House before the end of session.

Health Care Conscience Rights

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4309	Provides conscience rights for health care payers, facilities, and providers	N/A	 DIED Health Policy	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS, the State of Michigan has protected health care workers and facilities from having to perform abortions through a conscience rights law. House Bill 4309 would have expanded current law to include protections against performing other non-life-threatening, elective services, including contraceptives and sterilization procedures. The legisla-

tion also shields health care providers and institutions from termination, liability, or discrimination because of their objections to certain services. MCC has supported similar measures over the years because they balance the need for religious liberty rights with the needs of the patients. This session, no action was taken on the bill.





HUMAN LIFE & DIGNITY POLICY

TREATING OTHERS WITH THE dignity and respect they deserve is a core tenet of Catholic Social Teaching. Similar to popes before him, Pope Francis has continued to draw attention to this message, challenging the world to consider its responsibility to protect and to defend human life at every stage of its development. The pope has also warned against society's tendency to see everything as disposable, replaceable, or temporary, including people. MCC staff, encouraged by the Holy Father's comments, worked to promote a culture of life, from conception until natural death, advocating for policies that recognize every person's value.

Michigan lawmakers introduced and considered a number of measures related to the dignity of the human person. The session's major victories included the passage of legislation to prevent abortion coercion, to ban the sale of fetal body parts, and to terminate the parental rights of those who sexually assault a woman, when a child is conceived. The State of Michigan also

continued to provide funding for the Michigan Pregnancy and Parenting Support program, which offers positive alternatives to women in crisis pregnancies. The program helps support women and their children up through their first year of life, providing pregnancy counseling, parenting classes, material support, and adoption information. The failure of two measures that threatened human life—one that would overturn Michigan's ban on assisted suicide and one that would overturn the state constitutional prohibition on capital punishment—were also positive outcomes in the 2015–2016 session.

Through the Catholic Advocacy Network, Catholics in Michigan participated in additional efforts to protect human life, including voicing support for a measure to defund Planned Parenthood. There continues to be great passion and support for pro-life measures across Michigan.

Abortion Coercion

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 4787, 4830	Makes intentionally coercing a pregnant woman into having an abortion against her will a criminal offense	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 149–150 of 2016

IN 2012, MICHIGAN ENACTED new measures to reform the abortion industry and to protect the dignity of women. One provision of the legislation required information and screening for coercion to be conducted prior to an abortion, but the definition was stripped out before it was signed into law. As a result, the law could not be truly implemented or enforced. During

this legislative session, Representatives Amanda Price (R-Holland) and Nancy Jenkins (R-Clayton) introduced bills to allow for full implementation of the existing law. MCC testified on behalf of House Bills 4787 and 4830, speaking to the negative impacts of abortion coercion. Governor Snyder signed the two measures into law in June 2016.

Sale of Fetal Body Parts Ban

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bills 564–565	Bans the sale of fetal tissue and body parts obtained through elective abortions	 PASSED Oversight	 PASSED Health Policy	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 386–387 of 2016
House Bills 5086–5087		N/A	 DIED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
House Bill 4831	Prohibits a person who may financially benefit from fetal tissue donation from counseling a woman considering an abortion	N/A	 DIED Health Policy	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

LAWMAKERS INTRODUCED SEVERAL MEASURES this session to ensure no one receives compensation for fetal body parts obtained from an elective abortion. Senate Bills 564–565 and House Bills 5086–5087 responded to issues brought to light nationally, which suggested that Planned Parenthood and perhaps other abortion providers were selling fetal tissue. Michigan law already prohibits such a practice, but the mea-

asures were necessary to strengthen existing penalties. Michigan Catholic Conference supported both measures, which were introduced by Senator Phil Pavlov (R-St. Clair) in the Senate and Representative John Bizon, M.D. (R-Battle Creek) in the House. At the end of session, Senate Bills 564–565 passed the Michigan Legislature and were signed into law by Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley as Public Acts 386–387 of 2016.

House Bill 4831 would have prohibited any individual who could financially benefit from obtaining fetal tissue or who retrieves and supplies fetal tissue from providing abortion counseling. Michigan Catholic

Conference supported the measure, which was sponsored by Representative Mike Callton (R-Nashville), but it did not receive a vote in the House Committee on Health Policy.

Parental Rights & Sexual Assault

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 858	Allows a court to terminate parental rights for the offending parent when a child's birth is the result of criminal sexual conduct	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 178 of 2016

RESEARCH HAS ESTIMATED THAT somewhere between 25,000 and 32,000 pregnancies result annually from rape in the United States. Seventy-three percent of the women carry their pregnancies to term, and of these seventy-three percent, sixty-four percent raise the children themselves. Threatening to assert paternity following rape is one way to coerce a woman into having an abortion or to get her to drop charges for criminal sexual conduct. Senate Bill 858, sponsored by

Senator Rick Jones (R-Grand Ledge), assists mothers who are rape survivors, as well as their children, by allowing a court to terminate the parental rights of their rapist. Rights will be terminated when a judge is presented with clear and convincing evidence of criminal sexual conduct that resulted in the child being conceived. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the legislation, which was signed into law by Governor Snyder in August 2016 as Public Act 178 of 2016.

Assisted Suicide

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 5802–5803	Allows for physician-assisted suicide for patients with less than six months to live	N/A	 DIED Health Policy	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

IN 1998, MICHIGAN VOTERS overwhelmingly defeated a ballot measure that would have legalized physician-assisted suicide. This session, Representatives Sam Singh (D-East Lansing) and Tom Cochran (D-Mason) introduced two measures to legalize the practice. Across the country, California and Colorado passed measures in 2015 and 2016 and the American

Medical Association (AMA) is currently studying the idea of changing its longstanding position against the practice to one of neutrality. Members of the Catholic Advocacy Network wrote the AMA to encourage the organization's continued opposition to assisted suicide. House Bills 5802–5803 did not receive a committee hearing.

Death Penalty Resolution

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Joint Resolution G	Allows for the death penalty for the murder of a police or corrections officer in the line of duty	 DIED Judiciary	N/A	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

EARLY IN THE 2015–2016 session, former Senator Virgil Smith (D-Detroit) introduced Senate Joint Resolution G to allow for the death penalty for someone who murders a police or corrections officer in the line of duty. In order to overturn Michigan’s long-standing constitutional prohibition against capital punishment, the resolution would have required a two-thirds ma-

majority vote in both the State House and Senate, as well as a majority vote of the people in the next election. The Senate Judiciary Committee did not consider the resolution. Regardless, MCC staff spoke out strongly against the measure, declaring in a press release that MCC would devote “the full weight of its organization” to oppose the bill.

Licensing & Funding for Abortion

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 573	Prohibits facilities who are required to be licensed as free-standing surgical outpatient facilities from performing surgical abortions until they’ve obtained the proper license	 DIED Oversight	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
Senate Bill 575	Prohibits the State from allocating funds to an entity that considers elective abortion to be a part of the continuum of health care for family planning or comprehensive reproductive health services	 DIED Oversight	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

TWO MEASURES SPONSORED BY Senators Judy Emmons (R-Sheridan) and Patrick Colbeck (R-Canton) addressed licensing and state funding for facilities that provide abortion. Senate Bill 573 would have amended the 2012 abortion clinic regulations in order to ensure facilities which are required to be free-standing surgical outpatient facilities do not continue per-

forming surgical abortions until they have obtained the appropriate license. Senate Bill 575 prohibits the State from allocating funds to entities that consider elective abortion a part of their continuum of health care for family planning or comprehensive reproductive health services. MCC supported the bills, which died in the Senate Oversight Committee.

Dismemberment Abortion

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bills 704–705	Amends the current state ban on partial-birth abortion to include a ban on dismemberment abortion	 DIED Health Policy	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
House Bills 4833–4834		N/A	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Died on House floor

SENATE BILLS 704 AND 705, sponsored by Senator Tom Casperson (R-Escanaba), and House Bills 4833 and 4834, sponsored by Representative Laura Cox (R-Livonia), amend the state ban on partial-birth abortion to include a later term abortion procedure, Dilation and Evacuation (D & E). This procedure entails dismembering and removing a living fetus piece-by-

piece. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the bills, which pose a number of risks to women. House Bills 4833–4834 passed the House Criminal Justice Committee, but did not receive further consideration this legislative session. Senate Bills 704–705 died in the Senate Health Policy Committee.

Emergency Contraception

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bills 172, 736	Distributes information on emergency contraception (EC) to health facilities/agencies; requires those that provide emergency care to provide information on EC to victims of criminal sexual conduct	 DIED Health Policy	N/A	 OPPOSE	Died in committee
House Bill 4218		N/A	 DIED Health Policy	 OPPOSE	Died in committee
House Bill 4717		N/A	 DIED Appropriations	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

LAWMAKERS IN BOTH THE Michigan House and Senate this session introduced bills on the topic of emergency contraception. Among other aspects, the legislation would have required the Department of Health and Human Services to create and distribute information about emergency contraception to Michigan’s health facilities and agencies. The measures also would have called for health facilities and agencies to

provide information on emergency contraception to sexual assault victims. Senate Bills 172 and 736, as well as House Bills 4218 and 4717, were sponsored by Senators Bert Johnson (D-Highland Park) and Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor) and Representatives Marcia Hovey-Wright and Charles Smiley (D-Grand Blanc). Each died in their respective committees without a hearing.

Safe Delivery Update

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 5902	Updates Michigan's Safe Delivery law to provide for greater anonymity	N/A	✘ DIED Health Policy	▲ SUPPORT	Died in committee

IN 2000, THE STATE of Michigan enacted a Safe Delivery law. This law allows for the safe, legal, and anonymous surrender of an infant, from birth to 72 hours of age, to an emergency service provider, such as a fire department, hospital, or police station. Over 150 safe deliveries have taken place in Michigan as a result of this law. Representative Amanda Price (R-Holland)

sponsored House Bill 5902 this session in order to provide greater anonymity for parents. The bill allows for the parents to be listed as unknown on the report and the baby to be listed as baby Doe. MCC is supportive of the measure, which died without a hearing in the House Health Policy Committee.

State Contracts for Abortion Providers

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4145	Prohibits all state funding, including grants or contracts, from going to abortion providers	N/A	✘ DIED	▲ SUPPORT	Died in committee

HOUSE BILL 4145, SPONSORED by Representative Tom Hooker (R-Byron Center), would have prohibited all state funding, including grants or contracts, from going to abortion providers. The House Appropriations Committee held a hearing on this bill on January 27, 2016. Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) testified at that time in support of the measure, which did not pass out of the committee due to complexities of the nature of the funding.



The House Appropriations Committee was full during testimony on HB 4145

Perinatal Hospice & Spina Bifida Information

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 287	Provides parents who receive a poor prenatal diagnosis with medically-accurate information	 DIED Health Policy	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
House Bill 5065		N/A	 DIED Health Policy	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
House Bill 5098	Requires medically accurate information to be given to parents of children with spina bifida	N/A	 DIED Health Policy	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

SENATE BILL 287 AND House Bill 5065 sought to help expectant parents who receive a variety of poor prenatal diagnoses. The measures, introduced by Senator Jim Marleau (R-Lake Orion) and Representative Jason Sheppard (R-Lambertville), would have provided parents with medically-accurate information about treatment, support, and assistance, as well as perinatal hospice programs. MCC has consistently supported such legislation to provide parents with relevant information and support, as well as the opportunity to go through the natural grieving process with children

likely to die before or slightly after birth. Both of the bills died in committee.

A similar measure, House Bill 5098, sought to provide parents with the most updated and medically accurate information about spina bifida. The diagnosis can be overwhelming for expectant or new parents, and Michigan Catholic Conference is supportive of measures that help parents know about potential treatment and support programs or services. The measure, which was sponsored by Representative Henry Vaupel (R-Fowlerville), did not pass this session.

Vulnerable Adult Abuse

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 4550, 5420	Expands the definition of vulnerable adult abuse	N/A	 RE-REFERRED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
House Bill 5422		 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 480 of 2016
Senate Bills 49–50	Prohibits assault/abuse of elder and vulnerable adults; prescribes penalties for those crimes	 PASSED Judiciary	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died on Senate floor

MICHIGAN PROTECTS VULNERABLE ADULTS under a law enacted in 1994. To be considered vulnerable, an adult must require supervision or personal care or must lack the skills to live independently due to age, developmental disability, mental illness or physical handicaps. A number of bills were considered throughout this session to expand the definitions and penalties for vulnerable adult abuse. These measures were sponsored by former Senator Virgil Smith (D-Detroit), former Representative Derek Miller (D-Warren), and Representatives Peter Lucido (R-Shelby Township) and John Chirkun (D-Roseville). By the end of the 2015–2016 session, Representative Chirkun’s HB 5422 passed the Michigan Legislature. Governor Snyder signed it into law as Public Act 480 of 2016.



Pregnancy & Parenting Support Program

SINCE 2014, THE MICHIGAN Pregnancy and Parenting Support Program has provided support to women in crisis pregnancies. The program promotes alternatives to abortion and provides assistance to women and their babies through twelve months after birth. At the time of this writing, several local Catholic Charities agencies have contracted with the Pennsylvania-based vendor Real Alternatives, which was selected by the State of Michigan to administer the program. Those include Catholic Charities of Southeast Michigan, Catholic Charities West Michigan, Catholic Charities Diocese of Kalamazoo, St. Vincent Catholic Charities in Lansing, and Catholic Social Services of Washtenaw County, in addition to several other pregnancy resource centers.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133, Section 1307:

- Includes \$50,000 for the Real Alternatives program.
- Allows for carry-over funds from previous fiscal years to be combined with the new funding to assist pregnant women and their babies.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2016—HB 5294, Section 1307:

- Provides \$400,000 in federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding to continue the program, which is now entering its fourth budget year.







CHILDREN & FAMILIES POLICY

STRENGTHENING MARRIAGES AND FAMILIES has a positive impact on society. Between general audiences, the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia, and the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis has spoken often about the importance of families and the challenges that surround them in today's society. In 2015, Michigan Catholic Conference partnered with the seven (arch)dioceses to participate in a Year for Marriage throughout the state. The year celebrated the Church's teaching on marriage as the union of one man and one woman. While the Supreme Court decision in 2015 allowed for state recognition of same-sex marriage, the Catholic Church remains committed to its teaching and the importance of mothers and fathers for children. The Year for Marriage provided opportunities to celebrate married couples and families and included the creation of TV commercials and a website with marriage resources (www.michigancelebratesmarriage.com).

Michigan Catholic Conference's advocacy regarding children and families focused on several issues throughout the 2015–2016 legislative session, including promoting traditional marriage, preserving the partnership between faith-based agencies and the State of Michigan in child placement services, and advocating for policies which protect the family. MCC staff saw a number of successes in legislation to address domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking, all of which harm children and families. The Michigan Legislature and Governor Snyder approved two bipartisan packages of bills on these topics. The first allows domestic abuse victims to legally separate a cell phone plan from their abuser's name and the second updates existing law to better protect victim privacy. The two state budgets this session (2015–2016, 2016–2017) also included funding for human trafficking prosecution and awareness efforts. All of these measures protect and serve the children and families of Michigan, especially the most vulnerable.

Siblings in Foster Care Placements

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 5521	Requires agencies to make reasonable efforts to keep siblings together in the same foster placements	N/A Went directly to the Committee of the Whole	 PASSED Judiciary	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 190–191 of 2016
Senate Bill 483		 PASSED Families, Seniors, & Human Services	 PASSED Judiciary	 SUPPORT	

LAWMAKERS CONSIDERED AND APPROVED bills that call for agencies to make reasonable efforts to keep siblings together in the same foster placement. The measure calls for visits between siblings if joint placement is not possible, unless the visits would be contrary to the safety or well-being of the children.

House Bill 5521, sponsored by Representative Klint Kesto (R-Commerce Township), and Senate Bill 483, sponsored by Senator Rick Jones (R-Grand Ledge), received wide support in both chambers. The bills have now become law as Public Acts 190–191 of 2016.

Domestic Violence Package

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 4476–4481, 4788	Updates and enhances existing domestic violence laws	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 87–88, 91, 93–96 of 2016

LAWMAKERS CREATED THIS BIPARTISAN package of bills to provide greater support for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. Specifically, the measures better protect victims' privacy, increase penalties for those who assault a pregnant woman, and allow a Personal Protection Order (PPO) to include a pet, among other aspects. Michigan Catholic Confer-

ence advocated for its passage. Representatives Harvey Santana (D-Detroit), Klint Kesto (R-Commerce Township), Robert Kosowski (D-Westland), Amanda Price (R-Holland), Kurt Heise (R-Plymouth), and Lisa Posthumus Lyons (R-Alto) sponsored the measures. The measures became Public Acts 87–88, 91, 93–96 of 2016 in May 2016.

Local Contracts for Victims

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4563	Allows township boards to appropriate or spend money for a contract to provide services to victims of domestic or sexual violence	 PASSED Local Government	 PASSED Local Government	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 248 of 2015

HOUSE BILL 4563, SPONSORED by Representative Eric Leutheuser (R-Hillsdale), allows a township board to contract with private nonprofit organizations that provide services to victims of domestic violence or sexual assault. These services could include safe emergency

shelters, a 24-hour crisis hotline, support counseling, and legal advocacy. In December 2015, Governor Snyder signed the bill into law as Public Act 248 of 2016, which MCC supported.

Domestic Abuse Victims & Cell Phone Plans

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 5641–5642	Allows domestic abuse victims to legally separate a cell phone plan from their abuser’s name	 PASSED Communications & Technology	 PASSED Communications & Technology	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 269–270 of 2016

IN JULY OF 2016, Michigan enacted two measures to protect domestic violence victims from further danger and potential violence. House Bills 5641–5642, now Public Acts 269–270 of 2016, allow domestic abuse victims to legally separate from a cell phone plan in their abuser’s name. The victim will be able to

request a court order to do so when they apply for a Personal Protection Order (PPO), and then cell phone providers can transfer the number and set up a separate account. MCC supported the measures, which were introduced by Representatives Tom Barrett (R-Pottersville) and Vanessa Guerra (D-Bridgeport).

Human Trafficking Hotline Posting

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 5107	Requires public posting of a notice on human trafficking in certain places	 PASSED Families, Seniors, & Human Services	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 62 of 2016.

AS A RESULT OF legislation adopted this session, a number of public areas are now required to post notices on human trafficking. Michigan rest stops, public bus and rail stations, public airports and adult entertainment establishments, among others, are posting this information in English and Spanish, including the phone number for the national human traffick-

ing hotline. Representative Kurt Heise (R-Plymouth) introduced the bill, with helpful amendments from Representatives Vanessa Guerra (D-Bridgeport) and Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit) that allowed for materials to be created in other languages as needed. Governor Snyder signed the bill into law as Public Act 62 of 2016.

Local Expungement for Human Trafficking Victims

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 5542–5544	Allows human trafficking victims to request the removal of prostitution-related offenses under local ordinances from their record	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 336–338 of 2016

IN 2014, MICHIGAN ENACTED laws that allowed for human trafficking victims to expunge certain convictions under the state penal code. House Bills 5542–5544 allow victims to also potentially set aside criminal convictions for local ordinance-related prostitution offenses, which was recommended by the state Human Trafficking Commission. These mea-

asures were sponsored by Representatives Laura Cox (R-Livonia), Gary Howell (R-Lapeer County), and Nancy Jenkins (R-Clayton) and were supported by MCC staff. They received unanimous approval in the House and Senate. Governor Snyder signed the bills into law as Public Acts 336–338 of 2016.

Felony Penalties for Sex Tourism

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 5838–5839	Addresses the issue of sex tourism; introduces felony penalties	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 485–486 of 2016

HOUSE BILLS 5838 AND 5839 prohibit and prescribe felony penalties for selling or offering to sell travel services for the purpose of engaging in prostitution or human trafficking. For example, traffickers often arrange for workers in the sex trade to be brought to high profile events, like Art Prize, the Detroit Auto Show, and major sporting events. The penalty for

travel agencies or individuals who knowingly arrange or coordinate such travel would be a 5 year/\$10,000 felony, or 10 year/\$15,000 if the offense involved a minor. The two measures are sponsored by Representatives Tom Barrett (R-Pottersville) and Jason Sheppard (R-Lambertville). MCC staff supported the bills, which were signed into law as Public Acts 485–486 of 2016.

STATE BUDGET ON CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Human Trafficking Funding

THE STATE OF MICHIGAN has increased funding for human trafficking related efforts, including expenditures to help the Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking that was formed in 2014. The funding assists the Commission in carrying out necessary public awareness efforts, evaluation of services for victims, research programs on human trafficking, and identifying sources of grant funding.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133, Section 114:

- Includes \$200,000 for intervention services.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2015—HB 5294, Sections 102, 105, and 113:

- Includes \$200,000 for intervention services.
- Provides \$390,000 for the prosecution of human trafficking cases.
- Allocates \$500,000 for special human trafficking projects.

Foster Care Administrative Rates

IN BOTH OF THE budget cycles this session, the per diem administrative rates for private foster care agencies were included. These increases assist private foster care agencies in their care of Michigan's most vulnerable children.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133:

- Allows for a rate of \$40/day per child.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2015—HB 5294:

- Allows for a rate of \$45/day per child.



A foster child painting at Catholic Charities of Jackson, Lenawee, and Hillsdale Counties



HEALTH POLICY

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE is a basic right. For decades, the Catholic Church has provided health care services to all those in need, not just those who are able to afford them. During the 2015–2016 legislative session, MCC staff advocated for increased health care access for the vulnerable in society and for the protection of conscience rights in the health care setting.

MCC supported several items in the state budget related to health care policy, including the expansion of Healthy Kids Dental for low-income kids. As a result, children in all eighty-three Michigan counties are now able to receive necessary dental services for healthy teeth and gums. Staff also monitored efforts related to the state's expanded Medicaid program, Healthy Michigan, which was approved in 2013. Healthy Michigan provides access to health care for those earning up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level and has been popular in the state with over 600,000 enrollees. In 2015, Michigan had to apply for

a waiver from the federal government to maintain some of the unique provisions of the program, and staff asked for members of the Catholic Advocacy Network to encourage approval of the waiver so the program would continue.

Staff also supported improvements to mental health treatment. House Bill 4674 updated Kevin's Law, allowing friends and family to petition for someone close to them to receive necessary mental health treatment before a negative incident occurs. Under the simplified law, judges could order outpatient treatment for those with mental illness, addressing gaps in treatment and getting people the help they need before they harm themselves or others. Discussions also took place to examine how Michigan could improve coordination between behavioral and physical health to treat patients in a more comprehensive way and deliver services more efficiently.

Kevin's Law

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 858	Simplifies Kevin's Law; encourages use of assisted outpatient treatment programs for those with mental illness	 PASSED Health Policy	 PASSED Health Policy	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 320 of 2016

IN 2004, THE MICHIGAN Legislature amended the Mental Health Code with measures now known as Kevin's Law. These statutes authorize courts and community mental health agencies to develop assisted outpatient treatment programs that can be used in lieu of hospitalization for people who fail to comply with prescribed treatments. Probate court judges could then order treatment for individuals with serious mental illness who did not meet the traditional statutory criteria for involuntary hospitalization but who needed mandated outpatient mental health treatment to protect themselves and others. Results

from a 2014 survey showed, however, that the law was not often used due to its complexity. Michigan Lieutenant Governor Brian Calley convened a special task force to make recommendations to improve Kevin's Law. Representative Tom Leonard (R-DeWitt) introduced House Bill 4764 as a response to the task force's recommendations. The bill helps clarify Kevin's Law, establishes a process for early intervention, and encourages its use of assisted outpatient treatment programs. MCC supported the measure, which was signed by Governor Snyder into law as Public Act 320 of 2016.

MI-Post

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 5479–5482	Provides for a physician orders for a scope of treatment (POST) form.	N/A	 PASSED Judiciary	 SUPPORT	Died on House floor

LAWMAKERS INTRODUCED FOUR BILLS in March 2016 to allow for the creation of Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment (POST) in Michigan, which are physician's orders for a patient at their end of life. These orders would have been valid across healthcare settings, through use of a standardized form. A patient must be someone with an advanced illness which is not curable and through which death is anticipated, or a person with a medical condition that compromises one's health so that death within one year from that condition is likely. The purpose of the policy is to document patients' wishes for treatment or nontreatment,

as a medical order, prior to an incident. Michigan Catholic Conference staff participated in a workgroup that developed guidelines for the implementation of a MI-POST program and consulted regularly with the National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) and Catholic hospitals to ensure that necessary protections were added. Representatives Tom Cochran (D-Mason), Mike Callton (R-Nashville), Laura Cox (R-Livonia), and Jim Tedder (R-Clarkston) sponsored House Bills 5479–5482, which passed the House Judiciary Committee but did not receive further consideration.

Healthy Kids Dental Program

THE HEALTHY KIDS DENTAL Program provides low-income children access to dental services. The program was created through partnership between the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services and Delta Dental. Prior to this legislative session, the program existed in eighty of Michigan's eighty-three counties. During 2015–2016, lawmakers expanded the program to the remaining three counties, Kent, Oakland, and Wayne, to serve all of Michigan's low-income children (ages 0–20).

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133, Section 1894:

- Allocates \$168 million for the Healthy Kids Dental program.
- Expands the program to include low-income children under the age of 13 in Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2016—HB 5294, Section 1894:

- Allocates \$193 million for the Healthy Kids Dental program.
- Expands the program by \$25 million to include low-income children ages 13–20 in Kent, Oakland, and Wayne Counties.

Behavioral Health Funding

DURING THIS LEGISLATIVE SESSION, elected officials examined ways to improve coordination between behavioral and physical health treatment. By improving this coordination, the needs of the whole person can be considered, rather than treating patients with mental illnesses, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and substance use disorders compartmentally. Discussions about behavioral health also centered around how the state should distribute over \$2 billion in federal Medicaid dollars, cut administrative costs, and improve service delivery to about 200,000 patients across the state.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133:

- N/A

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2016—HB 5294, Section 298:

- Included funding for a workgroup to develop recommendations for coordinating physical and behavioral health. The workgroup was charged with finding the most effective financing model and policies to implement a more person-centered system. The workgroup issued its interim recommendations in late December, stating that Michigan should retain the current system structure of Medicaid funding, keeping physical and mental health funding systems separate. More discussion about these ideas will likely be had in January, when the final report is issued.







EDUCATION POLICY

EDUCATION IS ONE OF the most important tools society has as it encourages the development of critical thinking and values in students. For low-income families, a good education is also an opportunity to rise out of poverty. The Catholic Church teaches that parents are the primary educators of their children, responsible for choosing options that will help their children grow academically, socially, emotionally, and morally. In Michigan, lawmakers face significant obstacles when considering policies that provide for and expand school choice. The State Constitution currently prohibits public funding to be allocated for the purpose of supporting nonpublic school employment or student attendance. Despite these challenges, the 2015–2016 session saw the achievement of many of MCC-supported education policies.

MCC's priority educational achievement during the past two years was the inclusion of \$2.5 million in the state budget for nonpublic schools. Lawmakers included this funding in the Fiscal Year 2017 state

budget (October 2016–September 2017) to reimburse nonpublic schools for expenses related to state-mandated health, safety, and welfare requirements. These requirements include tasks such as performing criminal background checks for staff, conducting school safety drills, and maintaining immunization records. Staff fought strongly for this funding, which recognizes all children deserve to be cared for and supported, regardless of where they attend school.

Additionally, Michigan lawmakers approved the expansion of shared time services to include kindergarten, clarified the ability of nonpublic school students to utilize public school transportation services, and provided funding for low-income students through the Tuition Grant and Tuition Incentive Programs. All students deserve opportunities, not just those who attend certain types of school or live in certain geographical areas, and this legislative session recognized that fact.

Transportation Services

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 1046	Codifies the eligibility of nonpublic students to receive transportation services similar to that of their public school classmates	 PASSED Education	 DIED Education	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
House Bill 5753		 PASSED Education	 PASSED Education	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 428 of 2016

ARTICLE VIII SECTION 2 of the Michigan Constitution allows the Michigan Legislature to provide for the transportation of students to and from any school, including nonpublic schools. Under the Michigan School Code, public school districts that provide transportation services to their students must also provide transportation to those who attend a nonpublic school located in the district. As a result, public school districts are eligible to receive state aid for transportation. Since 1994, the School Aid budget has not included funding specifically to reimburse public schools for student transportation, which has created confusion about whether nonpublic school students can receive equal transportation services. House Bill 5753, sponsored by Representative Amanda Price (R-Holland), and Senate Bill 1046, sponsored by Senator Patrick Colbeck, both clarified the law. Michigan

Catholic Conference strongly advocated for the bills, and House Bill 5753 became law as Public Act 428 of 2016.



MCC staff testifies on behalf of the transportation services measure in the Senate Education Committee

School Choice for Special Needs Children

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Joint Resolution B	Requires financial support for children with special needs to attend the school of their choice	N/A	 PASSED Education	 SUPPORT	Died on House floor

IN JANUARY 2016, REPRESENTATIVE Tim Kelly (R-Saginaw) introduced House Joint Resolution B to amend the Michigan Constitution and require the Michigan Legislature to provide financial support for children

with special needs to attend the school of their choice. If a child chose to go to a nonpublic school, the support they would receive could not exceed the amount that would be used for that child at a public school.

Michigan's Constitution is one of the strictest in the nation about prohibiting aid, direct or indirect, to nonpublic schools. Therefore, the resolution would have required voter approval at the next general election if passed by the Legislature. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the resolution during a House

Education Committee meeting in April 2016, as it would have given parents choices for the type of education that is best for their child. While the committee approved the resolution by a 10-6 vote, the full House did not consider it further.

Shared Time for Kindergarten

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 4594, 4790	Expands shared time services to include kindergarten instruction	 PASSED Education	 PASSED Education	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Acts 222–223 of 2015

PRIOR TO THE 2015–2016 legislative session, Michigan law allowed nonpublic and homeschool students in grades 1–12 to receive shared time services. Through these services, nonpublic and homeschool students are able to take additional non-core cases, such as art, music, foreign language, or gym that otherwise would not have been offered to them. All eligible courses must be secular in nature and taught by a certified

teacher of the public school district. This successful policy has benefitted both public school teachers and nonpublic schools. Representative Ed McBroom (R-Vulcan) introduced bills this year with Michigan Catholic Conference support to expand shared time to include kindergarten instruction. Governor Snyder signed the measures, which passed the Legislature unanimously, into law as Public Acts 222–223 of 2015.

EpiPen Storage & Usage

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4438	Allows authorized entities to obtain, store, and use EpiPens; provides liability coverage to these entities	 PASSED Health Policy	 PASSED Health Policy	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 221 of 2015

IN 2013, THE MICHIGAN Legislature approved legislation to allow public school personnel to use Epinephrine Auto-Injectors (EpiPens) for students who need them. EpiPens are commonly used during potentially life-threatening allergic reactions. The law requires public schools to stock EpiPens and train their staff, while also providing them with liability coverage. This year, Michigan Catholic Conference worked with

Representative Lisa Posthumus Lyons (R-Alto) on the passage of House Bill 4438, which added “religious institutions and nonpublic schools” to the list of authorized entities that could voluntarily obtain, stock, and use the EpiPens, as well as receive liability coverage. Governor Snyder signed the measure into law as Public Act 221 of 2015.

STEM Diploma Recognition Bills

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bills 169–170	Allows for high school graduates to receive a STEM recognition on their diplomas	 PASSED Education	 DIED Education/ Workforce & Talent Development	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

SENATE BILLS 169–170, SPONSORED by Senator John Proos (R-St. Joseph), would have allowed individuals to receive a recognition on their diplomas if they met certain STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) requirements. All eligible students,

regardless of whether they attend public, nonpublic, or homeschool, could have received this designation. MCC supported the measure, which passed the Senate and died in the House Workforce Development and Talent Committee.

STATE BUDGET ON EDUCATION

Education Mandate Funding

EACH YEAR, NONPUBLIC SCHOOLS complete a number of general health, safety, and welfare requirements from the State. These include tasks such as conducting fire and lockdown drills, performing criminal background checks on staff, and maintaining student immunization records. While public schools receive state funding through a per pupil foundation allowance, nonpublic schools do not. Funding included to reimburse nonpublic schools for the costs of state mandates helps to ensure all of Michigan’s children are cared for and safe. Michigan Catholic Conference staff worked diligently for the last three budget cycles to include state funding for this purpose.



FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 85 of 2015—HB 4115:

- N/A

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act of 2016—SB 801, Section 152b:

- Offers \$2.5 million for nonpublic schools to apply for after completing state health, safety, and welfare mandates.

Tuition Grant & Tuition Incentive

TWO PROGRAMS WITHIN THE state budget help low-income students with the costs of college tuition. The Tuition Grant Program allows eligible low-income students to receive financial aid to attend one of Michigan's independent colleges or universities. The Tuition Incentive Program incentivizes completion of high school by providing Medicaid-eligible students with tuition assistance for the first two years of college.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 85 of 2015—HB 4115, Section 236:

- Provides \$34 million for the Tuition Grant Program.
- Includes \$48.5 million for the Tuition Incentive Program.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 249 of 2016—SB 801, Section 236:

- Provides \$35 million for the Tuition Grant Program.
- Includes \$53 million for the Tuition Incentive Program.

Lead Testing & School Safety

DURING THE 2016–2017 STATE budget discussions, two specific policies allowed for nonpublic schools to receive funding for safety needs. The first policy reimburses public and nonpublic schools on a voluntary basis for the cost of testing their water for lead. The second, the school safety grant from the Department of Michigan State Police, provides competitive grants for schools to purchase technology and equipment to improve building, student, and staff safety.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133:

- N/A

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2016—HB 5294, Sections 201 and 107:

- Reimburses schools for the cost of testing water for lead, up to \$950/school.
- Provides \$2 million in grant funding for school safety initiatives.

Dual Enrollment

DUAL ENROLLMENT FUNDING THAT has been included over the years for nonpublic school students allows individuals to take community college or university classes for college credit, while still in high school.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133, Section 108:

- Provides \$1.5 million for nonpublic school students.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2016—HB 5294, Section 108:

- Maintains \$1.5 million for nonpublic school students.





ECONOMIC JUSTICE & REGULATORY POLICY

A CLEAR INDICATOR OF a moral society is the manner by which it cares for its most vulnerable members. The Catholic Church teaches that all persons are to be treated with dignity and respect, and opportunities should be provided to assist the vulnerable in caring for their basic needs. These needs include food, clothing, shelter, education, access to health care, and employment. While in the United States, Pope Francis had lunch with the homeless in Washington D.C., setting a strong example of the need to encounter others, regardless of their circumstances.

Michigan Catholic Conference staff advocated for a number of economic justice policies in the state budget. Funding for the children's clothing allowance helps low-income families purchase weather appropriate and warm clothing for children to wear to school, and in the Fiscal Year 2017 budget, Michigan was able to expand the number of children eligible for the program. Towards the end of the legislative ses-

sion, a bipartisan group of lawmakers supported the inclusion of Heat and Eat policies in a supplemental budget, allowing Michigan to pull down more federal food assistance for low-income residents by providing additional energy assistance from the state.

During the two-year session, staff also placed a strong emphasis on the protection and expansion of tax credits that have proven to help Michigan families. Two such credits included the Homestead Tax Credit, which was expanded to help more Michigan senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, and the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which was protected from full elimination. In consideration of other legislation as well, such as changes to energy regulations, Michigan Catholic Conference spoke to the needs of the poor in legislative decisions.

Earned Income Tax Credit

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4609	Eliminates the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income workers	 PASSED Government Operations	 PASSED Roads & Economic Development	 OPPOSE	Died on Senate floor

IN THE 2008 TAX year, Michigan began offering a refundable credit on state income tax, allowing those who qualified to receive twenty percent of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). The state EITC incentivizes work and assists low income individuals and families on a path to self-sufficiency. After Michigan's tax code was rewritten in 2011, the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was cut dramatically from twenty percent of the federal credit to six percent. MCC staff helped to preserve the credit from full elimination. This session, Representative Jeff Farrington (R-Utica) introduced House Bill 4609, a measure to again consider elimination of the state EITC. MCC strongly advocated for its preservation, testifying in the House and Senate Committees and joining with other advocates in a press conference about the state credit's benefits. While the measure passed the House and the Senate Government Operations Committee, MCC helped to prevent a vote in the Senate.



Michigan Catholic Conference staff testified in opposition to the elimination of the state EITC before the House Roads and Economic Development Committee

Homestead Tax Credit Adjustment

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4871	Requires the amount of the Homestead Property Tax Credit and qualifying criteria to be adjusted annually for inflation	N/A	 RE-REFERRED Tax Policy	 SUPPORT	Died in House committee

HOUSE BILL 4871, SPONSORED by Representative Martin Howrylak (R-Troy), would have allowed for an increase in the Homestead Property Tax Credit by adjusting it annually for inflation. MCC supported this change, which would have addressed the economic

reality for Michigan's low-income families and senior citizens as day-to-day costs rise. The measure received consideration in the House Tax Policy Committee but did not pass out of the committee.

Charitable & Adoption Tax Credits

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 462	Creates a tax credit for charitable donations to food banks, homeless shelters, and community foundations	 PASSED Finance	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died on Senate floor
Senate Bill 463	Restores the income tax credit for qualified adoption expenses in a tax year	 PASSED Finance	N/A	 SUPPORT	Died on Senate floor

IN 2011, GOVERNOR SNYDER and the Michigan Legislature revamped the Michigan tax code, eliminating many tax credits and reducing taxes on businesses. While Michigan Catholic Conference staff was able to help save the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) from complete elimination, other credits to help low income individuals and families were cut. Two measures considered during the 2015–2016 year would have restored charitable donation and adoption credits. Senate Bill 462, sponsored by Senator Tonya Schuitmaker (R-Lawton), would have allowed a fifty

percent credit on a cash donation or the actual value of a food donation or a donation to a food bank or shelter, capped at \$100 for an individual or \$200 for a joint filing. Senate Bill 463, sponsored by Senator Geoff Hansen (R-Hart), would have restored the income tax credit for qualified adoption expenses in a tax year, up to \$1,200 per child. MCC supported both credits in the Senate Finance Committee, which encourage donations to charity and support those who choose adoption to provide for their children. Unfortunately, the measures died on the Senate floor.

Tax Credits & Road Funding Legislation

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4370	Expands the number of senior citizens and disabled homeowners that qualify for the Homestead Property Tax Credit	N/A Went directly to the Committee of the Whole	 PASSED Tax Policy	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 179 of 2015

IN MAY 2015, A statewide ballot proposal to raise funds for transportation was defeated by voters. Following the defeat of that proposal, lawmakers passed a revised package to appropriate funding for transportation and infrastructure repair. One component of this package expanded the number of senior citizens and disabled owners that could qualify for the Homestead

Property Tax Credit, helping to provide needed tax relief in light of other measures in the package. The credit helps low- and middle-income Michigan residents deal with large changes to the taxes on their home or rental property, and MCC supported its passage. In November 2015, Michigan Legislature approved House Bill 4370, sponsored by Representative

Holly Hughes (R-Montague), which expanded those who qualified for the Homestead Property Tax Credit. Governor Snyder signed the bill into law as Public Act 149 of 2015.

Note: The previous May 2015 statewide ballot proposal for transportation funding was defeated by approximately an eighty to twenty percent margin. The proposal included several policy measures. Among

these measures was a provision to restore the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to its 2011 level at twenty percent of the federal credit. Staff encouraged the measure's adoption, whether it was tied to efforts to raise revenues for the roads or not, because of the assistance it provided to vulnerable citizens. While MCC did not take a position on the ballot proposal, the organization supported efforts to expand the state EITC because it provided assistance to low-income workers.

Energy Legislation

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bills 437–438	Modifies electric utility integrated resource plan requirements and customer choice programs	 PASSED Energy & Technology	N/A Went directly to the Committee of the Whole	 OPPOSE	Signed into law as Public Acts 341–342 of 2016
House Bill 4298	Eliminates ability for other companies to compete with incumbent utilities on the sale of electricity	N/A	 PASSED Energy Policy	 OPPOSE	Died on House floor

OVER THE 2015–2016 SESSION, discussions took place in the House and Senate about how to best meet the energy capacity needs of the state going forward. Senate Bills 437 and 438, introduced by Senators John Proos (R-St. Joseph) and Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek), raised several concerns for MCC staff. In original form, the bills effectively eliminated electric choice in Michigan, choice that has allowed schools, churches, and businesses across Michigan to access more affordable energy and receive significant savings since 2002. MCC staff worked with lawmakers and other interested groups to ensure the needs of low-income ratepayers and the environment were considered. By the end of the legislative session, a compromise was reached to approve the measures. The compromise addressed

many of MCC concerns with the bills, removing fees and restrictions on alternative energy suppliers and energy choice customers, eliminating a surcharge on those who generate their own power and place excess generation into the grid (net metering), and increasing the percentage of energy that utilities must generate from renewable resources from ten to fifteen percent by 2021. The measures passed the Senate and House, and Governor Snyder signed the bills into law as Public Acts 341–342 of 2016. House Bill 4298, sponsored by Representative Aric Nesbitt (R-Lawton), was also introduced on this topic, but its strict restrictions on energy choice, among other aspects, limited its feasibility early on.

E-Cigarettes

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 231	Regulates e-cigarettes as vapor products (not tobacco products) and prohibits the sale of e-cigarettes to minors	 PASSED Judiciary	 DIED Regulatory Reform	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

OVER THE PAST SEVERAL years, Michigan Catholic Conference has expressed support for measures that prohibit the sale of e-cigarettes to minors. While Senate Bill 231, sponsored by Senator Rick Jones (R-Grand Ledge), did include this prohibition, the measure regulated e-cigarettes as vapor products, not tobacco products. Conference staff did not believe this type of regulation did enough to protect children

and thus opposed the bill. MCC joined with a number of groups, such as the American Heart Association, the American Lung Association, the Michigan Health and Hospital Association, and the Michigan State Medical Society in a letter to explain concerns with the legislation. Senate Bill 231 passed the Senate but did not receive the necessary support to pass the House Regulatory Reform Committee.

Open Carry Gun Law

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 442	Prohibits open-carry of firearms in certain areas, but does allow for concealed carry in those areas	 PASSED Judiciary	N/A	 OPPOSE	Died on Senate floor

IN 2000, A LAW passed by the Michigan Legislature allowed for the creation of “gun-free zones,” such as churches, stadiums, hospitals, schools, and taverns. Another section of that law says individuals with a concealed carry permit are able to carry openly in these zones, unless prohibited by a private property owner. During this legislative session, a bill was introduced to prohibit individuals with a concealed carry permit to carry openly in “gun-free zones,” instead allowing them to carry concealed. MCC legal counsel stated that in response to this change in law, churches and nonpublic schools would need to post an an-

nouncement, signage, or personally inform an individual of the policy. Staff testified against Senate Bill 442, sponsored by Senator Mike Green (R-Mayville), as it would be difficult for private property owners to enforce under the new legislation if they are unable to see the weapon. MCC suggested that an amendment be introduced saying that unless an owner or agent stated that they allowed guns on the premise, weapons would not be permitted on private property, including churches and nonpublic schools. The bill passed the Senate Judiciary Committee but did not receive a vote on the full Senate floor.

Unemployment Insurance System

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 4982	Requires additional notice and examination for fraud determination for unemployment insurance benefit claims	 PASSED Government Operations	 PASSED Oversight & Ethics	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 522 of 2016

HOUSE BILL 4982, SPONSORED by Representative Roger Victory (R-Hudsonville), changes how the Unemployment Insurance Agency deals with potential fraud cases of unemployment benefits. Among other provisions, the measure requires the agency to establish fraud based on unreported earnings, to gather the weekly wage information from an employer, and to transition from a six-year to a much shorter three-year time frame for administrative or court action. These changes help to prevent unemployed workers from being rejected due to computer error or having

to undergo a lengthy court process to sort out their benefits. The legislation emerged after a large number of unemployed workers were improperly determined to have obtained unemployment benefits fraudulently and were charged with heavy penalties. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the bill in an effort to address errors in the system and to resolve unemployment benefit cases for employees and employers in a timely manner. The measure passed the House and Senate and was signed by Governor Snyder into law as Public Act 522 of 2016.

STATE BUDGET ON ECONOMIC JUSTICE & REGULATORY POLICIES

Children's Clothing Allowance

THE CHILDREN'S CLOTHING ALLOWANCE helps low-income families who qualify for the Family Independence Program (FIP) to receive state assistance to purchase weather appropriate clothing for the upcoming school year.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133, Section 669:

- Provides \$2.9 million for the clothing allowance.
- Allocates \$140 per year for each eligible child.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 268 of 2016—HB 5294, Section 669:

- Provides \$6.2 million to expand the program to all school-age children that receive the Family Independence Program (FIP) benefits, adding 25,000 new children.
- Allocates \$140 per year for each eligible child.

Heat & Eat

LATE IN THE SESSION, the Michigan Legislature passed supplemental appropriations to the 2016–2017 state budget, including funding for lead abatement in Flint, funding for nursing services at the Grand Rapids Veterans' Home, and for the state's rainy day fund. The measure also included the necessary funding for MCC-supported Heat and Eat policies, which help low-income residents receive additional food assistance from the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). By showing that they receive federal energy assistance (LIHEAP), instead of providing copies of monthly utility bills, residents can qualify for additional food assistance. This provision

is especially valuable to those whose heating costs are bundled in with rent payments. Representative Jeff Irwin (D-Ann Arbor) offered the critical amendment that provided for this necessary funding. Governor Snyder signed the supplementary budget into law.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

Public Act 84 of 2015—SB 133:

- N/A

FISCAL YEAR 2017

Public Act 340 of 2016—SB 800:

- Provides \$6.8 million in state funding.
- Allows Michigan to receive at least \$140 million in additional Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for low-income residents. Families in need could receive as much as \$79 more per month as a result for food assistance.



POLICE LINE





RESTORATIVE JUSTICE POLICY

TAKING GENUINE STEPS TO reduce violence and crime, to promote healing for victims, and to rehabilitate those who have committed offenses are key components of restorative justice. Advocating for these policies—especially in a world of violence and terrorism—can be difficult, but they are necessary to addressing complex situations and reducing crime. Pope Francis has emphasized this point, especially during his visit to a Philadelphia prison. There he said “a just and necessary punishment” must take care to “never exclude the dimension of hope and goal of rehabilitation.”

The 2015–2016 session saw discussion on a number of aspects related to the criminal and judicial system. In May of 2015, Governor Rick Snyder presented a special message to the state focused on the topic of criminal justice. He specifically spoke about ways to improve support for victims, to address root causes of crime, and to prepare prisoners to reenter society. Throughout the session, lawmakers expressed a

desire to move Michigan towards a “smart on crime” approach, one that encourages genuine rehabilitation, rather than the previous “tough on crime” approach. Catholic Conference staff was pleased to see several measures enacted at the end of the legislative session to compensate and to provide services for those who have been wrongfully imprisoned and exonerated.

During the two-year session, MCC also testified on behalf of a juvenile justice reform package and a significant package of measures to reform the parole system. While these packages did not pass the Michigan Legislature this year, staff applauds the bipartisan nature in which many of the measures were introduced and considered. Additionally, MCC devoted two major FOCUS publications to restorative justice issues during the 2015–2016 session. These publications focused on confronting violence in society and reforming the juvenile justice system.

Compensation & Services for Wrongful Imprisonment

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 291	Allows eligible individuals who have been wrongfully imprisoned for a crime to apply to receive compensation	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 343 of 2016
House Bill 4536		N/A	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Died on House floor
Senate Bill 860	Allows taxpayers to deduct wrongful imprisonment compensation received from his/her taxable income	 PASSED Finance	 DIED Tax Policy	 SUPPORT	Died in committee
House Bill 5815	Provides reentry services for those wrongfully imprisoned	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 344 of 2016

THIS SESSION, MICHIGAN LEGISLATORS considered a number of bills concerning individuals who have been wrongfully imprisoned. Senate Bill 291, sponsored by Senator Steve Bieda (D-Warren), allows those who have been exonerated to receive \$50,000 a year for every year that they were incarcerated. House Bill 5815, sponsored by Representative Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit), allows these individuals to receive reentry and housing services from the Department of Corrections upon their release. Both of these measures passed the House and Senate with wide bipartisan support and

became law as Public Acts 343–344 of 2016. Michigan Catholic Conference supported these important pieces of legislation, which are a step in the right direction towards helping those wrongfully imprisoned and exonerated get back on their feet. Another measure considered during the year was Senate Bill 860, sponsored by Senator David Robertson (D-Grand Blanc), which would have allowed a taxpayer to deduct wrongful imprisonment compensation received from his or her taxable income. While it did not pass this year, MCC supported its intent.

Criminal Justice Reform — Recidivism

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bills 932–949	Addresses probation or parole violators; defines recidivism; establishes a Swift and Sure probation program, etc.	 PASSED Competitiveness	 DIED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

ONE KEY ELEMENT TO creating safer communities is reducing recidivism, or the percentage of individuals who commit another crime after being paroled or during their probation period. A package of eighteen bills focused on reforming Michigan’s criminal justice system, and specifically, focusing on reducing the rate of recidivism. Thirteen senators introduced the bipartisan package of bills, including Senators John Proos (St. Joseph), Rick Jones (R-Grand Ledge), Mike Shirkey (R-Clark Lake), Judy Emmons (R-Sheridan), Marty Knollenberg (R-Troy), Patrick Colbeck (R-Canton), Mike Nofs (R-Battle Creek), Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor), Ken Horn (R-Frankenmuth), Dale Zorn (R-Ida), Bert Johnson (D-Highland Park), Jack Brandenburg (R-Harrison Township), and David Robertson (R-Grand Blanc). Michigan Catholic Conference supported the legislation to promote rehabilitation and to reduce crime. While the measures received almost unanimous support in the Michigan Senate, they did not receive a vote in the House during the 2015–2016 legislative session. Among other aspects, the package:

- Creates the Parole Sanction Certainty Program, which would use a set of established sanctions to supervise eligible offenders who had been placed on parole,
- Provides that within four years, all state funds spent on recidivism intervention programs would be those in line with evidence-based practices,
- Requires the Department of Corrections to allow representatives from all nonprofit faith-based, business and professional, civic, and community organizations to provide inmate reentry services and to develop a screening process,
- Ensures eighteen to twenty-two-year-old prisoners were housed only with other prisoners of the same approximate age range; requires the Department of Corrections to provide programming designed for youth rehabilitation, to the extent possible, and
- Requires the Department of Talent and Economic Development to establish a program to provide grants to employers for hiring qualified individuals on probation or parole.

Juvenile Justice Reform Package

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 4947–4966	Raises the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 18, prohibits juveniles from being housed with adult prisoners, etc.	 DIED Judiciary	 PASSED Criminal Justice	 SUPPORT	Died in committee

MICHIGAN IS CURRENTLY ONE of a handful of states that allow seventeen-year-olds to be automatically

tried as adults. In order to address this and other issues with the juvenile justice system, state lawmakers

considered House Bills 4947–4966. The bills increase the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to eighteen, prevent youth under eighteen from being housed with adult prisoners, allow a judge flexibility when considering a waiver request, and incentivize counties to engage in more rehabilitative services for youth by modifying state and county funding allocations to the Child Care Fund. MCC staff supported the package, which was sponsored by: Representatives Pete Lucido (R-Shelby Twp.), Martin Howrylak (R-Troy), Dave Pagel (R-Berrien Springs), LaTanya Garrett (D-Detroit), Anthony Forlini (R-Harrison Twp.), Mike Webber (R-Rochester Hills), Chris Afendoulis (R-Grand Rapids), Harvey Santana (D-Detroit), Vanessa Guerra (D-Bridgeport), Kurt Heise (R-Plymouth), Klint Kesto (R-Commerce Twp.), Bob Kosowski (D-Westland), Leslie Love (D-Detroit), and Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit). Staff testified on behalf of the legislation, noting how the measures hold youth responsible

while at the same time work towards their rehabilitation. MCC also dedicated its November 2015 FOCUS to the topic of juvenile justice. The measures passed the House but were not approved by the Senate before lawmakers adjourned.



Judicial Parole Veto Authority for Successor Judges

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bill 5273	Eliminates the veto power for successor judges related to certain parole decisions	 PASSED Judiciary	 PASSED Judiciary	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 354 of 2016

UNDER CURRENT LAW, THE Michigan Parole Board considers a number of factors in an eligible parole case for a prisoner sentenced to life in prison before making its decision. Some of these factors include the crime committed, the prisoner’s cooperation with law enforcement, and the minimum time served. Parole is automatically denied if the sentencing judge in that prisoner’s case, or the judge that replaces him or her, files written objections within 30 days of receiving

a notice of the scheduled parole hearing. House Bill 5273, introduced by Representative Dave Pagel (R-Berrien Springs), changes the process slightly, only allowing the written objection of the original sentencing judge to automatically bar parole for an individual. Written objection from a successor judge would still be considered. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure, which becomes law as Public Act 354 of 2016.



IMMIGRATION POLICY

“IN RECENT CENTURIES, MILLIONS of people came to this land to pursue their dream of building a future in freedom.” During his September 2015 speech to the United States Congress, Pope Francis highlighted the important role immigration has played in the history of this country. Throughout the pope’s visit, he also emphasized the Catholic Church’s teaching on “welcoming the stranger.” In the spirit of this teaching, MCC’s policy guidelines encouraged advocacy for measures protecting the dignity of all immigrants and recognizing the value immigrants provide to Michigan’s culture and economy.

The Legislature considered several bills related to these topics, while comprehensive immigration reform made little progress at the federal level. Staff monitored efforts to prohibit sanctuary cities and introduce duplicative reporting requirements for agencies that participate in refugee resettlement. Among other issues, each of these bills reinforced negative

stereotypes about immigrants and refugees. Towards the session’s end, staff participated in a press conference to advocate for legislation that would allow the Michigan Department of State to issue an operator’s license to undocumented persons. While the bills did not receive action, their introduction highlighted the importance of driver’s licenses to encourage road safety and the dignity of all people as they head to work, the grocery store, doctor’s appointments, and take their children to school. Staff also highlighted issues surrounding immigration and refugee resettlement through several communications pieces, bringing forward the Catholic Church’s position in the midst of extremely negative political rhetoric. Staff will continue to work towards reform and aid the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops on federal efforts to restore due process rights, keep families together, address root causes of migration and enforcement needs, and improve the process for legal immigration.

Pause on Syrian Refugee Resettlement

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Concurrent Resolution 22	Urges the governor to maintain his pause on the relocation of Syrian refugees into Michigan	 DIED Government Operations	N/A	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

FOLLOWING TERRORIST ATTACKS IN Paris in November 2015, questions arose about the security screening portion of the refugee resettlement process. Soon after, Governor Rick Snyder announced a “pause” in Michigan’s offer to resettle additional Syrian refugees, beyond those already designated to arrive. The governor said he would evaluate and resume additional resettlement once the state received satisfactory answers about the screening process from the federal government. MCC staff, with direction from the organization’s Board of Directors, released a statement articulating the Catholic Church’s readiness to continue assisting refugees. In January 2016, the Senate Government Operations Committee held a hearing on a measure calling for a complete halt to the resettlement of refugees from Syria, which was sponsored by Senator Patrick Colbeck (R-Canton). MCC staff opposed the resolution due to concerns about its anti-refugee tone and expressed that its language could create an atmosphere of suspicion upon the entire Syrian people. Each committee member received a



Detroit News column written by MCC President and CEO, Paul Long, highlighting the federal process of vetting refugees and welcoming those admitted by the federal government to the United States. Staff also devoted MCC’s February 2016 FOCUS to the refugee resettlement process. SCR 22 did not receive further action after an initial hearing.

Sanctuary Cities Ban

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 445	Prohibits the creation or enforcement of sanctuary cities policies	 DIED Judiciary	N/A	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

NUMEROUS COMMUNITIES ACROSS THE country have enacted “sanctuary city” policies. These policies generally limit the extent to which law enforcement and other government employees can ask about an

individual’s immigration status or assist the federal government on immigration matters. Sanctuary city policies do not, however, prevent federal enforcement actions and do allow for some exceptions to ensure

that public safety concerns are met. Two Michigan cities, Ann Arbor and Detroit, have such a policy, stating that the local police department is prohibited from soliciting immigration status from individuals who seek police services, report crimes, or are witnesses. Status can be solicited if it is relevant to the investigation of a criminal offense or when processing an arrested person. Senate Bill 445, sponsored by Senator Mike Kowall (R-White Lake), would have prohibited local

sanctuary city ordinances and policies and withheld state funding if a local unit of government failed to comply. MCC staff raised several concerns with SB 445 as the legislation blurred the line between local law enforcement and federal responsibility, discouraged individuals from reporting crimes due to their immigration status, and might have led to racial profiling. The measure died in the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Resolution Halting Refugee Resettlement

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Concurrent Resolution 28	Urges the federal government to comply with the Refugee Resettlement Act and to halt further refugee placements until compliance with local consultation requirements	N/A	 DIED Local Government	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 28, sponsored by Representative Mike McCready (R-Birmingham), requested the federal government halt further refugee placements until proof is given of cooperation between the federal and local governments. After consulting with local Catholic Charities agencies who work with refugees, MCC opposed the resolution.

While staff believe cooperation should continue to take place between the federal, state, and local governments related to refugee resettlement, the agencies indicated this cooperation is already taking place and the resolution is unnecessary. The House Local Government Committee approved the resolution, but no further action.

Refugee Reporting Requirements

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 5528–5529	Adds additional reporting requirements to agencies working with refugee resettlement	N/A	 DIED Oversight & Ethics	 OPPOSE	Died in committee

THROUGHOUT THE LEGISLATIVE SESSION and during the election season, there was public discussion about the refugee resettlement process in Michigan. House Bills 5528 and 5529 were two such measures. Accord-

ing to the sponsor of the bills, Representative Jim Runestad (R-White Lake), HBs 5528–5529 would have created more state and local oversight to the federal refugee resettlement process. Currently the State

of Michigan, local officials, and stakeholders already play an important role in the refugee resettlement process. One such role is helping to evaluate local capacity for accepting refugees. Michigan Catholic Conference staff expressed concerns with the duplicative nature of the refugee reporting requirements outlined in the bills. Staff also opposed the general tone of the

legislation, which encouraged negative stereotypes about immigrants and refugees. After working with Michigan's Catholic refugee resettlement agencies, MCC staff spoke with the chair of the House Oversight and Ethics Committee about its concerns, as well as other legislative leaders. The committee did not hold a hearing on the legislation.

Reciprocity for Foreign Driver's Licenses

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
Senate Bill 501	Extends the conditions by which foreign drivers can drive in Michigan with a foreign driver's license	 PASSED Transportation	 PASSED Transportation & Infrastructure	 SUPPORT	Signed into law as Public Act 138 of 2016

IN THE 1940S, TWO international treaties were ratified to allow drivers from participating nations the ability to drive in other participating nations without having to obtain a new driver's license from the host country. Several nations, such as China, are not signatories to either treaty. In September of 2015, Senator Jim Stamas (R-Midland), introduced Senate Bill 501, which would allow drivers from all foreign nations to drive in Michigan if they had a driver's license from their home country. Conference staff supported the bill as introduced, but it was subsequently amended to include requirements that a driver present a passport, visa, or other documentation to show their legal

presence in the United States. Both of these changes concerned members of the Latino community, who feared the measure would allow for roadside law enforcement checks for citizenship and lead to racial profiling. Staff and other groups worked to engage key members of the House on this issue, and the provisions regarding passports and visas were removed. Furthermore, as amended, the legal presence requirement would apply to drivers from non-treaty countries only, removing most opposition. In May, Governor Snyder signed SB 501 into law as Public Act 138 of 2016.

Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants

BILL	DESCRIPTION	SENATE COMMITTEE	HOUSE COMMITTEE	MCC POSITION	OUTCOME
House Bills 5940–5941	Allows Michigan's Department of State to issue driver's licenses to eligible undocumented persons	N/A	✘ DIED Transportation & Infrastructure	▲ SUPPORT	Died in committee

IN LATE SEPTEMBER 2016, Representatives Stephanie Chang (D-Detroit) and Harvey Santana (D-Detroit) introduced two driver's license measures. Under House Bills 5940–5941, Michigan may issue an operator's license to an applicant who is unable to submit sufficient documents to verify his or her legal presence. An applicant would be eligible as long as they met specific criteria and provided documents that prove residency. For those who are eligible, specially-designated non-commercial driver's licenses and state identification would be issued to applicants. Staff participated in a press conference on the State Capitol steps to advocate for the legislation with other advocates and interested parties. During the conference, MCC spoke to the importance of driver's licenses in allowing a person to travel to work, to take care of their children, to buy necessary goods, and to contribute to the community's tax revenue. Allowing these individuals also to receive a driver's license ensures access to driver's training, making the roads safer for the whole community. House Bills 5940–5941 died in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee.



MCC participated in a press conference at the State Capitol alongside lawmakers and other immigration advocates



STATE BUDGET OVERVIEW

EACH YEAR, MICHIGAN CATHOLIC Conference pays especially close attention to how the budgets impact those most in need in the state. While the various items were included within the relevant issue categories listed earlier, below is a comprehensive list of MCC’s priority budget items and the amount allocated to each.

FISCAL YEAR 2016

1. Public Act 84 of 2015 for the omnibus appropriations for various departments of the State of Michigan.
2. Public Act 85 of 2015 for the omnibus appropriations related to education.

FISCAL YEAR 2017

1. Public Act 268 of 2016 for the omnibus appropriations for various departments of the State of Michigan.
2. Public Act 249 of 2016 for the omnibus appropriations related to education.
3. Public Act 340 of 2016 for the supplemental appropriations to the 2016–2017 state budget.

BUDGET ITEM	FISCAL YEAR 2016 (OCT. 2015–SEPT. 2016)	FISCAL YEAR 2017 (OCT. 2016–SEPT. 2017)	PURPOSE
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES			
Pregnancy & Parenting Support Program	\$50,000 (+funding carried over from previous budget years)	\$400,000 in TANF	Supports women in crisis pregnancies by promoting alternatives to abortion
Heat & Eat	N/A	\$6.8 million for heating assistance, drawing down at least \$140 million in federal food assistance	Helps low-income residents receive additional food assistance from the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
Children’s Clothing Allowance	\$2.9 million (\$140/yr per child)	\$6.2 million (\$140/yr per child)	Allows low-income children to buy clothing for the school year
Healthy Kids Dental	\$168 million, expands to children ages 0-13 in Kent, Wayne, and Oakland Counties	\$193 million, expands to all eligible children in Kent, Wayne, and Oakland Counties	Provides access to dental services for low-income children in all of Michigan’s counties
Human Trafficking	\$200,000 (intervention)	\$200,000 (intervention), \$390,000 (prosecutions), \$500,000 (special project)	Provides funding for intervention services, prosecution of human trafficking cases, and special projects

BUDGET ITEM	FISCAL YEAR 2016 (OCT. 2015–SEPT. 2016)	FISCAL YEAR 2017 (OCT. 2016–SEPT. 2017)	PURPOSE
Private Foster Care Administrative Rates	\$40/day per child	\$45/day per child	Increases the per diem administrative rate for private foster care agencies

SCHOOL AID, HIGHER EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Health Safety, and Welfare Mandate	N/A	\$2.5 million	Reimburses nonpublic schools for completion of state health, safety, and welfare mandates
Tuition Incentive Program	\$48.5 million	\$53.0 million	Provides assistance for the first two years of college to incentivize completion of high school for Medicaid-eligible students
Tuition Grant Program	\$34.0 million	\$35.0 million	Allows eligible low-income students to attend one of Michigan's independent colleges or universities

DEPARTMENT OF MICHIGAN STATE POLICE

School Safety Grant	N/A	\$2.0 million	Provides competitive grants for schools to purchase technology and equipment to improve school safety
---------------------	-----	---------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY

Statewide School Drinking Water Quality Program	N/A	\$4.5 million	Reimburses public and nonpublic schools on a voluntary basis for the cost of testing water for lead
-------------------------------------------------	-----	---------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY

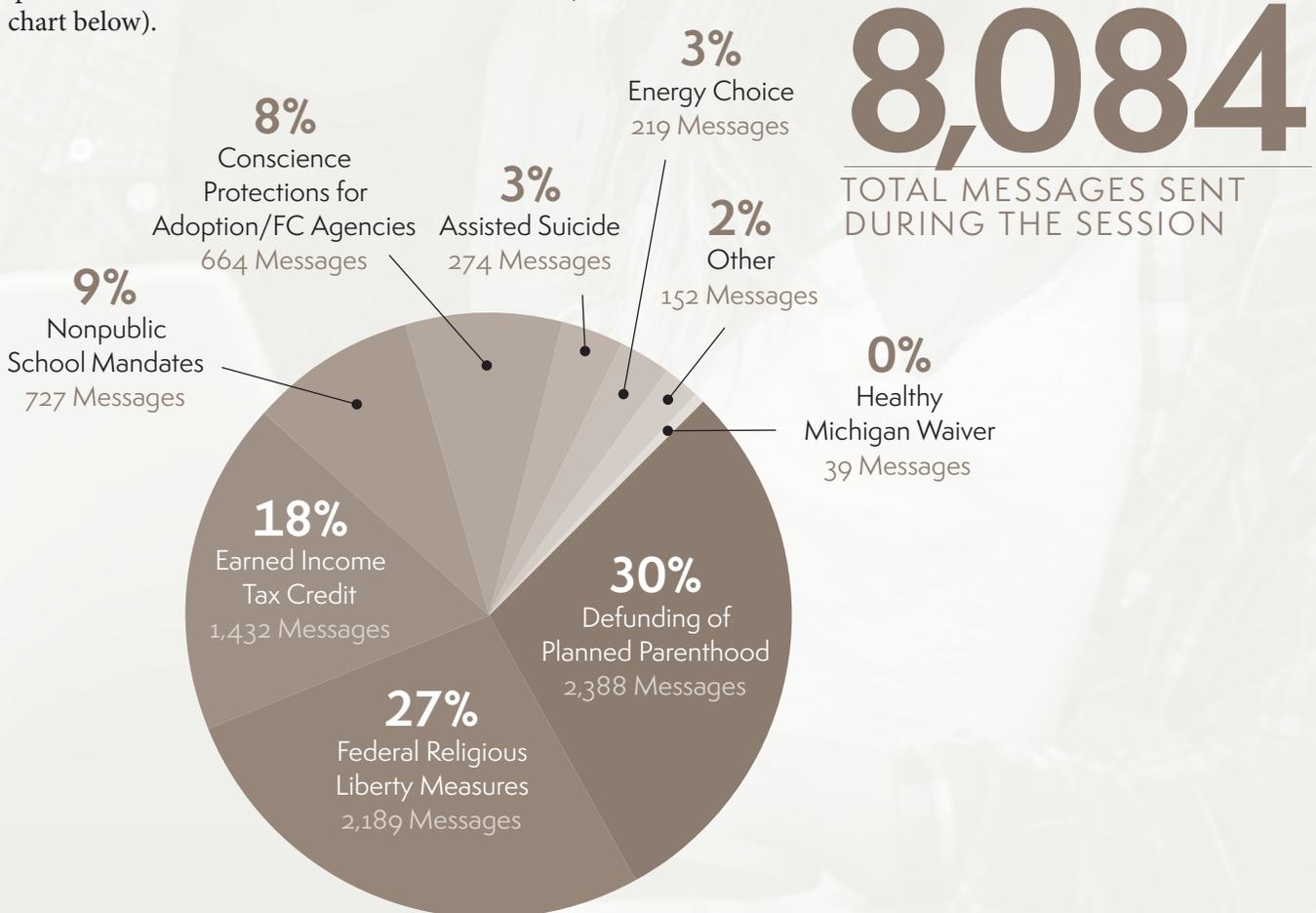
Dual Enrollment	\$1.5 million	\$1.5 million	Provides funding for nonpublic school students to take community college/university classes for college credit while still in high school
-----------------	---------------	---------------	-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

CATHOLIC ADVOCACY NETWORK

DURING THE 2015–2016 LEGISLATIVE session, Catholics across the state followed along with Michigan Catholic Conference’s advocacy agenda through the Catholic Advocacy Network, a grassroots email system. Through its weekly legislative publication, Lansing Update, MCC staff provided brief updates to members about issues of concern to the Church, including MCC action on specific bills or significant legislative votes in the House or Senate. Less frequently, staff used Action Alerts to call on members to communicate with their elected officials in support or opposition to specific measures. Staff spoke with parish and diocesan groups, including during the election for Faithful Citizenship talks, to get the word out to new members. By the end of the session, the Catholic Advocacy Network included about 8,000 members. During the two-year session, CAN members participated in various state and federal action alerts (see chart below).



MCC staff with President/CEO Paul Long, promoting the Catholic Advocacy Network and policy issues at the Cobo Center in Detroit



THE WORD FROM LANSING

THE WORD FROM LANSING is a monthly column provided by Catholic media outlets in Michigan under the byline of Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC) President and CEO Paul A. Long. Through these columns, MCC outlines current advocacy issues of importance to the Conference and discusses the Catholic position and role in the political process. This publication complements the more regular updates provided by MCC's Catholic Advocacy Network. The following columns were published during the 2015-2016 legislative session:

- 2013-2014 Session in Review (1/2015)
- A Blueprint for the Common Good (2/2015)
- Polices Offer Increased Opportunities for Michigan Students (3/2015)
- Serving Michigan's Greatest Gift—Our Children (4/2015)
- Month of May Promotes Foster Care Awareness (5/2015)
- Breaking the Cycle of Crime (6/2015)
- Earned Income Tax Credit Beneficial for Working Poor (7/2015)
- Educational Choice, An Investment in Our Children (8/2015)
- Religious Tolerance and the Freedom to Serve (9/2015)
- Respect Life Month Emphasizes Worth of Every Life (10/2015)
- Reforming Juvenile Justice in Michigan (11/2015)
- The Human Face of the Refugee Crisis (12/2015)
- Catholic Schools Contribute to Society (1/2016)
- Black History Month and the Need for Continued Dialogue (2/2016)
- Practicing Mercy in the State Budget (3/2016)
- Just Governance: A Lesson in Loving Our Neighbors (4/2016)
- Standing Up Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault (5/2016)
- Public Transportation and Communities in Need (6/2016)
- Protecting the Health and Safety of All Michigan Students (7/2016)
- Love & Peace in the Midst of Violence (8/2016)
- Opportunities for Work and its Impact on Society (9/2016)
- Calling for Dignity in the Public Square (10/2016)
- Seek Compassionate Care, Not Assisted Suicide (11/2016)
- Protecting the Freedom to Serve Should Be a Priority in 2017 (12/2016)



Protecting the freedom to serve should be a priority in 2017
 THE U.P. CATHOLIC | COMMENTARY
 Paul A. Long
 In recent years, however, secular advocacy groups and even some government entities have fought harder than ever to strip faith-based organizations of their ability to provide services to the poor and vulnerable. These groups argue that faith-based organizations are not qualified to provide such services and that their religious beliefs should not be a factor in their ability to do so. This is a dangerous precedent that we must not allow to be set. We must stand firm in our commitment to the dignity of every human person and support the right of all organizations to provide services to those in need.

Opportunities for work and its impact on society
 THE U.P. CATHOLIC | COMMENTARY
 Paul A. Long
 "Where do you work?" It's often one of the first questions people ask an individual does for a living, work is a topic that is often evaluated against one's dreams and expectations, a topic that occupies a significant amount of time. A job can be a lifeline, offering a way to pay the bills, and it can be a source of passion, something that the employer has offered economic opportunity as well as a sense of purpose and meaning. Work is not just a means to an end; it is a part of who we are and how we live. We must ensure that all people have the opportunity to find meaningful work and that their contributions are valued and rewarded.

Black History Month and the need for continued dialogue
 THE U.P. CATHOLIC | COMMENTARY
 Paul A. Long
 DURING BLACK HISTORY MONTH, LET US REMEMBER THE CONTRIBUTIONS WHO HAVE COME BEFORE US. IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF ALL PEOPLE AND TO PROMOTE JUSTICE FOR ALL. Black History Month is a time to reflect on the contributions of African Americans to the United States and to recognize the ongoing struggle for equality and justice. We must continue to work for a more just and equitable society for all people, regardless of race or ethnicity. The Catholic Church has a long tradition of advocating for the dignity and rights of every human person, and we must continue to stand in solidarity with all people who are marginalized and oppressed.

The refugee crisis has a human face
 THE U.P. CATHOLIC | COMMENTARY
 Paul A. Long
 The refugee crisis has a human face. It is not just a statistic or a headline; it is the story of real people who have been displaced from their homes and are seeking safety and dignity. We must show compassion and welcome these people into our communities. The Catholic Church has a long tradition of welcoming refugees and providing them with the support and care they need. We must continue to stand in solidarity with these people and work to address the root causes of the crisis. We must also ensure that our own communities are prepared to receive and care for these people with dignity and respect.

FOCUS

FOCUS IS AN EDUCATIONAL publication produced three to four times per year by Michigan Catholic Conference. These publications examine current issues and their relevance to the State of Michigan, and they are distributed across the state, including to all

parishes, Catholic schools, members of the state Legislature, statewide news outlets, and other elected officials. Copies are provided to parishes at no cost. The following pieces were published during the 2015–2016 legislative session:



2015-2016
ADVOCACY
PRINCIPLES

A Blueprint for the Common Good

...the obligation to teach about moral values that should shape our lives, including our public lives, is central to the mission given to the Church by Jesus Christ. —Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB

AT THE BEGINNING of each session of the Michigan Legislature, which runs over a two-year period, Michigan Catholic Conference lays out its advocacy principles to promote the common good of the state. In light of the Catholic Church's teaching to defend human life from conception through natural death, these principles extend to a wide-range of public policy categories. Legislative advocacy is not just a just society, one that is strengthened through strength-

Stabenow as Michigan's representation in the congressional upper chamber.

The focus of the 98th Michigan legislature will likely be on economic development and the administration of their efforts to bolster the state's economy. Legislation is crafted to address the needs of the state's citizens. It is critical for the legislature to remember the poor and vulnerable members of our society. The Michigan Catholic Conference has long been a vocal proponent of the moral and ethical values that should guide our public policy.

MAY SPECIAL ELECTION STATEWIDE BALLOT QUESTION PROPOSAL 15-1

On Tuesday, May 5, 2015 Michigan voters will head to the ballot box to participate in a special statewide election. The primary purpose for this special election is to amend the Michigan Constitution to ask voters if the Michigan Constitution should be amended to raise the sales tax to pay for road and transportation infrastructure repairs. Should voters approve Proposal 1, lawmakers that do not change the state constitution will also go into effect. These changes will create additional funds for public state taxes, and expand various state programs. In effect, Proposal 1 asks voters:

- Increasing both the state sales tax and use tax from 6 percent to 7 percent
- Dedicating 15 percent of the revenue collected at a rate of 7 percent for cities, townships, and villages
- Dedicating 60 percent of the revenue collected at a rate of 7 percent to the School Aid Fund
- Dedicating 12.3 percent of the revenue collected at a rate of 7 percent to the School Aid Fund

In order to address the needs of the state and sales tax increase

CONFRONTING VIOLENCE IN SOCIETY

"Respect for human life is the starting point for confronting a culture of violence." —U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), *Confronting a Culture of Violence*, 1994

One of the more disturbing elements of violence is how it manifests itself to children through violent video games, music, and mass media. As young people grow and mature, they learn life lessons by interacting with the world around them. In the digital age, violence has become a part of day-to-day life. The Internet and social media have made it easier than ever for one to witness violence. From the news to the Internet and social media, violence has become a part of day-to-day life.

REFUGEEES AND CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

"Biblical revelation urges us to welcome the stranger; in so doing, we open our doors to God, and the faces of others we see the face of Christ himself." —Pope Francis, *World Day of Migrants and Refugees*, 2016

Immigration, America's experience of immigration as individuals and families. Many came as refugees seeking freedom and safety. In the mid-1900s, large numbers of Italian, Irish, and Eastern European immigrants came to the United States. The United States has experienced a large influx of immigrants from various countries and ethnicities.

religious freedom and to the country's fiber. Now in 2016, many children and politically difficult times, other families are left behind. According to the High Commissioner for Refugees, the worldwide number of refugees has recently been recorded; at the end of 2015, there were 51.2 million refugees. Images have been shown in newspapers, and the growing refugee crisis across the Middle East, rising oil prices, and the climate of fear around the world have entered into American consciousness.

around the state are the grocery store, to business or personal reasons, public transit services.

REFORMING JUVENILE JUSTICE IN MICHIGAN

"I offer encouragement to all those who are convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation." —Pope Francis, *Address to U.S. Congress*, September 24, 2015

DIFFERENTIATING ONE GENDER FROM ANOTHER HAPPENS rather quickly for the naked eye. Body shapes and sizes, vocal tones, hair length, and stature are typical indicators that tell a male apart from a female. Men and women are created by God with natural biological differences that complement each other. Just as men and women possess identifiable characteristics that distinguish one from the other, so too do youths and adults differ in many ways. Setting aside obvious visual differences, youths and adults differ in the manner by which they think, reason, decide, and act. Whereas a healthy 54-year-old can realize the consequences of a decision, a troubled 14-year-old doubtfully possesses the same cognitive ability. Simply put, a 14-year-old does not think the same way as a 54-year-old.

Measures recently introduced in the state legislature have kick-started the process of reexamining juvenile justice in Michigan. In the mid-1990s the state passed a series of punitive laws that funneled thousands of youth into the adult criminal justice system. In addition to automatically considering all 17-year-olds as adults, Michigan expanded adult sentence and allowed children of any age to be criminally convicted and sent to prison. From 2003–2013, for example, over 20,000 Michigan youth were placed on adult probation, detained in jail, or imprisoned for a crime committed under the age of 18. The majority of the cases were for non-violent offenses; some were as young as 10 years old. A disproportionate number were minority youths.

growing number of families from strength and being together. These trans smooth and certain pop-and groups have been cussions and migrants, and the human person before the U.S. crisis while human face have been

This fo Church t migration

THE ISSUES, THE CANDIDATES AND YOUR VOTE

"A political society endures when it seeks, as a vocation, to satisfy common needs by stimulating the growth of all its members, especially those in situations of greater vulnerability or risk." —Pope Francis, *Speech to U.S. Congress*, 9/24/15

In a speech before a joint session of the United States Congress in September 2015, Pope Francis referred to the purpose of politics as the defense and preservation of human dignity "in pursuit of the common good." On November 8, 2016, voters will head to the ballot box to select candidates best suited to lead communities, the state, and the federal government. At the top of the ballot, voters will determine the next president of the United States. Members of Congress, the Michigan Supreme Court justices, two Michigan State House of Representatives, two Michigan State Board of Education, and members of local races will also be decided by their voters.

The candidates running for office have left much of the nation disenchanted, as voters want and expect more from the nation's highest office. Inexperience has all factors into voter dissatisfaction. Yet Catholics are called not only to participate in the political process but also to evaluate candidate positions on a wide range of issues, including the dignity of human life, care for the poor, families and children, education, and religious liberty. As the U.S. bishops teach, "we should be guided more by our moral convictions than by our political party or interest." It is necessary, our participation in the political process to transform the nation.

focus

Published By
MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

VOLUME 43, NUMBER 4
NOVEMBER 2015

IN THIS ISSUE

Moving from "Tough" to "Smart" on Crime

Current Legislation Affecting Juvenile Justice

Leading Thoughts



Content provided by MIRS News.
Visit us on the web at www.mirsnews.com.

◀ **Wednesday, February 4, 2015** ▶

Detroit Dem Proposes Death Penalty For Cop Killers

The only time in the last 15 years the Legislature voted on bringing back the death penalty was Mar. 18, 2004.

Sen. Virgil **SMITH**, Jr. (D-Detroit) was a first-term House member who spoke passionately against the measure. In the process, Smith admits he was "rude" to one of the big proponents of the measure, Jim **BOWENS**, whose son, Matthew **BOWENS**, and police partner, Jennifer **FETTIG**, were murdered in Detroit.

Last year, Smith was on the campaign trail, knocking doors in Lincoln Park, a new area in his 4th Senate District. Whom should he come face to face with? It was none other than Bowens himself, a resident of the new 4th District. The two had a long talk, after which Bowens volunteered to be a supporter of Smith's. Smith agreed to sponsor a resolution bringing the death penalty debate back to the Legislature.

Today, Smith lived up to his word. With the support of Senate Majority Leader Arlan **MEEKHOF** (R-West Olive) and House Majority Floor Leader Mike **KOWALL** (R-White Lake), Smith introduced a measure that would allow for the death penalty in first-degree murder cases against a police or corrections officer.

It's the first death penalty-related measure introduced in Michigan since 2007, when then-Rep. Dan **ACCIAVATTI** introduced a measure to bring it back for first-degree murder cases (See "[No Capital Punishment Bill In Last 6 Years](#)," 9/10/13).

The timing probably isn't the best, Smith acknowledged, particularly after police officers in Ferguson, Mo., and New York City escaped prosecution in the deaths of two separate individuals.

However, Smith said redistricting has stretched his Detroit-based district south into Allen Park, Southgate and Lincoln Park, where the views on such things as the death penalty aren't the same as those in his familiar Detroit stomping grounds.

"This will probably get me in trouble in Detroit, but it's the same old story in this business," Smith said. "You got one constituent who wants one thing. Another constituent wants something completely opposite. You still need to take care of them both."

If the Senate votes on the measure, Smith said he would be a "yes" vote.

Michigan became the first English-speaking territory in the world to abolish capital punishment in 1847, according to the Death Penalty Information Center. In 1962, a death penalty ban was voted overwhelming to be added to the new state Constitution, meaning any change would need to be approved by voters.

Back in 1999, four constitutional amendments regarding the re-introduction of the death penalty were introduced in the Senate, three of which were co-sponsored by then-Sen. and current Attorney General Bill **SCHUETTE**. However, the only vote the Legislature has seen in 15 years failed, 55-52 in the House, to meet the two-thirds threshold to put the measure in the Senate. Had it passed both chambers, it would have been put before the voters to decide.

Smith's measure was referred to the Senate Judiciary Committee, chaired by Sen. Rick **JONES** (R-Grand Ledge), who declined an invitation to co-sponsor the measure. The former county sheriff said he supports crooks doing "hard time" in the state's prison system.

However, Jones said he considers himself a "pro life" senator and cannot support capital punishment because "occasionally, the judicial system and the prosecutors make a mistake."

He pointed to a Lansing incident where Claude **McCOLLUM** was wrongly convicted in 2006 of killing a Lansing Community College professor.

"You can't dig someone out of the ground and say, 'We made a mistake,'" Jones said.

Jones said if members of his Senate Judiciary Committee want a hearing on the 🐾 **SJR G**, he'll give it to them, but he will not be voting in favor of it.

Likewise, David **MALUCHNIK** of the Michigan Catholic Conference said his organization doesn't believe "it's the state's decision on who should live and who should not live."

Life in prison without the possibility for parole is a severe penalty for those who commit heinous crimes and one that protects the public, he said. Maluchnik issued a statement later in the day vowing that the Catholic Conference will "devote the full weight of its organization to oppose and defeat any effort to allow for state-sanctioned murder."

However, Kowall said he's promoted bringing back the death penalty for "smoking gun, no-shadow-of-a-doubt" cop killers since he started in the House back in 1999. He acknowledged that it doesn't save the state money or add efficiencies, but it "sends a message that if you kill somebody, you're at jeopardy of being put to death yourself . . . If that's what it takes, that's what it's going to take."

Asked to handicap the measure's chance of moving, Kowall said that given Smith -- a Detroit Democrat -- introduced the measure and Meekhof was the first co-sponsor "This thing could get wings."



Volume #54, Report #27, Article #8--Monday, February 9, 2015

Catholic Conference Cites RFRA Among Legislative Priorities

The Michigan Catholic Conference on Monday cited the adoption of a state Religious Freedom Restoration Act, ensuring the definition of marriage as the union of one man and one woman, amending tax policies negatively impacting the working poor and reimbursement to non-public schools for state-mandated, non-educational services among its priorities for the upcoming legislative year.

Specifically, the conference broke down its priorities into the following groups: religious liberty, economic justice and regulatory policies, education, children and families, restorative justice, health care, human life and dignity, immigration and federal issues.

"The work of promoting the dignity of the human person involves policies that address the beginning and the end of life, with equal attention to the years in between," said group CEO Paul Long in a statement. "The Catholic Church's involvement in the public square is intended to propose rather than impose. As an organization with goals that do not neatly fit into an ideological or partisan box, the Church's efforts are focused on the person rather than politics. The breadth of policies to which we are called to address are both unique and necessary."

On religious liberty, the group seeks the rights of faith-based providers, institutions and all individuals to "conscience protections" in the delivery of services and in their practices; the equal application of the law to all persons and institutions regardless of their faith; opposition to insurance regulations mandating coverage for abortion, or contraception, or sterilization; and adoptions of a state Religious Freedom Restoration Act (which cleared the House but saw no action in the Senate in December).

In economic justice and regulatory policies, the conference wants to amend tax policies negatively impacting the working poor; the allocation of scarce budget resources to provide essential services for vulnerable persons; and the affirmation of the recognized right to exercise religious conscience in the provision of publicly-funded services.

And in education, the group seeks reimbursement to non-public schools for state-mandated, non-educational services; the expansion of shared time services to include kindergarten instruction; continued equitable participation of non-public schools in federal programs in districts undergoing reform; a requirement that all public schools have open enrollment policies; and protection of non-public schools from excessive regulation, among more items.

"State budget and pro-family policies have long been priorities for Michigan Catholic Conference," the group noted in its ["Blueprint for the Common Good"](#) to supporters. "The Conference's continued advocacy to promote quality education will remain essential as choice in education and options for families are among the greatest anti-poverty tools that can be employed."

The group also pointed to ensuring Michigan's constitutional ban on the death penalty stays in place. That conversation comes in the wake of resolution by [Sen. Virgil Smith](#) (D-Detroit) that seeks the ability to use the death penalty in cases where police or corrections officers are fatally killed (See [Gongwer Michigan Report, February 4, 2015](#)).



Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder signs controversial religious objection adoption bills

rick-snyder-office-michigan.jpeg

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder in his Lansing office. (AP File Photo | Carlos Osorio)

Jonathan Oosting | joosting@mlive.com By Jonathan Oosting | joosting@mlive.com

Follow on Twitter

on June 11, 2015 at 1:16 PM, updated June 11, 2015 at 1:36 PM

LANSING, MI — Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder on Thursday quickly signed controversial legislation allowing adoption agencies to decline service to prospective parents on religious grounds.

The three-bill package, widely opposed by LGBT advocates, had reached his desk less than 24 hours earlier after approval Wednesday in the Republican-led Legislature.

The new law, which largely codifies an existing Department of Human Services policy, takes effect immediately -- just weeks before the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to rule on Michigan's gay marriage ban.

"The state has made significant progress in finding more forever homes for Michigan kids in recent years and that wouldn't be possible without the public-private partnerships that facilitate the adoption process," Snyder said in a statement.

"We are focused on ensuring that as many children are adopted to as many loving families as possible regardless of their makeup."

The new law seeks to prohibit "adverse action" against a private agency that contracts with the state to provide adoption services, including an attempt to strip state funding.

If an agency rejects a prospective parent on religious grounds, they would have to refer them to another agency and provide them with a written list of options.

Snyder's office, in announcing the signing, provided MLive with letters from the Michigan Catholic Conference and Bethany Christian Services urging his support.

Bethany had suggested that future policies may force faith-based agencies to "choose between their desire

to help children and families and their fidelity to their religious principles."

Religiously affiliated agencies in some other states, including Illinois, have reportedly closed their doors rather than comply with new regulations there requiring them to work with same-sex couples.

Critics, comparing the proposal to an Indiana religious freedom law that prompted national criticism earlier this year, had urged Snyder to veto the legislation, arguing that it would amount to state-sanctioned discrimination against gays and lesbians wishing to adopt.

"Children deserve loving homes and our elected officials should be held accountable for supporting this blatant act of discrimination," Lonnie Scott, executive director of Progress Michigan, said in a statement.

"We hope that Gov. Snyder is prepared for the same amount of backlash that was seen in Indiana when they passed similar RFRA-style legislation and we encourage the people to raise up their voices in protest."

This story will be updated.

© 2015 MLive.com. All rights reserved.

Anti-poverty groups slam killing tax credit

Gary Heinlein, The Detroit News 2:01 p.m. EDT June 2, 2015



(Photo: File photo / The Detroit News)

Lansing — Anti-poverty groups said Tuesday it would be a mistake for lawmakers to end a tax credit for the working poor as part of a proposed state budget shuffle to fund more road repair work.

The \$113 million spent annually on the state's Earned Income Tax Credit is a tiny part of the \$1.2 billion annual boost needed to fix more roads and bridges, but would be a huge loss to people on poverty-level wages, they told the House Infrastructure and Transportation Committee.

"It's a tax hike on 820,000 working families who are raising one million children here in Michigan," said Michigan League for Public Policy President and CEO Gilda Jacobs.

Legislation to take away the \$113 million and spend it on road repairs is among 11 bills in the House no-tax-increase plan for raising more bridge and highway money.

The committee, which also took testimony Tuesday on legislation to redirect General Fund revenue to roads, is poised for a Wednesday afternoon vote on the bills.

The state's earned income tax credit is set at 6 percent of the rate for a federal earned income tax credit the bill sponsor said provides the biggest share of the income tax credit provided to low-income workers.

Rep. Jeff Farrington, the sponsor, agreed child poverty is a problem but said Michigan's Earned Income Tax Credit averages \$143 per family, or \$2.70 a week. He said the tax credit was shown by a federal audit to be fraught with fraud.

"Why would Michigan taxpayers want to be connected with that program to pay out \$2.70 a week?" asked Farrington, R-Utica.

Michigan's Earned Income Tax Credit was at 20 percent of the federal rate for a year before Gov. Rick Snyder's 2011 budget-balancing strategy cut it to the current level. The reduction cost poor families an average of \$300 each per year, according to testimony.

Jacobs said the higher tax credit helped raise 20,000 families out of poverty; even at the reduced rate of 6 percent, she said, it's boosting 7,000 of them.

Lansing resident Tiffany Bucceri, a mother of two young sons, testified the tax credit helped her get through a period of financial distress while she moved and hunted for a job following a divorce.

Bucceri, now employed in the benefits department of the Michigan Catholic Conference, said Michigan's EITC provided 10 percent of the state and federal income tax breaks that helped her pay off credit card debt she had run up to meet expenses while jobless for six months.

The Catholic Conference joined Jacobs' organization and United Way-supported agencies in opposing the elimination of the state tax credit.

Tom Hickson, its vice president for public policy, said poverty remains a persistent problem for the state. Hickson said one-quarter of all Michigan children live in poverty and the rate is 64 percent in Flint.

"Eliminating the EITC certainly does nothing to help (fight) poverty in Michigan," he said.

Michigan's Earned Income Tax Credit would have gone back up to 20 percent of the federal rate under a complex road funding plan called Proposal 1 that voters resoundingly rejected May 5. The measure also would have raised the state sales tax to 7 percent, up from 6 percent.

The sales tax hike also would have added more than \$300 million to the school aid budget and nearly \$100 million to the state's annual allotment for local governments. Approval would have triggered fuel tax increases leading to a \$1.2-billion boost in road funding.

In the wake of Proposal 1's rejection, lawmakers are scrambling for a new formula to get the \$1.2 billion. The 11 bills up for a Wednesday committee vote constitute House Speaker Kevin Cotter's proposed solution.

The Mount Pleasant Republican leader's plan, which he said would add a little over \$1 billion to the road fix-it pot by 2019, also would shift \$700 million in General Fund revenue and \$185 million from the Michigan Economic Development Corporation's annual budget to roads.

At last week's Detroit Regional Chamber conference on Mackinac Island, Snyder said the House plan is costing the state potential jobs, with its proposed diversion of economic development funds.

"Every time you look like you're bouncing around or not have a clear direction that you stay true to, you're creating a disincentive for investment," he said.

The Senate is working on its own proposal for more road funding. Majority Floor Leader Mike Kowall, R-White Lake, said members will skip their traditional two-month break to work all summer if necessary.

Snyder and Senate leaders say it's unrealistic to think the state can solve its road repair shortfall by diverting all of the money from other state services and programs. They argue a tax increase for road improvements not only is necessary but would be a worthwhile investment.

gheinlein@detroitnews.com

Read or Share this story: <http://detne.ws/1ld1Plx>

Column: Faith-based adoption helps children

Chad and Melissa Buck 12:05 a.m. EDT June 19, 2015



(Photo: Family photo)

Gov. Rick Snyder recently signed into law adoption legislation that hits close to home for us. Over the past five years we have been foster parents with a Catholic child placement agency in Lansing. In that time we have adopted four kids: Perry, Max, Liza and, most recently our youngest, Winnie. We currently have one foster placement.

We came to the faith-based agency in 2009 because we were ready to become parents. We had heard great things about the agency and after struggling with infertility for years, we were hopeful they could help us connect with kids we would be able to foster or adopt. Because we are not Catholic, we were nervous about what they would think of us, but we soon learned they held the same standards as us and were incredibly

supportive.

Not long after our license came through, we received our older kids. They came from a rough background; both of our sons had anxiety and our oldest had PTSD. We have seen kids go to residential treatment for less than what was happening. But the agency was there for us.

They listened when we called, upset, because we did not know what to do. Their therapists came to our home to help us with techniques. They gave us the strength to not give up and we are so glad we didn't because we could not imagine our lives without our kids. They have flourished. And we know it is not us who deserves all the credit; much of it goes to the agency that has always been there for us.

From time to time we have trainings with other foster parents from different agencies in our area and, after speaking with them, it is clear that the foster parents licensed through the faith-based agency are among the most satisfied, knowledgeable, and happiest. We feel the love and support of their staff and we see how much they care.

Our youngest daughter, Winnie, was born with a rare genetic condition that requires specialists in the Detroit area. Her caseworker drove to Winnie's appointments to learn everything she could about her condition and even went so far as to get trained by the endocrinologist so that she could teach the agency staff how to care for Winnie in case of an emergency while she was having visitation.

We could not imagine going through the foster and adoptive process without the support from our agency. To lose them would be devastating, which is why we support the religious liberty protections the governor recently signed into law. Without their presence, we would have to find a way to transfer our license to another agency and hope we don't lose placement of our little one.

To have these bills passed protects us, the agency, and the kids and families they serve. It keeps their doors open to serve our community. And it puts the best interest of kids ahead of the politics and personal opinions the adults have.

We have always said that foster care is about the kids, not the adults. Our agency believes that and puts it into practice every day. It is their mission to serve kids who have lost everything and to find them forever homes if needed. They are in the business of making families.

These children deserve to have a faith-based agency like ours around to care for and protect them. We could not be more proud to be a part of their work and the love they bring to so many people's lives.

Chad and Melissa Buck live in Lansing.

Read or Share this story: <http://detne.ws/1LiJTH9>

The Pope, a historic visit and ‘a deep desire to change the world’

Paul A. Long 9:48 a.m. EDT September 17, 2015



(Photo: AFP/Getty Images)

Next week, three cities — Washington D.C., New York City and Philadelphia — will host Pope Francis as he makes his first visit to the United States. The pope will arrive to a rather high level of energy and excitement, as people from coast to coast are intrigued by his visible model of service and humble manner of speaking.

During his time in the U.S., Pope Francis will become the first pope to address a joint session of Congress, the third to meet with a president while visiting the States, and the fourth to address the United Nations. He will end his American journey in Philadelphia at the World Meeting of Families, a worldwide Catholic gathering held every three years to celebrate and promote families.

Pope Francis' visit will also highlight the important role faith plays in public life.

Communities and individuals of differing faiths have significantly contributed to the development of society, bringing together diverse perspectives that seek to advance the common good. Along with the contributions religion makes to the development of culture and debate, faith also brings its mandate of service to others. Religious communities and organizations have been active in American public life for hundreds of years. For these organizations, practicing their faith and serving others are not two separate duties, but rather both are part of their full exercise of being religious.

The Catholic Church in Michigan, for example, maintains an extensive record of serving those in need. Last year, Catholic schools educated 53,364 students, teaching the importance of service, critical thinking, and faith values; Catholic social services agencies assisted 931,554 individuals with counseling, refugee resettlement, and personal needs assistance; Catholic hospitals and health care centers served 6,801,015 patients, many of whom could not afford the service; and 640 Catholic parishes — together with their parishioners — provided vital spiritual, financial, and material support across their community. Beyond the numbers, Catholic entities continue their presence for the underserved in society, providing care with dignity and respect.

The impact of Michigan's approximately 2 million Catholics, 20% of the state's population, is deeply engrained in society, and has been since Father Gabriel Richard, Bishop Baraga, and Jesuit missionary Pere Marquette first ministered in the Great Lakes region beginning in the 17th and 18th centuries.

To address issues that impact poor and vulnerable persons, the state benefits from the presence of a variety of organizations that recruit volunteers and care for those on the margins. Society is well served by this diverse engagement of citizens, including those of faith. Through their charitable service to others, religious communities promote a positive vision for every human person.

Pope Francis has written that an authentic faith "involves a deep desire to change the world." He has also urged the faithful to "leave this earth somehow better than we found it." May this historic visit further inspire individuals to enrich public life through faith and service.

Paul A. Long

President and CEO, Michigan Catholic Conference

Read or Share this story: <http://on.freep.com/1iREpaE>

Michigan Catholic Conference: Refugees deserve our help

Paul A. Long 11:30 p.m. EST December 18, 2015



(Photo: Santi Palacios / AP)

Two thousand years ago, a young woman named Mary gave birth in a stable. After being warned in a dream of coming violence, her husband, Joseph, gathered the family and fled Bethlehem.

The King of Judea, threatened by news of the child Jesus, had ordered all boys age 2 and younger to be put to death. In their escape from persecution, the Holy Family became refugees. Sadly, the family was neither the first nor the last to be displaced from their home due to violence, war or extreme conditions.

Today, hundreds of thousands of individuals and families are forced to flee their homes in Iraq, Syria and other parts of the Middle East to escape persistent violence and terror. Pope Francis acknowledged the magnitude of this refugee crisis when he spoke before Congress in September, recognizing that it presents governments with difficult challenges and decisions. At the same time, he encouraged lawmakers to “view (the refugees) as persons, seeing their faces and listening to their stories, trying to respond as best we can to their situation.”

In recent weeks, harsh and inflammatory rhetoric has regrettably emerged in discussions regarding refugees. Some have called for restrictions based on a person’s religious belief. It is true in the wake of recent terrorist attacks that safety must be a primary concern. Yet, as a nation, we cannot allow fear to lead us to sacrifice the values we hold close to our hearts.

America has long been a nation where individuals of all faiths have been able to create a life for themselves, where religious liberty is protected as a cornerstone value. Time and again the U.S. has shone as a safe haven from persecution, a place of opportunity for those desperate for peace and safety.

Restrictions on religious liberty, in all its forms, are both misguided and unconstitutional, ignoring the spirit of tolerance and respect upon which this nation prides itself. In fact, refugees of differing faiths and backgrounds have lost their homes and jobs. Many have personally witnessed the death of family members and loved ones. Contrary to public perception, those fleeing such senseless violence are not admitted into the U.S. on a whim.

Refugees are among the most scrutinized (<https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/11/20/infographic-screening-process-refugee-entry-united-states>) of all persons seeking to enter the country. Once the United Nations grants refugee status to an individual and refers them to the U.S. for resettlement, the individual faces a rigorous vetting process of checks and screenings that averages 18 to 24 months.

Some 2,234 Syrian refugees have entered the United States since October 2010 through the process, mostly women and children (<http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/11/250005.htm>). In our nation’s collective response, we can strive to “welcome the stranger,” specifically those who have been cleared by the government’s refugee approval process.

For decades, the Catholic Church has provided services that help resettle refugees of differing faiths. They come from war-torn countries and politically oppressive parts of the world. Today, the Church stands ready to assist additional refugees. In collaboration with other faith-based organizations, the Church wishes to recognize the dignity of each person by picking them up from the airport, finding safe and affordable housing, providing English as a second language and cultural inclusion classes, and offering financial literacy and employment services, among others.

Let us open our hearts and take the time to recognize the human face of all those who have been displaced with physical and emotional wounds, have no place to call home, and are searching for stability and safety. Let us also stay true to our founding principles, preserving our great nation as a place that welcomes and protects people of all religious beliefs.

Paul A. Long is president and CEO of Michigan Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state.

Read or Share this story: <http://detne.ws/1YIP2w>

Bills in Michigan Legislature could help cap school-to-prison pipeline

Tom Hickson 11:15 p.m. EST March 12, 2016



(Photo: Evan Vucci, Associated Press)

In his speech before Congress in September, Pope Francis spoke of the need for society to address the corrections system, offering encouragement to those “convinced that a just and necessary punishment must never exclude the dimension of hope and the goal of rehabilitation.”

If the words of Pope Francis are to be taken seriously, then bipartisan legislation awaiting action from the Michigan House of Representatives is a good place to start.

Policies enacted in the mid-1990s brought about a “tough-on-crime” approach, expanding prospects for juveniles to be treated as adults in the criminal justice system. As a result, more juvenile offenders have been shifted into the adult system instead of receiving services that lead toward rehabilitation.

These policies have also done little to repair the harm caused to communities and to victims by crime. But a new “smart-on-crime” approach seeks to improve critical re-entry services to lower recidivism and to offer alternative sentencing when appropriate for low-level, nonviolent offenses.

One common-sense way to integrate the “smart-on-crime” approach is found in House Bills [4947](http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2015-HB-4947) (<http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2015-HB-4947>) through [4966](http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2015-HB-4966) (<http://legislature.mi.gov/doc.aspx?2015-HB-4966>), which are pending before the Michigan House of Representatives. These measures recognize the differences between youth and adults that have been proven through [scientific and academic research](http://sites.nationalacademies.org/cs/groups/dbassesite/documents/webpage/dbasse_083506.pdf) (http://sites.nationalacademies.org/cs/groups/dbassesite/documents/webpage/dbasse_083506.pdf). Youthful offenders under the age of 18 can be impulsive, often succumb to peer pressure, and many have had significant trauma in their lives. Of the youths that are in the adult corrections system today, most have seen a friend or family member killed. A majority have substance abuse issues and are suffering educationally. Many have bounced around the foster care system.

Michigan is only one of nine states that automatically require prosecuting 17-year-olds as adults. [Between 2003 and 2013](http://www.miccd.org/2014/06/ybb/) (<http://www.miccd.org/2014/06/ybb/>), 20,000 Michigan juveniles received an adult sentence, including detention in jail or imprisonment for a crime they committed. There is an increased chance juveniles exposed to adult jails, detention facilities, or prison will feel hopeless and become hardened. [A 2006 study from the Centers for Disease Control](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5609a1.htm) (<http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5609a1.htm>) shows that youth exiting the adult system are 34% more likely to re-offend, re-offend more quickly and escalate to more violent offenses than youth exiting the juvenile system.

Is this the best way to deal with society’s youthful offenders?

The justice system should hold offenders, including youth, accountable for their crimes, but it also must seek to foster rehabilitation whenever possible. Pope Francis has urged society to help those who have committed crimes to find a more productive path, one that benefits offenders and “elevates the morale of the entire community and society.” House Bills 4947-4966 would encourage rehabilitation, raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18, prevent juveniles from being housed with adult prisoners, allow a judge flexibility when considering a waiver during sentencing for a juvenile and increase state contributions to the Child Care Fund, which helps counties provide rehabilitative services and programming.

Adding 17-year-olds to the juvenile justice system and providing them with rehabilitative services will add costs. But if Michigan is to be serious about making an impact on rehabilitation, increasing public safety, and reducing crime, it should be reflected in the state’s spending priorities.

Not only is this legislation compassionate, it moves Michigan away from the “tough-on-crime” approach to a more effective “smart-on-crime” approach. In other words, it places a priority on rehabilitation over retribution. House Bills 4947-4966 will help youth become more productive members of society, reduce costs of future victimization, and prove a worthwhile investment for the state.

Tom Hickson is the Vice President for Public Policy and Advocacy of the Michigan Catholic Conference, the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Michigan.

Read or Share this story: <http://on.freep.com/1pgf79e>

Editorial: Keep budget funding for private schools

The Detroit News 11:41 p.m. EDT April 18, 2016



(Photo: Al Goldis)

Republicans in the state House and Senate have included funding in this year's budget to help private schools meet state-mandated health and safety regulations. All public schools in the state get funding specifically to cover these costs, and private schools should, too. The full Legislature should get on board.

If lawmakers do approve the funding, it would be the first time the state offers this kind of support to private schools. Since the funds aren't directed to any instructional activities, it doesn't conflict with Michigan's strict constitutional language blocking state funding for nonpublic education.

[It's the second time lawmakers have considered \(/story/opinion/columnists/ingrid-jacques/2016/04/01/state-aid-private-schools/82501082/\) the funding](#), but last year it failed to gain traction. Prospects are more hopeful this year. Both the full House and Senate Appropriations Committees have approved the line item: \$1 million was set aside in the House; \$5 million in the Senate.

The Michigan Catholic Conference, which has helped lead the effort to include the funding, estimates private schools in the state spend roughly \$10 million a year meeting the regulations — about \$100 per student. While the proposed funds don't come close to meeting that target, the Catholic Conference would be pleased to see any resources included.

The money would help private schools pay for requirements such as employee background checks, safety drills and immunization verification — all required by state law.

Not surprisingly, this is a party line issue. But helping all schools meet basic health and safety requirements shouldn't be partisan. Plus, there is already precedent for the state offering some assistance to nonpublic schools. Private school students can benefit from shared time instruction services from public schools as well as courses from the Michigan Virtual University. The Michigan State Police in 2015 included 15 private schools in grants it awarded to help schools purchase equipment to boost safety.

Michigan wouldn't be alone in offering this aid. Ohio and New York include funding in their budgets to help private schools meet state mandates.

Rep. Sarah Roberts, D-St. Clair Shores, tried to strip the \$1 million in the House; she expressed constitutional concerns and wanted to direct the funding elsewhere.

"My Democratic colleagues and I fought for fair solutions to this flawed budget so all students in Michigan, not just a select group have access to a great education," said Roberts, minority vice chair of the school aid subcommittee, after the Appropriations Committee approved the K-12 budget.

If lawmakers really want all students in Michigan to have access to a great education, then they should look at changing the state constitution to allow vouchers or tax credits for private schools. In the meantime, the least the Legislature can do is approve this funding for nonpublic schools to cover state mandates.

Read or Share this story: <http://detne.ws/1SoWgTF>



Content provided by MIRS News.
Visit us on the web at www.mirsnews.com.

◀ Tuesday, May 3, 2016 ▶

Abortion Coercion Ban Bills Move To Senate Floor

This session's version of legislation creating a ban on coercing a woman into having an abortion were reported today from the Senate Judiciary Committee on party line votes.

The package includes 🐾 [HB 4787](#) and 🐾 [HB 4830](#), sponsored by Rep. Amanda [PRICE](#) (R-Holland) and Nancy [JENKINS](#) (R-Clayton).

Two similar bills moved last session out of the Senate only to die in the House during lame duck (See "[Abortion Coercion Bills Head To House After Senate Approval](#)," 12/11/2014).

Right to Life of Michigan has made passage of the coercion bills a priority for the last two legislative sessions (See "[Right To Life Targets Abortion Opt-In, Coercion](#)," 01/25/2013). They, along with the Michigan Catholic Conference, contend that the Legislature began the move in 2012 when it adopted abortion clinic standards in [HB 5711](#) (PA 499 of 2012).

"Coercive abortion is a very real and serious women's health issue," testified Rebecca [MASTEE](#) of the Michigan Catholic Conference. "Some studies have revealed that up to 64 percent of American women report feeling pressured to abort -- indicating more than half of abortions involve some form of coercion."

Mastee argued that based on the work the Catholic Church has done with its Project Rachel program that offers support to post-abortive women, she's "inclined to agree with the 64 percent number."

Opponents, such as the ACLU of Michigan argue existing law against stalking, black mail and abuse already cover the issue.

"The bills we're looking at are part of a political and PR campaign that women seeking abortion are coerced," Merissa [KOVACH](#), of the ACLU of Michigan told the panel. Kovach cited statistics from the Guttmacher Institute that fewer than three percent of women are "coerced" into obtaining an abortion.

"Do you know how many abortions are performed in Michigan," Judiciary Committee Chair Rick [JONES](#) (R-Grand Ledge) asked Kovach.

"I don't have those numbers," she responded.

"If it's three percent, it's a lot," quipped Jones.

The two pieces of legislation create the crime of coercion and amend the state's sentencing guidelines to reflect the change. The panel reported the bills with recommendation they be granted immediate effect.



Visit us on the web at www.mirsnews.com.

◀ Monday, May 9, 2016 ▶

Catholic Conference: Nothing Controversial About Private School Funding

House and Senate budget proposals to give private schools \$5 and \$1 million to cover the costs of state mandates connected to fire drills, immunizations and criminal background checks, among other things, is "nothing new" and goes directly to ensuring the safety and healthy of children, said Tom **HICKSON** of the Michigan Catholic Conference (MCC).

Speaking on the *MIRS Monday* podcast, Hickson said he believes the state mandates are good ones. However, public schools are reimbursed for complying with them through their foundation allowance while private schools get nothing.

While the MCC has the support of both House Speaker Kevin **COTTER** (R-Mt. Pleasant) and Senate Majority Leader Arlan **MEEKHOF** (R-West Olive), the proposal is receiving pushback from some Democrats, traditional public school groups and the American Civil Liberties Unions (ACLU) as being an inappropriate mix of church and state.

"I don't think there's anything controversial about protecting the health and safety of children," Hickson said. "I can see how some people, who don't know the details would have a knee-jerk reaction, but after it's explained, some of that opposition goes away."

A couple hundred million dollars goes to New York private schools and \$65 million was set aside for private Ohio schools for the exact same purpose, he said. What Michigan is looking for would come out of the General Fund, not the School Aid Fund, while giving children the "same protections as those in public schools."

Hickson emphasized the \$1 to \$5 million would come out of the General Fund and isn't much different from a Michigan State Police grant project in which \$634,000 of a \$5 million grant for security upgrades went to private schools like St. Joseph in Howell, Trinity Lutheran in Ottawa County or Oholei Yosef Yitzchak Lubavitch in Oak Park.

Also, some public money ends up going to fund specialty teachers who teach at both private and public schools under the state's shared time program, said Hickson, making the point that the idea that some public money goes to private schools isn't a new concept.

"This is a common sense-type of proposal," Hickson said.

While Hickson said the money is technically General Fund money, Jennifer **SMITH** of the Michigan Association of School Boards (MASB) said it's still money out of the School Aid Budget that could be used for literacy coaches or put back in the per-pupil allotment.

Smith said she understands that private schools may face state mandates, but she said public schools face plenty of state mandates that aren't fully compensated. If the state is going to start picking and choosing which mandates it's going to fund, it should start with the reimbursing publicly funded schools.

Shelli **WEISBERG** of the ACLU said it's been her group's position that using any public money for a religious school is not appropriate. Besides, public schools don't receive a special allocation for the types of state mandates the private schools are asking for, she said.

"We do think it starts to impede on the constitutional question of church and state," Weisberg said.

The matter is one of several points of difference between the House and Senate's "School Bus" funding proposal for Fiscal Year (FY) 2017, which will be working out in a joint House-Senate conference committee before being sent to the Governor.





MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Michigan Catholic Conference
510 South Capitol Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Visit us on the web
www.micatholic.org



Find **Michigan Catholic Conference** on
Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Instagram

©2017 Michigan Catholic Conference