



**MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC**
CONFERENCE

ADVOCACY REPORT ON THE 100TH MICHIGAN LEGISLATURE

An Analysis of the 2019–2020 Legislative Session



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DEAR FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES,

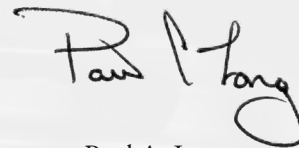
I am pleased to present this Advocacy Report on the 100th Michigan Legislature that chronicles Michigan Catholic Conference's advocacy efforts during the 2019–2020 legislative session. Incorporating the framework of MCC's guiding advocacy document, *A Blueprint for the Common Good*, this report is divided into nine overarching categories: Human Life and Dignity; Preferential Option for the Poor and Regulatory Policies; Religious Liberty; Education; Children and Families; Health Care; Restorative Justice; Immigration and Refugees; and Care for Creation.

Over the past two years, the Conference has worked diligently with lawmakers and legislative staff of both political parties to advance the common good. Staff carefully reviewed hundreds of bills, examining the impact that each would have on the dignity of the human person and the needs of the vulnerable. MCC provided testimony before House and Senate committees, conducted polling on key issues, offered lawmakers relevant data to enhance their understanding of various measures, worked to build advocacy coalitions, and shared the Church's perspective on policy issues at press conferences and in encounters with the media.

While the 2019–2020 legislative session brought forth challenges—especially in the wake of ongoing social unrest, an acrimonious election cycle, and the COVID-19 pandemic—the Conference celebrates many achievements for Michiganders. This Advocacy Report not only highlights these critical successes but also provides a historical record that will inform advocacy during future legislative sessions.

Michigan Catholic Conference appreciates the encouragement, support, prayers, and advocacy of its episcopal leadership, diocesan clergy, men and women religious, and lay leaders, which helped MCC's efforts to be successful and faithful to the values of our Catholic faith.

With deep appreciation for your interest, support, and guidance, I am,



Paul A. Long
President and CEO

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HUMAN LIFE & DIGNITY

The Catholic Church recognizes and teaches that a person's value is inherent, a gift from God, and not determined by characteristics such as "age, education, income, or productivity."¹ During the 2019–2020 state legislative session, Michigan Catholic Conference sought to identify and act where policies that impact human dignity were the subject of legislative debate.

Highlights

Wins for Human Life and Dignity

- Public Act 177 of 2019 established a Suicide Prevention Commission to research the causes of suicide and to present recommendations for addressing risk factors (SB 228.)
- House Resolution 23 of 2019 emphasized the need to preserve legal protection for the unborn and recognized that abortion is a tragic loss of life.
- House Resolution 123 of 2019 encouraged Congress to establish and fund programs that support positive health practices for minority mothers.
- Public Act 209 of 2020 waived the fee for families seeking a certificate of stillbirth, which helps in the process of claiming a state tax exemption for expenses associated with their loss (HB 5289.)
- House Resolution 317 of 2020 recognized the sadness caused by the loss of a pregnancy.
- State budget language required school districts to have a disciplinary policy for staff who refer students for abortions (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.)



Featured Action

Petition Drive to Ban Dismemberment Abortion

The Michigan Legislature spent several months considering bills that would ban dismemberment abortion, a procedure used in the second trimester of pregnancy that brutally ends the life of an unborn baby pregnancy (HBs 4320–4321 and SBs 229–230). While MCC testified on behalf of the measures, the pro-life community turned its attention toward an initiated position after

Governor Gretchen Whitmer announced she would veto any pro-life legislation. An initiative petition gathers a necessary number of signatures from registered Michigan voters to submit language before the Legislature, without requiring approval of the governor to become law. In June 2019, MCC joined Michigan Right to Life and other pro-life organizations to announce the *Michigan Values Life* initiative. To support the effort, staff created promotional resources for use in dioceses and parishes, coordinated action with diocesan staff, promoted the petition drive through the news media, and staffed local petition drives. Sadly, the initiative fell short during the certification process. One unnecessary challenge to the success of the petition drive was a competing petition drive from a new organization called the Michigan Heartbeat Coalition, which sought to outlaw abortion when a heartbeat is detected. The effort did not have the support of Michigan Catholic Conference or the Michigan bishops; the initiative would have liberalized abortion in the state since existing Michigan statute prohibits the procedure.²

Left: *Rebecca Mastee, JD of MCC spoke at a press conference with pro-life groups about the brutal nature of the dismemberment procedure, sharing that “women deserve better.”*

Featured Action

State Budget Support for Mothers

After years of MCC advocacy that began in 2013, the Michigan Legislature included an appropriation in the state budget to assist women (and their children) in crisis or unexpected pregnancies, provided the funds were not used to promote or discuss abortion. Through the Michigan Pregnancy and Parenting Support Services Program, women received counseling, parenting classes, adoption information, referrals for pre- and post-natal care, and material items for herself and her child, all at no cost. While the budget item enjoyed wide legislative support, MCC understood Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s pro-abortion views could lead to a veto of the funding. In 2019, staff engaged in a statewide earned media effort to highlight real stories of women helped by the program and encouraged the public to advocate for its inclusion in the final law.³ Unfortunately, while MCC was awarded for its communications effort, Governor Gretchen Whitmer indeed vetoed the funding in both budget cycles this session. Going forward, MCC maintains its commitment to assist pregnant women in need and is currently exploring budget alternatives that could support vulnerable women and their children.

Summary of MCC's Advocacy

Regarding Human Life and Dignity

MCC supported legislation that recognizes the worth of every person, protects against threats to human dignity, and aids the vulnerable. The policy process brought forward important discussions on these topics, and although they did not become law, MCC advocated for bills to:

- Protect vulnerable and elder adults from abuse or exploitation (HBs 4076, 4254–4260, 4265 and SBs 108–109, 412–413.)
- Regulate abortion in several ways, including by adding more state abortion reporting, requiring the distribution of information about abortion reversal to women

prescribed the abortion pill, and encouraging passage of provisions to protect those born alive after abortion. No hearings were held, but MCC was prepared to support each of these measures (HBs 4322, 4416–4417, 5374; SBs 165–166; and SR 27 of 2019.)

Additionally, MCC stood ready to oppose unsuccessful legislation that would:

- Remove Michigan's prohibition against abortion; explicitly name contraception, sterilization, and abortion as fundamental rights; and repeal existing abortion regulations that MCC helped put in place. No hearing was held, but MCC was prepared to testify against the bills (HBs 4113–4116, 5179–5185 and SBs 50–53, 622–628.) 100





PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR & REGULATORY POLICIES

Good public policy is made when “engaging the voices and needs of the poor and vulnerable” in legislative discussions.⁴ Throughout the past two years, MCC worked on a variety of critical state policies to highlight the needs of the poor and to uplift low-income Michiganders.

Highlights

Wins for Low-income Michiganders

- MCC helped defeat a measure that would have expanded predatory lending practices in the state (HB 5097.)

See “Featured Action: Opposition to Payday Lending Expansion” to learn more.

- Public Act 392 of 2020 revoked the law prohibiting individuals with multiple drug felonies from receiving federal food assistance (SB 1006.)
- The state budget included funding for runaway and homeless youth programs, emergency homeless shelters, and the annual clothing allowance for low-income children (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.)
- Lawmakers maintained Heat and Eat appropriations, which utilizes low-income energy assistance to help needy individuals qualify for additional federal food assistance (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.)

Featured Action

Opposition to Payday Lending Expansion

Michigan Catholic Conference dedicated significant energy to fighting efforts to expand payday lending in Michigan. More specifically, the bill would have allowed payday lenders to offer loans of up to \$2,500 from the current \$600 limit (HB 5097.) The legislation did not provide adequate consumer protections and would have charged interest on loans at an unreasonable 132 percent annual rate. Members of the Catholic Advocacy Network sent over 1,150 email messages to lawmakers opposing the bill at key points in the policy process. In addition to dedicating the March 2020 *The Word from Lansing* column for Catholic papers to the topic, MCC also distributed a brief for Michigan senators on alternatives to payday lending to demonstrate other options existed that would not bring residents into crippling debt.⁵ Additionally, MCC composed an op/ed column for *The Detroit News*, which also saw on its news side an extensive report about campaign donations to legislators from out-of-state payday lenders. Due to efforts from MCC, other low-income advocates, and members

of the credit union community, numerous senators from both parties urged leadership not to bring the bill up for a vote in the Senate Regulatory Reform Committee. Thus, a national effort to expand payday lending Michigan was defeated as the session ended

Featured Action

Press Conference in Support of State EITC

In June 2019, MCC hosted a press conference with a broad coalition of groups to speak to the importance of the state

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC.) The state EITC is a refundable credit available to low-income workers, offsetting much or all of their payroll taxes. Specifically, the coalition urged legislators to support restoring the state EITC from six percent of the federal credit back up to twelve percent (HB 4324.) Hundreds of citizens across the state watched the Facebook Live event. Staff also dedicated its December 2019 **focus** publication, *Advocacy on Behalf of Those in Need*, to the state EITC and other policies that benefit the poor, as well as its September column of *The Word from Lansing*.^{6,7} While the state EITC was not restored, this session’s advocacy brought together a strong coalition of interested stakeholders, which will be helpful for future advocacy efforts.



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MCC's Tom Hickson and other stakeholders highlighted the benefits of the state EITC for low-income workers.

Summary of MCC's Advocacy

Regarding Preferential Option for the Poor

MCC advocated for a variety of measures that recognize the challenges low-income Michiganders endure and encouraged support for organizations that serve or work with them. Although they did not become law this session, MCC also supported bills to:

- Prohibit payday lenders from charging service fees over a thirty-six annual percentage rate, which would provide some protection for borrowers (HB 4251.)
- Allow for the creation of “microgrids” by municipally owned electric utilities, electric utilities, and private entities, which would allow critical institutions such as hospitals and public safety facilities to maintain power during an outage (HB 4477.)

Right: Tom Hickson, Michigan Catholic Conference; Representative Angela Whitwer (D-Lansing); and Dr. Phil Knight, Food Bank Council testified on behalf of HB 6162 during the legislative process. Photo by Rep. Angela Whitwer's office.

- Allow for a nonrefundable tax credit for contributions to food banks, food kitchens, or homeless shelters (HB 6162.)

MCC opposed legislation that would have:

- Eliminated all gun free zones in Michigan, except schools, and allowed open or concealed carry of firearms in places such as childcare centers, sports arenas, bars and taverns, hospitals, and churches and church owned properties (HBs 4770–4771.) 100







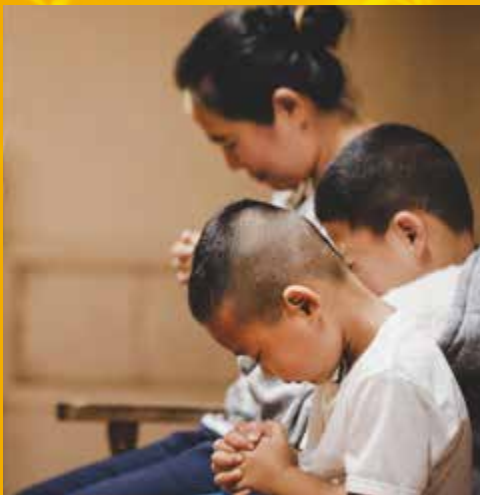
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

During the 2019–2020 session, the protection of religious freedom received more attention in the courts than in the legislative arena. Whenever possible, Michigan Catholic Conference sought to highlight the rights of religious people and organizations to operate according to their faith principles in the public realm. Staff frequently shared information about significant judicial cases taking place during the past two years with a Catholic audience.

Highlights

Wins for Religious Liberty

- House Resolution 302 of 2020 declared September 24, 2020 as a Day of Prayer, Fasting, and Humiliation across the state.



Featured Action

“Decline to Sign” Fair and Equal Ballot Proposal

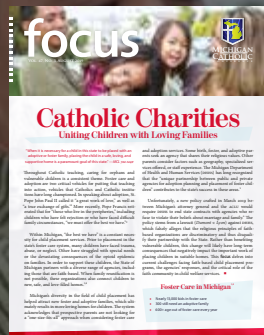
In January 2020, a group called Fair and Equal Michigan formed to amend the state’s Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act through citizen-initiated legislation, or a petition drive. The petition language would create a new definition of “sex” to include gender identity and sexual orientation and would impose a restrictive definition for “religion” in state law. After reviewing the proposal, MCC prepared materials to share with parishes about its harmful aspects, including a statewide bulletin announcement and an informational summary of Church ministries and activities that would be negatively impacted. In the materials, MCC asked churches to encourage parishioners to “decline to sign” the proposal. The group originally had until May 27, 2020 to submit over 340,000 signatures to the State Board of Canvassers for certification. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and a legal challenge in the Michigan Court of Claims, the deadline was extended. In October 2020, the group submitted 480,000 signatures and announced its plans to place the measure on the 2022 statewide ballot if the proposal was not supported or voted on by the legislature. Additionally, while no hearings were held, MCC planned to oppose legislation that sought the same policy as the petition drive (HB 4688 and SB 315.)

Featured Action

Catholic Charities Focus

In Michigan, the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) collaborates with public and private agencies to carry out placement services for the state's most vulnerable children. Michigan's longstanding agency partnerships and diversity in providers have helped attract new foster and adoptive families for decades. However, in response to a lawsuit against DHHS, Attorney General Dana Nessel and the American Civil Liberties Union of Michigan created a new policy in 2019 requiring DHHS to end state contracts with agencies who refuse to violate their beliefs about marriage and family, including Catholic agencies.⁸ Michigan Catholic Conference issued a

focus publication in August 2019, *Catholic Charities—Uniting Children With Loving Families*, outlining why the state's new rule was harmful both to religious liberty rights and the opportunity to move more children out of the foster system. The publication also shared the significant contributions of faith-based agencies in the child placement realm.⁹ The lawsuit challenging the policy, *Buck v. Gordon*, is on hold in federal court as the U.S. Supreme Court is slated to issue a ruling in June 2021 regarding a similar case in Philadelphia regarding the provision of adoption and foster care services by faith-based providers. MCC was also prepared to oppose legislation that would have removed Michigan's conscience protections for faith-based child placement agencies, however no hearing was held to advance the measures (HBs 4469–4472.) 100



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EDUCATION

Michigan Catholic Conference has consistently supported parents in their educational choices and has advocated for strong schools of all types. During the 2019–2020 session, staff actively engaged in state budget discussions with this goal in mind. Additionally, as the COVID-19 pandemic hit, MCC spoke often about educational and safety needs of all students, stressing that nonpublic schools should be treated no differently than public schools regarding state and federal funding.

Highlights

Wins for Michigan Students and Schools

- Public Act 30 of 2019 granted smaller organizations greater flexibility in the timeline for making 911 safety upgrades, which helps these organizations afford and implement the changes (HB 4249.)
- Public Act 45 of 2020 allowed schools to install temporary door barricade devices and required schools to notify local law enforcement and fire departments before installation (HB 5689.)
- Public Acts 130–131 of 2020 expanded dual enrollment opportunities to include classes when a student's high school is not in session, if approved by the school (HBs 4546–4547.) Additionally, the state budgets passed during this session maintained consistent funding for dual enrollment.
- State budget funding provided competitive First Robotics grant funding for nonpublic schools (2020–2021) and continued funding for shared time (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.)
- The Legislature maintained or increased funding for the Tuition Incentive Program and the Tuition Grant

Program, which help low-income persons attend a four-year university (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.)



Through events like School Choice Week at the State Capitol and testimony during legislative committees, MCC highlighted the importance of educational choice.

Summary of MCC's Advocacy

Regarding Education

While the following measures did not become law this year, MCC also supported legislation to:

- Provide additional eligibility or flexibility for certain educational assistance, to address those impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (HBs 6171–6172.)
- Continue reimbursements for nonpublic schools to help with costs related to state-mandated health, safety, and welfare requirements (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.) The Michigan Legislature approved this funding for both budget cycles but it was later vetoed by Governor Whitmer.

See “Featured Action: Mandate Funding Lawsuit” to learn more.

Featured Action

Mandate Funding Lawsuit

From 2016 to 2019, the Michigan Legislature approved an appropriation that would reimburse nonpublic schools for expenses related to some three dozen state health, safety, and welfare mandates. These requirements include conducting background checks on school personnel, taking attendance, and keeping vaccination records, among others. In total, \$5.25 million has been set aside to fund this policy, however ongoing litigation regarding the constitutionality of the appropriation prevented the Legislature from disbursing any funds. In the final days of 2020, the Michigan Supreme Court issued a split 3-3 ruling that upheld a 2018 Court of Appeals (COA) decision that stated the reimbursement of specific mandates was constitutional, provided it was not an excessive entanglement with religion and was incidental to the operation of a school. The Court of Claims, which initially ruled the appropriation unconstitutional, must now review each mandate to determine if it meets the COA criteria. MCC filed an amicus brief defending the appropriation, coordinated additional briefs from members of the Michigan Legislature, Agudath Israel of America, and parents of Immaculate Heart of Mary School (Grand Rapids), and the First Liberty Institute, and worked with legal counsel that

argued in support of the policy before the Michigan Supreme Court. It is likely that legal challenges to the appropriation will continue in 2021.

Featured Action

Fighting for Equitable Access to COVID Funding

Federal lawmakers approved early COVID-19 aid through the CARES Act, including funding for public and nonpublic school needs. The U.S. Department of Education issued an Interim Final Rule (IRF) stating that the funding would be distributed based on a school's total student population, as all were impacted by the pandemic. Public officials in Michigan initiated a national lawsuit, *Michigan vs. DeVos*, to withhold millions of CARES Act dollars earmarked for nonpublic schools, including \$16.5 million from Michigan. MCC joined a legal brief in federal court opposing the litigation, and over 2,500 of its grassroots advocates contacted their federal lawmakers about legislation to clarify nonpublic school use of the funds.

- On September 4, 2020, U.S. District Judge Dabney Friedrich ruled in *NAACP v. DeVos* that Secretary

DeVos lacked the authority to add her own conditions on CARES Act funding. The ruling applied nationwide and was not appealed.

- On October 9, 2020, the USDE issued a new CARES Act guidance, stating that the school district where the nonpublic school resides is responsible for allocating CARES Act funds based on low-income student rates in nonpublic schools.
- In December 2020, Congress and the president approved additional relief. Among other aspects, the funding helps schools address pandemic expenses such as sanitation supplies, personal protective equipment, physical barriers, and educational technology. The law provides \$1.6 billion for Michigan public schools and \$39 million for the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund, a more flexible option for assisting public schools, colleges, and universities. Finally, the law makes available an additional \$87 million for state nonpublic schools by request. MCC urged the governor to formally request the aid, which she has indicated she will do. [100](#)



CHILDREN & FAMILIES

Supporting healthy marriages and families and protecting against violence, abuse, and other challenges were again major priorities for MCC last legislative session.¹⁰ MCC staff kept such goals in mind throughout its legislative advocacy and was active in many legislative discussions, especially regarding the protection of children.

Highlights

Wins for Children and Families

- House Resolutions 198 of 2019 and 326 of 2020 recognized November as Adoption Awareness Month. The resolutions conveyed how adoption is a loving option for those facing unplanned pregnancies.
- Michigan kept an annual appropriation for human trafficking intervention services and maintained or increased per diem rates for private adoption agencies (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.)
- The state budget included increases to programs for senior citizens and set up a pilot program to check on seniors, especially the isolated or homebound (2020–2021.)
- The state budget adopted a requirement that the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Education work with schools on initiatives that provide education on human trafficking and sexual abuse prevention (2020–2021.)
- Public Acts 363–365 of 2020 allowed a parent to execute a DNR order on behalf of his or her medically frail minor child if certain procedures are followed to prevent abuse (HBs 5417–5419.)



Summary of MCC's Advocacy

Regarding Children and Families

Lawmakers discussed several bills to protect children and vulnerable adults from abuse, especially in educational and medical settings. While the following did not become law during the two-year session, Michigan Catholic Conference strongly supported legislation to:

- Better protect children with a parent convicted of criminal sexual conduct (HB 4074.)
- Expand the list of mandatory reporters of abuse and neglect and provide comprehensive training for all on the list (HBs 4108, 4376–4377.)
- Lengthen the time required to keep medical records on many procedures that involve rectal or vaginal penetration; create a pamphlet on proper protocols for such procedures; and require implementation of these and other safety protocols (HBs 4370–4371 and SBs 217–218.)
- Add penalties to hold abusers accountable and prevent individuals from using their authority to discourage the reporting of a crime (HBs 4372–4374, 4382–4383 and SBs 219–220.)
- Deter abuse against vulnerable children (HBs 4783, 5474.)
- Recognize pornography as a public health crisis (HCR 14.)
- Require public schools to offer information on sexual assault and harassment to students and to encourage related professional development for staff (SB 216.) 100







HEALTH CARE

Michigan Catholic Conference advocated on behalf of several health-related measures during the session, with the goals of expanding health care access and improving the amount of information provided to patients. The work completed on this issue held the dignity of the human person, the protection of religious liberty, and the needs of the poor as guiding principles.

Highlights

Wins for Patients and Access

- Public Acts 42–43 of 2019 exempted hospice providers from certain opioid-related regulations, which allowed the providers to continue providing prompt end-of-life care (SB 128 and HB 4225.)
- House Resolution 93 of 2019 encouraged Congress to support Medicaid coverage for jail and prison inmates and to provide consistent, reliable treatments, especially for those struggling with mental health or substance abuse issues.
- Public Acts 31–32 of 2020 required marijuana sold in Michigan to include a health warning for pregnant and breastfeeding women and required a safety pamphlet to be made available (HBst 4126–4127.)
- Public Acts 99–101 of 2020 expanded access to telemedicine for those with Medicaid or those receiving mental health services (HB 5414–5416.)
- The state budget included or increased funding for mental health services available for Michigan students (2019–2020 and 2020–2021.)

Summary of MCC's Advocacy

Regarding Health Care

In addition to the legislative successes listed above, MCC raised concerns with legislation (SBs 106 and 155) to regulate e-cigarettes in a new "vapor products" category. While these measures did prohibit the sale of e-cigarettes to minors, a laudable goal, the Conference joined with a broad group of organizations calling for the product to be regulated more rigorously (HB 4164.) During the session, the measures passed as Public Acts 17 and 18 of 2019. MCC appreciates that state law now provides protections against minor use but still believes that regulation of e-cigarettes as a tobacco product would be more effective. Staff also advocated for a measure which would have required the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to establish a fee-for-service payment for services related to alcohol use disorder and allowed non-physician care providers to treat the disorder and receive Medicaid reimbursements (HB 5408.) Unfortunately, this bill did not pass by the end of the session. 100



REFORM

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE



Guided by the Church's concept of restorative justice, Michigan Catholic Conference addressed policy matters through the legislative session that sought to promote criminal justice reform. MCC's advocacy promoted measures that would benefit communities and bring forward fairness, accountability, public safety, rehabilitation, and healing.

Highlights

Wins for Public Safety and Rehabilitation

- Public Act 10 of 2019 added reporting requirements and funding for individuals eligible for wrongful imprisonment compensation (HB 4286.)
- Public Acts 13–16 of 2019 allowed eligible prisoners needing substantial medical care or nearing the end of their life to be moved to a nursing home for the rest of their sentence (HBs 4129–4132.)
- Public Acts 97–114 of 2019, also known as the “Raise the Age” package, increased the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 17 to 18, prohibited the placement of youth under 18 in adult jails and prisons, and established funding so 17-year-olds can access age-appropriate rehabilitation services in the juvenile justice system (HBs 4133–4136, 4140, 4142, 4143, 4145, 4443, and 4452 and SBs 84, 90, 93, 97, 99–102.)
- House Resolution 234 of 2020 urged the U.S. Congress to repeal the federal ban on making Pell Grants available for prison-based education.
- Public Acts 361–362 of 2020 allowed for expungement for juveniles who commit certain crimes. The laws, which include public safety protections, make expungement available within two years after the final judgement, the settlement, or on their eighteen birthday, whichever is latest (SBs 681–682.)
- Public Acts 375–386 of 2020 eliminated certain mandatory minimums and reclassified certain crimes as misdemeanors to improve rehabilitative outcomes (HBs 5844, 5846–5847, 5849–5857.)
- Public Acts 389–391 and 393–398 of 2020 limited how long juveniles could be detained for certain offenses, incentivized sentences that include community corrections, and sought to reduce the number of individuals who receive jail time for probation and court order violations (SBs 700, 893–894, 1046–1051.)

See “*Featured Action: Raise the Age*” to learn more.

Featured Action

Raise the Age

Over the last several years, Michigan Catholic Conference has fought for juvenile justice reform. The “Raise the Age” measures, successfully enacted into law this session, grants judges greater discretion in charging seventeen-year-olds who have committed crimes. Previously, Michigan required all seventeen-year-olds to be automatically charged as an adult, regardless of the severity of their crime. Working with a broad coalition, MCC testified on behalf of the measures, sharing information with lawmakers about how they could reduce recidivism and give youth a path to a more productive future. Staff also provided updates through several mediums to Catholics across the state, to keep them informed and engaged in the advocacy process. Following a conversation with its staff, *The Detroit News* wrote an editorial in support of “Raise the Age” legislation.



A bipartisan group of elected officials gathered for the bill signing of the “Raise the Age” package. Photo by Nila Bala, R Street Institute.



Summary of MCC's Advocacy Regarding Restorative Justice

Staff advocated for the adoption of measures to improve public safety outcomes, including many recommendations made by the Michigan Task Force on Jail and Pretrial Incarceration. MCC testified before the Task Force, highlighting programs conducted by Catholic agencies and sharing the importance of access to clergy for the imprisoned. While

the session expired before these measures could become law, MCC supported efforts to:

- Modify penalties for those who fail to produce a driver's license (HB 5699.)
- Provide law enforcement training to reduce bias and prioritize de-escalation (HB 5837 and SB 945.)
- Create a Forensic Science Commission to improve conviction accuracy (SBs 276–277.) ¹⁰⁰



IMMIGRATION & REFUGEES

Welcoming families and individuals from foreign lands has long been a value in the Catholic tradition. While many policies regarding immigration and refugee resettlement are decided at the federal rather than the state level, MCC found several opportunities to speak at the State Capitol on behalf of the needs of affected populations.

Featured Action

Press Conference Promotes Driver's Licenses

In October 2019, MCC participated in a press conference with state lawmakers and other advocacy groups to call for measures that would offer specially designated driver's licenses and state identification cards for applicants without proof of immigration status (HBs 5192–5193 and SBs 631–632.) In its comments, MCC highlighted the importance of state identification, recognizing how it impacts the ability for refugees and immigrants to work, to take care of children, to provide for their families, and to further their education. While the measures did not become law this session, the press conference provided an opportunity to highlight the need for helpful documentation for immigrants.



A diverse group of elected officials and organizations gathered for the press conference, including Michigan Catholic Conference. Photo by State Rep. Rachel Hood.

Summary of MCC's Advocacy Regarding Immigration and Refugees

Throughout the session, MCC spoke out about the needs of immigrants and refugees, and the role of government at various levels to address these policies. Specifically, the Conference shared concerns about legislation—which was not adopted this session—to:

- Ban adoption or enforcement of any local ordinance or other such policy that limits local police communication with Immigration and Customs Enforcement about any person's immigration status beyond what is required by federal law, also known as “sanctuary city” policies (HBs 4090 and 4803.) ¹⁰⁰







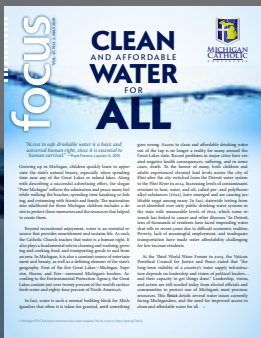
CARE FOR CREATION

In *Laudato Si'*, the Holy Father's teaching document about humanity and the environment, Pope Francis wrote that "concern for the environment needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings."¹¹ This concept guided Michigan Catholic Conference, encouraging staff to highlight connections between environmental stewardship and the protection of human dignity, especially low-income populations disaffected by poor policy decisions.

Highlights

Wins for Environmental Awareness

- Public Act 252 of 2020 paused residential water shutoffs temporarily for Michiganders who could not afford their water bills during the COVID-19 pandemic (SB 241.)
- MCC devoted two statewide **focus** publications to the Church's social teaching on caring for God's creation: *Clean and Affordable Water for All* in May 2019 and *Care for Our Common Home: Reflecting on Laudato Si'* in June 2020. Each highlighted critical environmental issues, their connection to Michigan, and practical ideas for Catholics to further advance their understanding of environmental stewardship.



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Summary of MCC's Advocacy

Regarding Care for Creation

While neither became law this session, MCC supported efforts to encourage the use of renewable energy and to protect students and low-income Michiganders, including bills to:

- Provide the opportunity for low-income customers to participate in community energy programs, to remove the current cap that dictates how much residential solar power can be put back into the electric grid, and

to guarantee a fair price in that sale (HBs 5143–5145 and SBs 596–598.)

- Allocate state funding to replace drinking fountains in public school buildings with hydration stations, which would provide clean, filtered drinking water. MCC advocated for nonpublic schools also to be included in the appropriation (2019–2020.) ¹⁰⁰



A blurred city street scene with a yellow overlay. The image shows a street with buildings, a car, and people walking, but the details are obscured by the blur and the color overlay.

*For a full list of bills of concern to MCC
and their outcomes, please visit*

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ENDNOTES

1. *Focus: A Blueprint for the Common Good*, MCC, January 2019, bit.ly/392WaRH.
2. MCC and the Michigan bishops chose not to support the petition drive from the Michigan Heartbeat Coalition that would have banned abortion after cardiac activity is detectable (similar to House Bills 4664–4665 and Senate Bills 357–358 that were introduced during the session.) While the intent was laudable, it likely would have weakened and potentially superseded Michigan’s existing ban on all abortions, which would go into effect should the U.S. Supreme Court overturn *Roe v. Wade*.
3. The columns were published in *Bridge Magazine*, *Lansing State Journal*, *Macomb Daily*, *Mount Pleasant Morning Sun*, *Oakland Press*, *Royal Oak Daily Tribune*, *The Detroit News*, *The Holland Sentinel*, and *Traverse City Record Eagle* (an overall potential audience of close to 400,000.)
4. *Blueprint*, MCC.
5. *The Word from Lansing: Payday Lending and the Cycle of Poverty*, MCC, 3/27/20: bit.ly/3sEklNV.
6. *Focus: Advocacy on Behalf of Those in Need*, MCC, December 2019: bit.ly/39NM9qA.
7. *The Word from Lansing: EITC Extends a Helping Hand*, MCC, bit.ly/3iE6NO1.
8. The lawsuit, *Dumont v. Lyons*, alleges that religious principles of faith-based organizations are discriminatory and thus disqualify their partnership with the State. MCC strongly objects to this allegation.
9. *Focus: Catholic Charities—Uniting Children With Loving Families*, MCC, August 2019: bit.ly/3c04aVr.
10. *Blueprint*, MCC.
11. *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis, 2015: bit.ly/3o2SfbA.



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