



2021 Policy Priorities

Catholic Charities of St. Louis, guided by Catholic social teaching, encourages public policy that defends and honors the life and dignity of all people. We advocate in particular for our clients, many of whom are poor, homeless, living with mental illness and substance use disorders, victims of domestic violence, seniors, and children; we advocate for our agencies who support and accompany our clients as they work for the lives they dream of. Our policy goals highlight that every person, including those too often marginalized by our society, is created in the image and likeness of God and should be treated accordingly.

In calendar year 2021, we support policy designed to strengthen families and foster racial equity as well as those further described in this document.

- I. Support state policy that 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:

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

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. Funding for programs that Catholic Charities' clients and vulnerable people across the state depend upon has been reduced and other funding is in jeopardy. This circumstance has been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 on our state's general revenue account.

Should the Missouri Legislature move forward regarding the collection of online sales tax, Catholic Charities supports legislation directing such revenue into Missouri's general revenue account. We support benevolent tax credits and particularly the reinstatement of the Youth Opportunity Program and Neighborhood Assistance Program tax credits. We encourage the creation of a refundable state-based earned income tax credit (EITC) to benefit low- to moderate-income families and stimulate local economies. The federal EITC has been in place since 1975 and since then, 30 states have created state-based EITCs, the majority of which are refundable.

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

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 including substance use, homelessness, incarceration, high school dropout, suicide, unemployment, and family dysfunction.

We specifically support the implementation of expanded Medicaid eligibility in Missouri, policy to ensure timely access to the COVID-19 vaccine, and increased Medicaid support for seniors, particularly those living in skilled nursing facilities.

- III. Support policies that ensure people have access to affordable, stable, healthy and safe housing.

Although the Missouri Housing Development Commission voted in September of 2020 to revive the state's low-income housing tax credit program, its three-year suspension created a large increase in the number of people on waitlists for affordable housing; the COVID-19 pandemic further increased the need. There is also significant danger of families becoming homeless when the federal COVID-related eviction moratorium expires on March 31, 2021.

- IV. Support policy that permits in-state tuition rates for Dreamers residing in Missouri.

Missouri is home to nearly 225,000 immigrants and pushing undocumented students out of Missouri is bad for business and for workforce development. Missouri is one of only six states that bar Dreamers from in-state tuition benefits; nearby states of Kansas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas are among those offering in-state tuition rates to undocumented, resident students.