



February 1, 2017

Dear Senate Human Services Reform Finance and Policy Committee Members:

The Minnesota Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota, writes to express its disappointment that the \$100 per month increase in the Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) was not included in Governor Dayton's Health and Human Services Budget Recommendations. While we are pleased the Governor's Budget includes recommendations for some other worthy programs for the poor and vulnerable, such as an increase for the Working Family Tax Credit, the omission of any increase for the MFIP program is a glaring one.

As you are aware, the Minnesota Family Investment Program provides basic economic assistance for children and their parents working toward full-time, paid employment. All parents enrolled in MFIP must be working, job searching, pursuing education, or job training. What some of the newer members of the committee may not be aware of is that this program has not kept up with inflation and has not seen any increase in 31 years. In other words, families are trying to get out of poverty in 2017 on 1986 dollars.

We are not unrealistic, as we fully understand that the MFIP program is not the only solution to help the working poor in Minnesota, and that there are many additional policy solutions that will work to alleviate poverty in our state. We do, however, see it as an important tool that should be supported and strengthened to help those most in need. Seven out of 10 MFIP recipients are children, and 50 percent of those are under age five. It is also not a program that only benefits those in our big, urban population centers. For example, in Todd County, more than 120 miles from the State Capitol, 54 families rely on MFIP for their basic daily needs. MFIP families can live in every county, every district, and every corner of our state.

While the common good stems from the dignity, unity, and equality of all people, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need are our preferential concern, or priority. The poor and vulnerable includes all who are marginalized in our state, nation, and beyond.

The preferential option for the poor and vulnerable is not optional. A basic moral test for society is measuring how we treat the most vulnerable in our midst. In a society with a growing gap between rich and poor, Scripture gives us the story of the Last Judgment (Mt 25:31-46), and reminds us that we will be judged by our response to the "least among us."

The Minnesota Catholic Conference seeks public policy solutions that create a healthy economy and society, including employment opportunities that promote human dignity, increase social solidarity, and promote self-reliance for the poor. MFIP is a program that has had success in moving people from poverty to work, and we would ask that, as you deliberate on the Governor's Budget and on your own legislative recommendations, you include an increase in the MFIP program.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

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