



St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice of the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on December 11, 2021

In Attendance: David Anderson, Dave Busch, Richard Fedler, Michael Howden, Tom Jozwik, Marian Lamoureux, E. Michael McCann, and John Weber

Call to Order: The Chairperson opened the conference call at 8:59 AM, waited for others to connect and called the meeting to order at 9:04 AM with the Opening Prayer for Society meetings.

Minutes: The minutes from the VOP meeting held on November 13, 2021 were reviewed. The November minutes were accepted by the members on a unanimous voice vote.

Subcommittee Updates:

Energy – Dave Busch reported that there was not much news to report on Energy this month.

He did report that the Wisconsin Energy Assistance Program still has plenty of funds available this year. People in need of Energy Assistance can check on their eligibility and/or apply for benefits online here: <https://energybenefit.wi.gov/OnlineApps/OnlineApp/Default>

Help in obtaining benefits in Milwaukee and Waukesha County can be obtained from [Community Advocates](#), by calling for an appointment at: 414-470-4653.

Criminal Justice: E. Michael McCann first reported that McCann also reported that [AB185](#), relating to prosecuting or adjudicating delinquent a person under the age of 18 for committing an act of prostitution has not received any action and is stuck in committee.

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. McCann reminded us that that the current law was changed back in 1994 and lowered the age to 16, for prosecutions of minors involved in prostitution as adults. AB185 also has widespread support by social service and government agencies as well as the Badger State Sheriffs Association and he thinks we should continue to support this bill.

McCann next reported that the Expungement Bill, [AB69](#) / [SB 78](#), passed by the Assembly in June and sent to the Senate, is still waiting to be scheduled for a floor vote. This bill has bipartisan support, the support of the Wisconsin Bar Association and support from the Wisconsin Catholic Bishops and would go a long way toward helping poor people get and hold good jobs, by eliminating criminal records of youthful non-violent offenders. The bill is being held back by five Senate Republicans that are opposed to it. McCann stated that one of the five is Andre Jacque, Senator from De Pere. Jacque is Catholic and may be influenced by our position in support of this bill. Mike then mentioned our efforts to publish a statewide Action Alert using VoterVoice.

Chairperson Dave Busch mentioned that Wisconsin SVDP state coordinator Jim Penczykowski is working on getting support from all give diocese in the state. Busch thought that we should put our position into an Action Alert statement now. That seeing our position in writing will make it easier to get buy-in from the other dioceses.

Mike McCann agreed to begin working on putting our position into a written statement and Busch agreed to help him edit this into an Action Alert letter.

McCann next updated us on the effort to change the Wisconsin law on charging and trying juveniles under the age of 18 as adults. The change in the law was included in Governor Evers Budget proposal for the next biennium, but was removed from the bill by the Republican Senate leadership. This bill has yet to be reintroduced in the legislature, but there is some hope that it may get some play after the holiday break.

Next Mike told us that [AB239](#) received its first required public hearing on October 28th. This bill requires the Department of Justice to collect information from law enforcement agencies and prepare an annual report to the legislature about the issuance of search warrants and the use of no-knock or unannounced entries upon execution of search warrants. The bill requires the report to specify action on unannounced searches in great detail, by jurisdiction.

Lastly, McCann reported that the Board of the Milwaukee Council SVDP Society is attempting to make a change in the law in order to maintain the tax exempt status of properties owned by charitable organizations. In particular this affects the property tax exemption for SVDP owned Thrift Stores covered under Wisconsin statute Chapter 70 on General Property Taxes, [section 70.11](#), subsection 12A and 12C. The Milwaukee Council Board is asking for our help in supporting their property tax exemption status. McCann stated that he would do some more research on this topic and report back to us next month regarding any position we could support on this matter or any actions we could take on behalf of the SVDP Society Milwaukee Council.

Health Care - Marian Lamoureux reported that the number of available hospital beds and Intensive Care Unit beds are in short supply due to the resurgence of COVID-19 cases in Wisconsin. Currently there are on 46 ICU beds available statewide. Over 70 percent of people being admitted to Wisconsin hospitals with COVID-19 are unvaccinated.

Hospital Sisters Health System hospitals, which include facilities in western and northeastern Wisconsin, are at full capacity, CEO Damond Boatwright stated.

“We are full,” Boatwright said at a [Health News Illinois event](#). “Make no bones about it.”

A year ago, requests for patient transfers coming into their Wisconsin and Illinois hospitals was hovering between 500 and 1,200 a month. Now, they’re seeing a rate close to 2,000 per month. “That sort of gives you an idea of how full we’re getting in both states, just with the level of other hospitals reaching their capacity very quickly and then wanting to transfer,” he said.

Marian also reported that approximately 87,000 Wisconsinites sign up for Healthcare.gov coverage. Federal health officials [released](#) their first breakdown of Wisconsinites signing up for Healthcare.gov during the new enrollment period, with 86,685 choosing a plan between Nov. 1 and Dec. 4.

Last year, 91,520 Wisconsinites chose a plan between Nov. 1 and Dec. 5. Overall, 3.9 million people are enrolled in a plan through Healthcare.gov and when you include the state-based exchanges, the number rises to 4.6 million.

Open enrollment runs through Jan. 15, but those wanting to have a plan take effect by Jan. 1 needed to make their plan selection by Dec. 15.

Marian next reported that the [Marshfield Clinic Health System’s](#) Psychiatry & Behavioral Health and Center for Community Health Advancement departments, in partnership with the Wisconsin Department of Administration Beyond the Classroom Grant Program, are offering a four-part mental health Learning Series to help educators, caregivers and adults who work with children and youth.

This learning series provides an overview of compassion fatigue and burnout experienced by adults as they support children and adolescents through the pandemic. The series will highlight how daily work stress is affecting educator and caregiver mental health and well-being. The presentations will define compassion fatigue and burnout, identify early signs of burnout, become

aware of risk factors and protective factors, and discuss realistic action steps towards building compassion resilience. This series will help participants learn how to identify signs of burnout and implement accessible self-care strategies in their daily work to facilitate improved personal and team well-being. Visit www.wiafterschoolnetwork.org to select the "Learning Series" tab to learn more and to register.

In closing, Marian referred to her report from last month regarding the need to support struggling unpaid family caregivers in Wisconsin. An estimated one in five Wisconsinites are unpaid caregivers. They provide 80 percent of all care for people with disabilities, older adults and others throughout the state. One in four caregivers provide more than 40 hours of unpaid care a week. Marian asked if there is anything that we can do now to help get more resources to in-home family caregivers, now that the budget has passed without any extra aid. VOP Chair Dave Busch suggested that we keep reporting on the need for more aid. By keeping this in the public's view by publishing and distributing this story in our Meeting Minutes, we can build grassroots support and urge Catholics to contact their representatives about this need.

Housing: Rose Lue-Hing was unable to attend this meeting due to her wait for a new phone to be installed. John Weber reported that The [Milwaukee Continuum of Care](#) (MCoC), a homeless services consortium whose mission is to end homelessness in Milwaukee, coordinates nightly checks of homeless and warming shelters throughout Milwaukee county for the Impact 2-1-1 hotline. People in need can call toll free, anytime, at 866-211-3380, (or just dial 211) and get up to date information on available emergency shelter or warming sites with openings.

MCoC will be leading a 2022 Point in Time count this January, to capture an accurate number of how many people experience homelessness on a single night in Milwaukee County.

Last year, The Milwaukee CoC, Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and its partner agencies [reported](#) that they have reduced the count of individuals experiencing homelessness by 42 percent over the last decade. Between the January 2020 and 2021 counts, Milwaukee's Point in Time count saw the sharpest decrease to date of individuals staying in unsheltered settings.

This low count of unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness can be attributed to expanded street outreach coverage, utilizing CARES Act funding for additional permanent housing, a robust increase in homeless prevention efforts to reduced evictions, emergency hotel placements, and the utilization of Clare Hall for temporary shelter. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, as shelters were forced to limit their capacity to reduce the spread of the virus, these other resources were timely and effective. Additionally, the efforts of the local philanthropic community, and their quick pivot to address real-time needs, allowed for gaps to be filled quickly and efficiently.

Weber also reported that the end of the moratorium on evictions has resulted in a massive increase in eviction filings around the state. According to Wisconsin Circuit Court Access data, eviction filings have increased by 55 percent since the moratorium ended.

"We will have the highest number of eviction filings for 2021 in the month of September. That is concerning," said Michael Basford, director of the Interagency Council on Homelessness, which tracks [Wisconsin's eviction data](#).

Despite this sudden increase, eviction filings have still not returned to pre-pandemic levels and eviction judgments have remained relatively low. Advocates say this is because more tenants and landlords are taking advantage of the state's emergency rental assistance programs to recoup losses.

Lastly, Weber reported that The [Wisconsin Department of Justice](#) (DOJ) is bringing a major lawsuit against a notorious Milwaukee landlord and his property management company. The lawsuit names Youssef Berrada, along with his firm, [Berrada Properties Management, Inc.](#), as defendants in the suit. It includes 15 claims for violations of state law ranging from illegal lease

agreements to unfair billing practices, fraudulent representations, confiscating personal property, illegal eviction practices and illegally withholding security deposits. Berrada is the sole owner of more than 170 limited liability companies, which in turn own more than 8,000 rental properties; most of them in Milwaukee and Racine counties. It is estimated that while the state DOJ was preparing their case, Berrada received approximately 7 million dollars in state rental assistance funds.

Michael Howden reported that Anne Haines, who now serves as the Executive Director/Episcopal Representative at Urban Initiative Milwaukee, has helped to open [St. Bakhita House](#). The House on North 2nd Street in Milwaukee, is a Catholic Worker House that is teaching and practicing the Beatitudes and providing a supportive community for women escaping the exploitation of human sex trafficking. They are planning a grand opening Celebration for St. Bakhita House on the feast day of St. Josephine Bakhita on February 8th. Contact St. Bakhita House, 414-395-0506, for more information.

Food/hunger: Tom Jozwik that the New Jersey Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, through its president Marisa Sweeney, applauded the state's U.S. senators, Democrats Cory Booker and Bob Menendez, for "their actions to champion legislation that supports the underserved, and Health of those who have experienced hardships in having basic needs met due to the global pandemic." The New Jersey Academy claimed to be "excited" that a National White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, Hunger, and Health is under consideration. The bill to authorize the White House Conference (H.R. 5724) was introduced in congress on October 26 and was then referred to the subcommittee on Nutrition Oversight, and Department Operations. In the House, Rep. James McGovern (D-Massachusetts) is sponsor, with 18 co-sponsors representing both parties, the last seven signing on since our last VOP meeting (the latest on December 7).

It's been reported that such a White House Conference "would bring together the heads of food banks, hospitals, government agencies, nonprofits, educators, farmers and ranchers, individuals with lived experiences, and more, with benchmarks for ending hunger, reducing nutrition insecurity, and reducing diet-related disease." A policy committee, according to the bill, is to be established by the end of June 2022 with 25 Senate, House, and Presidential appointees; the first meeting would be within a month of the last of these appointments. The Senate bill to authorize the Conference, [S.3064](#), also was introduced October 26—by the aforementioned Booker, with one co-sponsor, Republican Mike Braun of Indiana. Following two readings the bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

Jozwik also reported on a [Milwaukee Journal Sentinel story](#) by Jessica Rodriguez headlined "Community organizations bring culturally relevant foods to south side mobile food pantry." The article told of a partnership involving Northwestern Mutual, the Forest Home Avenue School, and Feeding America: they operate a mobile food bank to provide culturally significant fare such as cilantro, rice, and garbanzo beans. One observation in the article was that "Food plays a significant role in bringing people together, adding to their enjoyment and keeping a culture alive."

Immigration: Armand Carriere was unable to attend this meeting but did submit a report on continuing efforts to place Afghani refugees staying temporarily at Fort McCoy near Sparta, Wisconsin.

The number of refugees currently being housed at Fort McCoy has been reduced to approximately 8,000. The target for resettlement of refugees in Wisconsin remains at about 400. The majority of the refugees are being settled in Texas and California.

[Lutheran Social Services](#) (LSS) in Milwaukee remains the only agency in the greater Milwaukee area working directly on refugee resettlement.

[Catholic Charities of Milwaukee](#) continues to collect clothing for the Afghan residents housed at Ft McCoy at their offices located at 2021 N 60th Street, Milwaukee. A full truck load of donated items

was transported to Fort McCoy in late November. Additional donations may be coordinated with Andrew Ruesch, Afghan Refugee Coordinator at 414-769-3543 or aruesch@ccmke.org. Lutheran Social Services imposes a time limit for their direct support, of approximately 3 months. Catholic Charities hopes to step in with additional needed services after LSS pulls back. Jessica Brandt, Parish Relations Coordinator for Catholic Charities, will coordinate refugee support services in conjunction with the support provided by LSS. Catholic Charities will be looking for volunteers (individuals or groups) to assist in this work. If you, your Conference, or group is interested in helping the refugees, you can contact Jessica at 414-769-3414 or jbrandt@ccmke.org.

Team Rubicon, a national disaster response nonprofit [managing donations at several bases with Afghan refugees](#), has created Amazon registries with the specific clothing needs for each base. Find Fort McCoy's registry [at bit.ly/McCoyList](https://bit.ly/McCoyList).

More information on how to help can be found here:

<https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/2021/08/20/refugees-coming-wisconsin-fort-mccoy-heres-how-you-can-help/8193555002/>

Human Trafficking – The Committee is looking for another member that may be interested, passionate, or knowledgeable on the subject of Human Trafficking and willing to report on this topic in future meetings. Discussion was tabled until the next meeting.

Labor/Minimum Wage – Dave Busch reported that there has been no progress on a bill to raise the Minimum Wage in Wisconsin [AB477](#) and its companion bill in the Senate [SB452](#), were read into the record, then sent to the [Committee on Labor and Integrated Employment](#). Both bills support raising the state minimum wage for most employees to \$10.15 per hour on the effective date of the bill, and \$15 per hour one year after the effective date of the bill.

Waukesha Update: David Anderson reported that [Waukesha SVDP](#) has opened their overflow daytime warming center located inside an old firehouse on Sentry Drive just off of Sunset Drive, one block west of the Thrift Store. The shelter is seasonal and will close in early April depending on the weather.

David also reported that the number of people participating in the [Hope Center](#) meals program has been noticeably reduced. They believe that fuller employment, the increase in FoodShare benefits and other pandemic related programs have all contributed to this decrease in the need for free meals. He also stated that the numbers of people needing food are down at the Food Pantry operated by his Conference in Muskego.

Dick Fedler that the number of people using the SVDP meal sites in Milwaukee are also down, and cited that the same reasons are believed to be at work in Milwaukee as well.

Anderson also reported that the remodeling project at the Sunset Drive Thrift Store to improve the meeting rooms and offices, is well underway. And the latest report from the Waukesha Thrift Stores to the Council is that the electronic store voucher program has been very successful. Neighbors in Need are given a prepaid debit card, called the 'Care Card', instead of a paper voucher. It has reduced a lot of confusion when interpreting hand written vouchers at the store, and has reduced some of the stigma of presenting a paper voucher at the cash register, as the user appears to be presenting a credit card.

Lastly Anderson reported on a program by his Conference in Muskego for helping the elderly get to doctors' visits and healthcare appointments, as well as the pharmacy by use of a voucher system for the Muskego Taxi service. All trips have to be approved in advance and are limited to the area close to the city.

Racine Update: Jim Erven was unable to attend this meeting. Discussion on this matter was tabled until our next meeting.

Old Business:

SVDP Wis. Expungement Bill on Voter Voice – Dave Busch reported that he has been in touch with the SVDP State Coordinator Jim Penczykowski from the Madison Council on the idea of promoting passage of the expungement of records bill, [AB 69](#) and [SB 78](#).

Jim is still working on getting the approval of the Madison Council President, along with the Green Bay and Superior Council Presidents to move this project forward. Jim is also seeking approval from our SVDP Regional Vice President. Busch thought that we need to put our position on this bill into written form, in order to make it easier to get the needed approvals. Mike McCann agreed to author this letter and Busch agreed to help edit this into the VoterVoice format. Busch will continue to coordinate with Jim in Madison and report back to this committee on any progress.

Gerrymandering in Wisconsin – Dave Busch reported on the lawsuits filed over Wisconsin voting district lines. A narrowly divided state Supreme Court announced that it would minimize changes it would make to Wisconsin's election maps, effectively guaranteeing Republicans will continue to maintain control of the Legislature for the next decade.

The [4-3 ruling](#) comes as the justices prepare to issue a final ruling that will establish the exact contours of the state's legislative and congressional districts. Where the lines go has a profound effect on which political party has an advantage in elections.

Tuesday's decision broke along ideological lines, with the four conservatives in the majority and the three liberals in the minority.

In the most significant part of their ruling, the justices wrote that they would limit the changes they would make to maps that were drawn 10 years ago, when Republicans controlled all of state government and established district lines that favor their party.

Writing for the majority, Justice Rebecca Bradley contended the justices must make as few changes to the maps as possible as a way to respect the past choices lawmakers have made. They cannot attempt to right what opponents perceive as past wrongs, she wrote.

"Claims of political unfairness in the maps present political questions, not legal ones," she wrote.

"Such claims have no basis in the constitution or any other law and therefore must be resolved through the political process and not by the judiciary."

In dissent, Justice Rebecca Dallet wrote that the majority had engaged in "inserting the court directly into politics by ratifying outdated partisan political choices."

States are required to draw new districts every decade to make sure they have equal populations.

Approving maps has become increasingly contentious because the political stakes are so high.

Republicans who control the Legislature in November approved maps that are [modeled on the GOP-friendly districts](#) that were put in place in 2011. Democratic Gov. Tony Evers quickly vetoed them.

The majority concluded it should make as few changes as possible to the maps because courts should not weigh in on policy matters.

"Just as the laws enacted by the legislature reflect policy choices, so will the maps drawn by that political body. Nothing in the constitution empowers this court to second-guess those policy choices, and nothing in the constitution vests this court with the power of the legislature to enact new maps," Rebecca Bradley wrote for the majority.

Dallet in dissent countered that the majority opinion had a political cast to it because it would help cement the Republican's overwhelming advantages that were established a decade ago.

"In effect, a least-change approach that starts with the 2011 maps nullifies voters' electoral decisions since then," she wrote. "In that way, adopting a least-change approach is an inherently political choice. *Try as it might, the majority is fooling no one by proclaiming its decision is neutral and apolitical.*"

Mike Howden reported that he did a little research into other social justice ministry groups but he could not find *any* statement from another group, on the gerrymandering issue.

New Business:

Support for Waukesha Parade Victims –Dave Busch reported on efforts in Waukesha County to help the victims of the Holiday Parade Massacre. The Catholic Community of Waukesha (CCW) has set up a relief fund to raise money for the victims of the deadly parade, and to provide updated information on counseling services and the welfare of Waukesha Catholic priest Father Pat Heppe who was injured in the parade. You can find information or make donations by following this link to their web site: <https://www.ccwauk.org/parade>

Infrastructure Spending Bill – In early November, Democrats set aside divisions between progressives and centrists to pass a \$1 trillion package of highway, broadband and other [infrastructure improvements](#) and has sent it on to President Joe Biden to sign into law. Democrats still have much work to do on the second pillar of Biden's domestic program: a sweeping expansion of the social safety net and programs to fight climate change. At a price tag of \$1.75 trillion, that [Build Back Better](#) package would be the biggest expansion of the U.S. safety net since the 1960s. Democratic leaders had hoped to pass both bills out of the House last November, but ran into opposition from Democrat Senator Joe Manchin. With the Senate divide equally between Democrats and Republicans, the Dems need every one of their members to support this bill.

Jim Erven told us that he will be examining how the money will be spent and how the poor will be able to participate in the benefits this spending will bring. Erven was unable to attend this meeting so discussion on this subject was tabled until our next meeting.

Next Meeting: Our next meeting will be held online, using your phone or computer, on **February 14, 2021 at 9 am**, the second Saturday in December. Watch your email for the invitation to the November meeting. The link to the Zoom Meeting is also found at the bottom of this document.

Adjournment: The meeting was formally adjourned at 11:06 AM with all members praying together a Prayer For Systemic Change.

“Open our minds and hearts so that we might stand at their side and assist the poor to change whatever unjust structures keep them poor.”

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MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE OF POOR COMMITTEE

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Link to our next Virtual Zoom Meeting

St. Vincent de Paul Society of Milwaukee is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom teleconference meeting for the Archdiocesan Council Voice of the Poor Committee, on the second Saturday of each month, at 9 am.

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84435969715?pwd=WFN2NIhkV1c1SVpqd2l1RG5oVklyUT09>

Meeting ID: 844 3596 9715

Passcode: 1234

Or DIAL: +1 312 626 6799