



March 9, 2021

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Minnesota House Judiciary and Civil Law Committee
Hon. Jamie Becker-Finn, Chair
559 State Office Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

RE: Minnesota Catholic Conference support of HF306 (Frazier) and HF336 (Becker-Finn)

Chair Becker-Finn and Members of the Committee,

The Minnesota Catholic Conference (MCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota, writes to express our support for HF306 (Frazier) and HF336 (Becker-Finn), two measures which seek to reconsider and eliminate criminal punishments that create unjust collateral sanctions for those living at or near the poverty line.

Catholic Conferences across the country have routinely supported legislative efforts to de-criminalize poverty. Our faith teaches us that criminal laws should always respect the dignity of each person. When an individual violates the law, they should be punished. At the same time, a criminal offender's inherent dignity does not diminish even if he or she violates a law. The proper balance is struck when our laws and sanctions consider several factors, including the offender's danger to the society. Civil and criminal penalties should always serve the purpose of rendering justice to both society and the offender.

We must distinguish between policies that render justice and those that perpetuate injustice. License suspensions for payment-related violations primarily impact people with low incomes and little savings. Sixty percent of low-income individuals who lose their driving privileges eventually lose their job, leading to escalating debt, exposure to usury, and family hardship. The non-payment of fees and fines is not a threat to public safety, but rather a symptom of poverty, and we should ensure that no policy perpetuates the injustice of poverty. Similarly, our criminal justice system can uphold public safety without also acting as revenue stream for the state, an arrangement that disproportionately harms communities of color and those in poverty.

The changes proposed by HF306 and HF336 transcend ideological and partisan boundaries and would allow our justice system to maintain public safety without criminalizing poverty. Please vote "Aye" on favorable passage of both measures.

Respectfully submitted,

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