



2019 Policy Priorities

- I. Support state policy which generates sufficient revenue to fund necessary programs for vulnerable people in our state, including those provided by our agencies, and is consistent with moral principles announced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

State general revenue has declined to a nearly 35-year low relative to the size of the economy, eroding Missouri's ability to meet the needs of its residents. Programs that Catholic Charities clients and vulnerable people across the state depend upon have been eliminated and others are in jeopardy. In addition, within the current tax system low-income people pay a larger percentage of their income in taxes than those with higher incomes.

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has offered six moral principles to guide debate on tax reform:¹

Care for the Poor

The poor should not be burdened with income taxation as they struggle to meet their daily needs, and programs designed to support them and lift them out of poverty must be adequately funded.

Strengthening Families

Instruments of the tax code that benefit the family . . . are especially important.

Progressivity of the Tax Code

In a system of taxation based on justice and equity it is fundamental that the burdens be proportioned to the capacity of the people contributing.

Adequate Revenue for the Common Good

The tax system should raise adequate revenues to pay for the public needs of society, especially to meet the basic needs of the poor.

Avoiding Cuts to Poverty Programs to Finance Tax Reform

The loss of revenue created by tax cuts should not be made up by cuts to programs that serve those most in need.

Incentive for Charitable Giving and Development

¹ Letter from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to Congress dated October 25, 2017.

- II. Support health policies designed to make health care accessible to all and with a particular focus on increasing access to behavioral health care.

According to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “health care is not a privilege, but a right and a requirement to protect the life and dignity of every person.”² Health insurance is an important means of providing access to health care, and many vulnerable Missourians depend upon our state’s Medicaid program for that access. Cuts to the program primarily impact seniors, people with disabilities, and children as these are 90% of Medicaid enrollees in our state.

Many other vulnerable people in Missouri lack health insurance entirely. Non-disabled adults who are not custodial parents or caregivers are generally not eligible for Medicaid no matter how low their income. Eligibility for custodial parents is the third most restrictive in the country: approximately 22% of federal poverty level or, for instance, annual income of less than \$4620 for a family of three.

The needs of people with behavioral health conditions are of particular concern to Catholic Charities: our agency directors report that poor behavioral health is the single biggest obstacle their clients face. Multiple barriers to treatment must be addressed, particularly given the consequences of untreated or inadequately treated mental health conditions which can include substance use, homelessness, incarceration, high school dropout, suicide, unemployment, and family dysfunction.

- III. Support incentives for the construction and maintenance of low-income housing.

A June 2017 report by the Governor’s Committee on Simple, Fair, and Low Taxes recommended that state low-income housing tax credits be replaced with a low-interest loan program. The following December, the Missouri Housing Development Commission, charged with providing financing for the construction of affordable housing in the state, voted against issuing state low-income housing tax credits for 2018. No alternative program has been established, and Governor Parson has said he will not support reinstatement of the tax credit program until it is reformed according to recommendations by a commission he intends to create.

The need for low-income housing, however, persists. Tens of thousands of Missourians are on wait lists for affordable housing and understandably so: according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, to rent a two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent while keeping that expense at 30% of income, a Missourian working full-time for 52 weeks must earn \$15.46 hourly, annual income which exceeds the federal poverty level for most households.

² Letter from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to Congress dated March 8, 2017.