

St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice of the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on June 12, 2021

In Attendance: Dave Busch, Randy Bedore, Jim Erven, Zoltan Eszes, Dick Fedler, Michael Howden, Tom Jozwik, Marian Lamoureux, E. Michael McCann, John Weber, and guest Armand Carriere from Holy Family Conference.

Call to Order: Dave Busch opened the conference call at 9 am, waited for others to connect and called the meeting to order at 9:06 AM with the Opening Prayer for Society meetings. Busch asked our guest Armand Carriere to introduce himself. Armand told us that he is a member of the Holy Family Conference in Whitefish Bay. He has been involved with the SVDP meal program for many years, is on the Meal Site Advisory Committee, and has an interest in social justice matters.

Minutes: The minutes from the VOP meeting held on May 8, 2021 were briefly discussed. The figures on Seniors not taking advantage of available FoodShare benefits were incorrectly reported in the original May Minutes and a revised version was emailed to everyone on June 11th. The May Minutes, (Rev 01) were approved as revised, on a unanimous voice vote.

Subcommittee Updates:

Energy – Dave Busch reported that there is not much news on the Energy front this month. Wisconsin Electric Power Company and Wisconsin Gas LLC (WE Energies) has applied for a Certificate of Authority to construct a system of new liquefied natural gas facilities and associated natural gas pipelines near Ixonia and Bluff Creek, Wisconsin. If approved by the [Public Service Commission](#), the costs of this facility and pipeline would be shared among the residential customers of Wisconsin Gas. Busch will update us as this project progresses.

Criminal Justice: E. Michael McCann reported on Wisconsin Senate Bill [SB119](#), which the Senate passed on a voice vote on June 9th and was sent to the Assembly. Under this bill, if in any year a municipality decreases the amount of its municipal budget dedicated to hiring, training, and retaining law enforcement officers so that it is less than the amount dedicated to that purpose in the previous year, the municipality will receive a county and municipal aid payment from the state that is reduced by the same amount of that decrease. The Republican bill which would decrease municipalities' shared revenue funds according to how much they defund police, sparked a heated back and forth among state representatives, however, the bill has some bipartisan support. McCann reported that Milwaukee may be forced to cut police funding due to the city's pension obligations, a loophole not allowed under this law. The bill seems to be in reaction to the protest movement of 2020, which continues to call for defunding police and re-allocating law enforcement budgets. Milwaukee County was the scene of some of the longest consecutive protests that have been held over the last year, and it has already seen its shared revenue payments from the State decrease year after year.

McCann also reported on [SB121](#) which will ban the use of chokeholds by law enforcement. Current law requires law enforcement agencies to develop policies on the use of force by law officers in the performance of their duties. This bill provides that a law enforcement agency may not authorize in its use of force policy the use of choke holds by law enforcement officers, except in life-threatening situations. The Wisconsin Senate also passed this bill on June 9th, and sent it on to the Assembly.

McCann also updated us on the progress of two Federal Gun bills that we had supported and had asked the National VOP for their support as well. [H.R.8](#) which establishes new background check requirements for firearm transfers between private parties (i.e., unlicensed individuals). Specifically, it prohibits a firearm transfer between private parties unless a licensed gun dealer, manufacturer, or importer first takes possession of the firearm to conduct a background check. The bill was passed by the House and was sent to the Senate. The Senate has yet to take any action on this bill.

Another House bill, [H.R.1446](#), revises background check requirements and increases the amount of time, from 3 business days to a minimum of 10 business days, that a federal firearms licensee must wait to receive a completed background check prior to transferring a firearm to an unlicensed person. This bill also passed the House and was sent to the Senate.

Armand Carriere asked if the State has made any progress on police reform bills. Armand was specifically interested in legislation that would prevent police officers with troubling history from moving from department to department. McCann replied "Yes" Senator Wangaard's bill, [SB123](#) regarding the reporting of Use of Force incidents by law enforcement, has bipartisan support and is moving forward. It will likely come up for a vote before the legislature takes its summer recess at the end of June.

Previously, McCann reported that on May 6th, the [Wisconsin legislature voted](#) to eliminate over 90 percent of the provisions in the Governor's budget plan and started work on their own plan. Republicans essentially scrapped the Democratic governor's entire two-year proposal. They instead built a new budget off of the last budget the Republicans had crafted for the previous biennium.

POST MEETING NOTE: The Wisconsin Senate passed the \$87 billion Wisconsin state budget on June 30th. The *new* budget eliminated Evers' proposals to expand Medicaid in Wisconsin, eliminated raising the minimum wage, eliminated raising the age from 17 to 18 for the prosecution of juveniles as adults, and did not close the loophole for gun background checks, all of which the VOP had supported.

Health Care - The VOP Committee has been looking for another member interested in covering Health Care in future meetings. Marian Lamoureux volunteered to take on this important topic for us. Marian stated that Marge Sebern had sent her a number of links to resources that Marge had been using in her reports on Health Care.

Dave Busch reported that the number of reported [cases of COVID-19](#) in Wisconsin has slowed down recently and on May 16th the State had its first day of zero reported new cases since the start of the pandemic.

The special enrollment period for Affordable Health Care plans ends on August 15th. There is still time to get insurance in 2021 via the [healthcare.gov](#) website, also known as the federal healthcare exchange or marketplace as insurers like to call it.

Housing: Rose Lue-Hing was still experiencing problems with her phone and was not able to attend this meeting. John Weber has been providing some information on this topic during Rose's absence, was not able to attend this meeting. The Chairperson then tabled discussion on this topic until the next meeting.

John Weber was able to supply this link to an article explaining the affordable housing crisis in Milwaukee: <https://milwaukeejournalssentinel-wi-app.newsmemory.com/?publink=26e6c8ca3>

Mike Howden supplied this link to the Milwaukee Rental Housing Resource Center: <https://www.renthelpmke.org/resources/> Their web site has a simple checklist that renters and landlords can use to help them find resources for help with rent and eviction problems, depending a person's particular circumstance.

Committee member Joan Gulczynski supplied this link to an analysis of the looming eviction crisis in Milwaukee County: https://patch.com/wisconsin/milwaukee/time-bomb-ticking-see-rental-arrears-milwaukee-county?utm_term=article-slot-3&utm_source=newsletter-daily&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter

Dave Busch reminded members that the CDC moratorium on evictions has been extended to July 31st.

Food/hunger: Tom Jozwik reported Wisconsin has received approval from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) for its plan to implement a new federal program to provide food benefits for children under the age of 6 who are part of FoodShare households and who are not yet enrolled in school. They will be distributing extra food benefits to those families, via their FoodShare EBT card. Called [Pre-6 Pandemic-EBT](#), the program is designed to help families whose young children may have been at home more often since last fall due to closures of child care facilities during the pandemic. FoodShare recipients do not need to do anything to receive these benefits. If your family is eligible for Pre-6 P-EBT, you will receive a letter that will tell you if you will get Pre-6 P-EBT, and if so, how much for each month. The additional benefits will be added directly to their Quest card.

Tom also updated us on his efforts regarding the problem of [only 42% of the country's eligible senior citizens availing themselves of FoodShare](#) benefits. Tom was finally contacted by Martha Collins, the director of advocacy and outreach at Feeding America. One line from her email response stated, "If additional funding was available, we could hire more staff to provide grassroots level outreach to better serve the elderly population." But she went on to mention "handouts, flyers and poster distribution" as being a tactic she has apparently used previously in an effort to increase SNAP participation. She also said that shelter, meal program and food pantry volunteers can be good prospective identifiers of seniors in need of FoodShare-related assistance. Jozwik recently emailed back and asked whether handouts, etc., might be available to the for VOP distribution. He is awaiting a reply. Collin's email also expressed a willingness on her part to train Vincentians on how to apply for SNAP benefits for seniors and other constituencies. Marian Lamoureux asked if there was a way the VOP Committee could reach out to inform all Vincentians about this problem. Jozwik mentioned that the Archdiocese Coordinator of Social Justice Ministry, Rob Shelledy offered to help. We briefly discussed the possibility of getting out bulletin announcements about this problem to all parishes across the archdiocese.

Dick Fedler mentioned that the SVDP Meal Sites are places where we have a lot of contact with senior citizens. Dick suggested that we could put up informational posters at the meal sites to help inform seniors on how to apply for FoodShare benefits.

Mike Howden mentioned the Eras Seniors Network has replaced Milwaukee Interfaith in the Milwaukee area and they are now managing Milwaukee County Senior Centers, including the Senior Meal Program. Mike suggested that they could also help us spread the message about signing up for FoodShare benefits. Tom expressed willingness to draft a prospective boilerplate bulletin announcement (and also to distribute materials to various venues).

Immigration: Sharron Schmidt was not was unable to attend this meeting so discussion on this topic was tabled until the next meeting. The VOP Committee may be looking for another member that is interested, passionate, or knowledgeable on Immigration issues, to cover this topic in future meetings.

Mike McCann reported that there seems to be a real log jam in Congress towards affecting any real changes to immigration law. All movement on immigration appears to be coming from the Administrative branch. The Biden Administration recently raised the limit on the number of refugees allowed to enter America to 62,000, after having dropped the number to 15,000. The Administration faced immediate pushback from pro-immigration groups so they raised the quota back to 62,000.

For information on current immigration issues, Mike Howden recommended subscribing to email from CLINIC, the Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc. You can sign up, here:

<https://cliniclegal.org>

The Catholic Legal Immigration Network, Inc., has been on the cutting edge of training nonprofit immigration legal service providers to provide affordable, quality legal representation to immigrants since its founding in 1988.

Human Trafficking - Mary Steger was unable to attend this meeting so discussion on this topic was tabled until the next meeting.

Labor/Minimum Wage – Dave Busch reported that Wisconsin Unemployment Rate has remained steady for the past three months, at about 3.80%. The current rate matches the State’s pre-pandemic unemployment rate.

Busch also reported that Wisconsin Republicans want to end the \$300-per-week federal unemployment supplement, which they said hurts businesses that are struggling to fill vacancies as customers return amid a loosening of coronavirus restrictions. Democrats have generally been supportive of the additional unemployment payment, saying other barriers to work are fueling the worker shortage, not the \$300. They also point out that Wisconsin’s unemployment rate of 3.8% is below the national average of 6% and is comparable to what it was before the pandemic hit.

[AB336](#) would end the \$300 weekly supplement payment that was included in President Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion stimulus measure. The supplement is set to expire on Sept. 6.

[Labor experts say the labor shortage](#) is not just about the \$300 payment. Some unemployed people have been reluctant to return to work because they fear catching the virus. Others have found new occupations. And many women, especially working mothers, have left the workforce to care for their children. Busch also noted that many of those recently unemployed have lost all of their health insurance benefits and need the extra money to pay for Health Care.

This bill would also prohibit the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development from waiving work-search requirements for any reason that is related to COVID-19. The State has currently waived the work search requirements, but that waiver is set to expire in July. Unemployed people normally have to perform four work-search activities weekly to obtain benefits.

Waukesha Update: David Anderson was unable to attend this meeting so discussion on this topic was tabled until the next meeting.

POST MEETING NOTE: Sharing the Waukesha Getting Ahead Evaluation Story

On Monday, August 16 at 12:00 PM CDT, the next National “Getting Ahead” program practitioner call will discuss the why, how, and the outcome of Waukesha’s first Getting Ahead investigator impact evaluation. They will share their challenges and surprising successes. Let’s learn together.

To join this call, Register here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZUofuyvqj8rGdMmhOcclzGPWQIUbyyHD-y->

Racine Update: Jim Erven updated us on the Racine Council's recruitment drive. They are trying hard to get younger people interested in the Society, to that end they have decided to hold off on their series of virtual "Young Persons Forums" until October. Once schools are back in session, it will be easier to capture a larger group of teens for these online forums.

Jim also reported that the Racine Council is looking into opening another Thrift Store in central Racine. Their current store is located in Waterford and has been very successful, but there is a clear need for a store located closer to the people that they serve through home visits. The Racine Council has formed an investigative committee. The committee is looking into completing a full feasibility study and has begun doing location scouting in the city. They are looking at some vacant shopping centers in a number of high traffic areas.

Old Business:

North Central Regional Meeting - Marian Lamoureux reminded us that the SVDP Midwest Region will be holding their annual meeting on July 12th thru July 14th. The meetings will be held virtually and you can attend online for free this year. They will be focusing on Conference Life, Conference Presidents, and Servant Leaders with webinars covering each topic. You can register for virtual sessions here:

<https://meetingssvdpusa.regfox.com/2021-virtual-midwest-regional-meeting>

Zoltan Eszes added that next year's North Central Regional Meeting will be held in person, right here in Waukesha.

Then Marian also reminded us that the SVDP National Assembly will be an in-person event this year, and is scheduled for August 25th thru August 28th in Houston. You can still register for this by [clicking here](#).

Support of Policing Reforms – Marian Lamoureux reported that we are still waiting for a response from the National VOP on our letter asking the National VOP to support some of the provisions of the "George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021" policing reforms bill [H.R.1280](#). The bill has been passed by the House and has been received by the US Senate. The Senate has not taken any action on this bill since it was received.

Informational webinar on the VOP Mission – VOP Chair Dave Busch previously reported that after he presented the edited version of our PowerPoint presentation on the Mission of the Voice Of the Poor to the Executive Board of the Milwaukee Archdiocese Society, the Board gave approval for releasing the presentation to Society members at large. Busch told us that he recently gave the presentation to his conference members at Blessed Sacrament parish and some members (including Dave) thought the presentation was a bit too long. Busch promised to do some more editing, and those edits have been completed. The final PPT file is now available to all VOP members. Let Dave know if you would like a copy of the VOP PowerPoint presentation.

New Business:

Juvenile Justice Reforms – Information on AB660 and AB185.

Committee Chairperson Dave Busch wanted to clarify some of the information we had discussed in May regarding Assembly Bill 660. This bill was originally introduced in 2017 as [AB660](#), but was never passed, nor reintroduced in subsequent years.

AB660 proposed to raise from 17 to 18 the age at which a person who is alleged to have violated a criminal law is subject to be charged as an adult. That 2017 bill was supported by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the Wisconsin Bishops, and the VOP supported passage.

The language from that bill was reintroduced in Governor Evers 2021-2022 budget bill, and was subsequently deleted from the budget by the Wisconsin Senate majority party.

[AB185](#) is a similar proposal specifically covering juveniles arrested for prostitution. Under current law, a person who is under the age of 18 can be prosecuted or adjudicated delinquent for committing an act of prostitution, a Class A misdemeanor. Under this bill, a person who is under the age of 18 may *not* be prosecuted or adjudicated delinquent for committing an act of prostitution, with some exceptions.

The main point of this change is to prevent juveniles from having a felony charge on their criminal record, which would exclude them from many job opportunities later in life. Mike McCann believes that we should support this bill as well as any new bills proposing to change the current law that allows 17 and younger to be tried as adults.

SVDP Awareness Month – VOP Chairperson Dave Busch asked Committee members if they would agree to sponsor St. Vincent de Paul Awareness month again in October. The VOP would suggest that all Conferences participate in weekly SVDP Awareness activities and kick off the October events by recognizing the Feast Day of St. Vincent on September 27th. VOP Committee members agreed to bring this to their Conferences and Tom Jozwik volunteered to assist in proof reading the informational brochures on Awareness Month so that we can distribute them to all Conferences.

July Summer Recess – With the US Congress and the Wisconsin Legislature both on summer recess next month, the VOP Committee customarily does not meet in July. A motion was made by E. Michael McCann to recess from meeting next month. The motion was seconded by Dick Fedler, and the members voted in favor of a summer recess in July.

Next Meeting: Our next meeting will be held virtually once again, over your phone or computer, on **August 14, 2021 at 9 am**, the second Saturday in August.

The VOP Chairperson suggested that we might be able to meet in person soon, but we will continue the virtual meetings for at least a few more months. He also asked committee members to consider a format of in person meetings, possibly only three or four times per year and meet virtually most months.

Watch your email for an invitation to the August meeting. It may land in your spam or junk mail folder; due to the number of recipients it is being emailed to.

Adjournment: The meeting was formally adjourned at 10:40 am with members praying together for all fathers, in honor of Father's Day.

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MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE OF POOR COMMITTEE

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