



St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice For the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on June 14, 2025

In Attendance: David Anderson, Randy Bedore, Dave Busch, Armand Carriere, Jim Erven, Richard Fedler, Tom Jozwik, E. Michael McCann, John Weber, plus Kenosha Council President Sharon Tenuta, and Ozaukee Council VP Linda Vargo

Call to Order: As the Committee gathered together, there was some general discussion about the recent increase in the number of home visits we have been seeing as of late. Dave Busch also talked about a recent home visit that was particularly tough to deal with. Others commented that they are also seeing an increase in requests for help this spring.

The meeting was finally called to order at 8:08 AM with all members praying together, the Opening Prayer for SVDP meetings. After the prayer, Busch announced that he has heard from several people that are interested in joining this Committee and will ask them to attend our next meeting.

Approval of the Minutes: The Minutes from our meeting on May 10th were sent to the Committee members in advance of this meeting. VFP Chairman Dave Busch asked the members if they had any corrections or noted any omissions to those minutes. No amendments were offered and the chairman asked for approval. The minutes were approved as submitted, by verbal consensus.

Subcommittee Updates:

Criminal Justice - E. Michael McCann opened the meeting by telling us that he has another family commitment this morning and requested that he be permitted to submit his report first, so that he might be able to leave the meeting early. All members approved.

McCann began by reminding us that the bill to expand post-partum healthcare for new mothers from six months to one year ([SB23](#)), was approved by the Senate on a 32-1 vote. The bill was sent on the Assembly where it will likely be sent to their Rules committee.

Wisconsin is [one of just two states](#) that does not offer expanded postpartum coverage.

Previously, McCann had asked Barbara Sella at the Wisconsin Catholic Conference about working to get Assembly Speaker Robin Voss to temper his opposition to this bill. Sella advised Mike that it would be better for us to hold off on pressuring Voss at that time.

After the bill passed the Senate, McCann contacted Sella again and she stated that now would be a good time to contact Voss (or solicit his constituents to contact him) and persuade Voss to allow the bill to get to the floor for a vote in the Assembly, regardless of how he might vote on this bill. McCann and Sella believe there is some support by Republicans in the Assembly who favor this expansion of health care coverage for the poor.

Mike stated that he would be willing to try and set up a meeting with Voss to let him know how important we, as Catholics, think this bill is.

Or we can move ahead with a letter to constituents from his parish or District and ask them to contact Voss to let him know that they would like to see the bill move ahead.

Or launch a VoterVoice Action Alert to ask Christians to contact their representative in the Assembly and tell them that they approve of having Wisconsin join 48 other states, in improving post-partum health care coverage for poor mothers. Busch suggested that the Action Alert idea would make this issue less about Voss and more about improving health care for new mothers. Next McCann brought up the issue of expanding eligibility for Medicaid coverage in Wisconsin. Mike reminded us that this is something that directly affects the poor, and is expected to improve the health for more than 60,000 people in Wisconsin by moving the income requirements for receiving Medicaid to be within 132 percent of the federal poverty level (instead of the current 100 percent).

McCann stated that the current push from the Trump administration is to cut Medicaid coverages. He felt that the new budget reconciliation bill might even cut coverage back to the 100 percent of the federal poverty level, across the nation. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that the One Big Beautiful Bill Act will cut federal spending on Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) benefits by [\\$1.02 trillion](#), due in part to [eliminating at least 10.5 million people](#) from the programs by 2034. If these cuts remain in the bill, it will make expansion of Medicaid in Wisconsin nearly impossible.

Chairperson Dave Busch then excused McCann from the meeting, so that he could attend his family event.

Busch then brought up [AB23](#), a recently introduced bill to establish a Palliative Care Council in Wisconsin. The bill requires the council to consult with and advise DHS regarding 1) outcome evaluation of established palliative care programs; 2) the economic and quality of life effectiveness of palliative care that is provided along with curative treatment; 3) the mechanisms for and adequacy of reimbursement for palliative care services; and 4) any other issues relating to palliative care arising through meetings or discussions, as the council determines appropriate. The bill also specifically prohibits the Council from advising DHS on physician-assisted suicide, euthanasia, medical aid in dying, or any other act that would condone, authorize, approve, or permit any affirmative or deliberate act to end life. Busch noted that the WCC came out in opposition to the bill, but he could not find the documentation from the WCC that would clarify their reasoning on this. Busch ended by stating this bill may be worth keeping an eye on.

Energy – Busch reported that Energy Assistance is still available but may end without notice. As part of the Trump Administration's plan to reduce the DHHS workforce by 20,000 positions, the [Department of Health and Human Services](#) (DHHS) laid off ALL federal employees working in the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP).

Since then, social service agencies in Milwaukee are committed to work on getting energy Assistance to people in need, while the current funding allocation continues. [Community Advocates'](#) Energy Assistance Team will continue to provide vital utility assistance to Milwaukee County residents through the Milwaukee County Energy Assistance Program.

In 2024 alone, Community Advocates helped 26,186 households maintain their utility services by offering financial support and assistance with payment plans. The Milwaukee County Energy Assistance Program is administered by Community Advocates and [UMOS](#).

Maudwella Kirkendoll, Chief Operating Officer of Community Advocates stated "While the impact of these federal layoffs is still unclear, we remain fully committed to delivering this essential program to Milwaukee County residents.

Milwaukee County residents can schedule an appointment or apply for Energy Assistance at keepwarmmke.org or by calling 414-270-4MKE (4653). Walk-in applications are also accepted—no appointment necessary—Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., at Community Advocates' downtown office at 728 N. James Lovell Street, Milwaukee.

Hunger/FoodShare: Tom Jozwik also reported having another important commitment this morning. John Weber agreed to have Tom give his report first so that he could leave early. Jozwik reported that the President's July 4 deadline for signing the "One Big Beautiful Bill" is coming up fast as Republicans in the Senate argue over spending cuts and other issues. "Elon Musk's scathing criticism of the bill as 'a mountain of disgusting pork' is creating political headwinds for the legislation," the publication [the Hill](#) stated.

The section of the bill that cuts \$267 billion in the SNAP program is among the sections facing the strongest Senate objections.

Since the Republicans counted 53 Senate seats, they can afford only three defections and still pass the bill. No Democrat is expected to support it.

Next, Tom reported on an article by [CBS MONEY WATCH](#) associate managing editor Aimee Picchi. Anti-hunger advocates are saying the US is facing an unprecedented rise in food insecurity (defined as the lack of sufficient food to live a healthy, active life). The rise comes in the midst of persistently high inflation, and cuts to the food stamp program earlier in the year.

By many measures the economy is strong; the unemployment rate is at a 50-year low. But, although jobs are plentiful, many workers do not earn enough money to cover the surging cost of living, and some make tradeoffs like skipping meals or paying for food rather than paying the rent. It seems that many people purchase the cheapest food available and some water down food or baby formula to make ends meet.

Food stamp cuts earlier in 2025 reduced benefits at a time when groceries are 20 percent costlier than was the case just two years ago. The rise in food insecurity comes as the debt ceiling deal struck between the White House and Republican legislators would add more work requirements for SNAP, and thus presumably create more difficulties for a larger number of struggling Americans.

Tom then told us about the World Food Program (WFP) USA's [Spring Statement of Impact](#) report that states 343 million people do not know where their next meal will come from. Fueling this global hunger crisis are extreme weather, economic instability, displacement, and conflict. Funding shortfalls are exacerbating this already dire situation. WFP is being forced to suspend operations, or reduce the amount and reach of assistance. Unless new funding is received soon, 58 million people could lose lifesaving assistance across 28 of WFP's most critical response operations.

Housing - John Weber reported that the Trump plan for "woke" cuts hits Milwaukee.

"Woke" is an adjective which means having awareness of racial prejudice and discrimination.

"Woke" Housing grants are targeted in President's budget.

Amid the Trump administration's 2026 budget proposal, which seeks federal spending cuts, one item highlights Milwaukee. An example of "woke" spending includes a \$2.1 million grant, awarded in 2024 by the Biden administration to the city of Milwaukee, "to rectify racial disparities in home ownership" according to the White House.

Milwaukee is using that grant for 11 housing units. City officials are apparently spending the money, despite the Trump administration's criticism. Milwaukee has a signed grant agreement with HUD and is in the process of beginning to carry out grant-funding activities, according to the Department of City Development.

John then told us about a Milwaukee housing coalition known as RON, ([Reclaiming Our Neighborhoods](#)) RON is a partnership between the Milwaukee Christian Center, Muskego Way Forward, Sherman Park Community Association, Clarke Square Neighborhood Initiative, Rooted and Rising Washington Park, Riverworks Development Corp, Near West Side, Amani United, Via CDC, Walnut Way, Dominican Center and Southside Organizing Center.

The groups work alongside local housing agencies to improve the housing quality in Milwaukee through data-informed, resident-engaged strategies and actions.

Every month, partners from every neighborhood, other organizations, the city and anyone who wants to join meet and share information on housing conditions, programs and resources. Dawn Hutchison- Weiss, consultant to the steering committee, said the group went from a budget of \$20,000 in the first year to a budget of \$500,000.

John also reported on a former Milwaukee hospital's planned conversion into affordable apartments is among 27 such projects throughout Wisconsin that are receiving a key form of state public financing.

The redevelopment of the Doctors Hospital, 2711 W. Wells St. into 124 apartments for the elderly people, is being developed by Milwaukee Development Corporation and is receiving state and federal housing tax credits.

Wisconsin Preservation Fund Inc, Gorman & Co. and One 5 Olive LLC plan to develop Mid-Town housing on a vacant lot 5825 W. Hope Ave.

The Midtown Center proposal, known as Midtown Commons, would involve developing 100 apartments on a vacant lot next to the shuttered Walmart, 5825 W. Hope Ave.

Austin Commons would provide 100 apartments for families at 2318 through 2332 S. Austin St. and is being developed by Northernstar Companies LLC and Commonwealth Development Corp. That project is estimated at \$30 million.

Human Trafficking – The VFP Committee is looking for a Vincentian that may be interested, passionate, or knowledgeable on the subject of Human Trafficking and is willing to report on this topic in future meetings.

There are a number of agencies in the greater Milwaukee area, addressing Human Trafficking in what they describe as a “hidden pandemic”.

These agencies include:

[St. Bakhita Catholic Worker House](#), 3138 N. 2nd Street, Milwaukee, WI 53212

[The Women's Center of Waukesha](#), 505 N. East Ave, Waukesha, WI 53286

[The Redeem and Restore Center](#), 4430 N. 127th Street, Brookfield, WI 53005

Immigration - Armand Carriere reported first, on several national immigration issues.

The demonstrations in Los Angeles continue to dominate the news regarding the removal of undocumented persons from the U.S. What was initially described as a plan to remove violent undocumented immigrants has devolved into a mass deportation effort, with White House deputy chief of staff and chief architect of Trump's hardline immigration policies, Stephen Miller, [setting a target](#) of 3,000 arrests per day, or 1 million per year.

Demonstrations have taken place in other cities around the country, including Milwaukee, citing the abuse of power by the federal government (including the questionable decision of activating California National Guard troops without the consent of the Governor), [denial of due process](#), and the [separation of children from their parents](#), among other issues.

The President has instituted a [12 country travel ban](#) for individuals seeking to enter the United States. The countries included in the ban include Myanmar, Laos, Afghanistan, and Iran.

The Supreme Court has sided with the Trump administration in allowing the revocation of temporary legal status of hundreds of thousands of Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans. The verdict is not final. Lower courts put the termination on hold while migrant groups challenge it. The Supreme Court lifted the hold, but the challenge continues.

President Trump signed an executive order prioritizing the re-settlement of Afrikaners based on the claim that they are victims of violence and land seizures, claims that the South African government disputes. All other refugee admissions to the US have been halted.

Locally, the travel ban discussed above has the potential to create havoc and uncertainty on local institutions of higher education. 15 percent of the student body at UW-Madison comes from overseas. UWM and Concordia University each enroll more than a thousand international students. While the President has lifted the ban on students coming from China, students from other countries are still impacted. And students currently enrolled in American colleges, including those in the Milwaukee area, live with the uncertainty of being able to re-enter the country if they leave for the summer.

Armand also reported that [Federal agents arrested an immigrant](#) on Milwaukee's south side on June 10, sparking fears from residents and local officials of a wider immigration crackdown. A local reporter saw a piece of black tape over the security camera on the door of the man detained. According to a neighbor, the tape was placed there by law enforcement agents.

[Yessenia Ruano](#), a Milwaukee teacher's aide, is facing deportation to El Salvador despite having a pending visa application for victims of trafficking. Previously, people with open applications for visa for trafficking or crime victims were protected from deportation. Under the new Trump policies, Immigration officials will not wait for decisions on these appeals. Ruano has been in the US for 14 years, has children who were born here, and has a valid work visa. She has no criminal record.

Catholic Charities Office of Refugee and Immigrant Services (<https://risccmke.org/en/>) is reporting an increase in legal needs that cannot be met with current staffing levels. They have pivoted their focus on some of the services they provide, to prioritize certain types of applications where there are more serious/immediate consequences. Unfortunately, they still have to turn some people down for legal help with immigration.

After Armand wrapped up his reports, David Anderson asked if the taxpayers are paying for the deportation flights to South America. Armand answered, yes, and it is a very expensive ticket. Many government and news sources have estimated the cost per person to be about double the cost of a first class ticket, at about 4,600 dollars. This is due to the fact that these are high security charter flights, and many of them are being run by our military.

Lastly, Armand noted that the annual celebration of [World Refugee Day](#) will be held at the Linden Sculpture Garden in Brown Deer on Sunday, June 20.

Mental Health Care – Sister Julie Krahl was not able to attend this meeting. A discussion on Mental Health Care was tabled until our next meeting in August.

Minimum Wage/Labor – Dave Busch reported that the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announce the [latest U.S.](#), [State](#), and [local](#) unemployment rates and analysis.

Preliminary employment estimates for March 2025 showed Wisconsin's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate remained unchanged at 3.2% over last month, which is 1.0 percentage point below the national unemployment rate of 4.2%.

The state's labor force participation rate ticked down to 65.6% in March while the national rate increased to 62.5%, marking Wisconsin's participation rate 3.1 percentage points above the rest of the nation.

- **Place of Residence Data:** Wisconsin's unemployment rate was 3.2% in March, 1.0 percentage points below the national rate of 4.2%. Wisconsin's labor force decreased by 5,000 over the month but is up 8,200 over the year. The number of people employed decreased 5,600 over the month to 3,071,900 employed, and is down 3,100 over the year.

• **Place of Work Data:** Total nonfarm jobs increased 10,000 over the month and increased 15,000 over the year to 3,055,200 jobs.

The number of persons unemployed in Wisconsin is up slightly since the summer of 2024 (2.9%), but holding steady for the past three months at 3.2%

Busch also reported that number of persons unemployed in Southeastern Wisconsin still remains up, above the rest of the state:

UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREA	NOT SEASONALLY ADJUSTED				
	PRELIM Apr-25	FINAL Mar-25	YEAR AGO Apr-24	NET CHANGE OVER	
				1-Month	1-Year
Appleton	2.8	3.0	2.4	(0.2)	0.4
Eau Claire	3.2	3.9	2.8	(0.7)	0.4
Fond du Lac	2.9	3.2	2.5	(0.3)	0.4
Green Bay	2.9	3.2	2.6	(0.3)	0.3
Janesville-Beloit	3.6	4.0	3.3	(0.4)	0.3
Kenosha	3.6	3.9	3.2	(0.3)	0.4
La Crosse-Onalaska	2.7	3.1	2.5	(0.4)	0.2
Madison	2.6	2.7	2.2	(0.1)	0.4
Milwaukee-Waukesha	3.5	3.8	3.1	(0.3)	0.4
Oshkosh-Neenah	2.8	3.1	2.5	(0.3)	0.3
Racine	3.9	4.4	3.6	(0.5)	0.3
Sheboygan	2.8	2.9	2.4	(0.1)	0.4
Wausau	2.8	3.0	2.5	(0.2)	0.3

Source: Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS)

David Anderson wanted to note that even though unemployment is down, wages are still up, indicating that there still may be a shortage in the work supply. He told us of someone that he knows who was hired at Costco about one year ago and states that Costco is still hiring and the starting wage is around \$20 per hour for unskilled help, plus a full benefits package. Skilled labor is starting at about \$24 per hour. Sharon Tenuta told us about a “Catch 22” situation they are seeing with participants in their Getting Ahead program. Getting a better paying job puts some people above the federal poverty level, which generally means losing all assistance. So as soon as people feel they are getting ahead, they lose their support and can no longer afford their rent. These days, it seems getting a good paying job is not the complete solution to poverty.

Randy Bedore added that a 15 dollar an hour job is not enough to make a genuine difference for people in poverty, and yet we still cannot get a law passed to raise the minimum wage to \$15.

Racine Update: Jim Erven reports that there is not much news to report from Racine. The Council has been successful in recruiting new members, and they have filled their opening for a new Conference President. He also reports that there has been an increase in demand for food in the Racine area and their meal program has also seen more people showing up at the door. The Racine Council is now working on putting up information tents at summer festivals, parish festivals, and county fairs. The tents are used to promote awareness of the work that the Society does, and to try to recruit people to become new members.

Waukesha Update - David Anderson reported that the county has a new meal site up and running on East Avenue in downtown Waukesha, serving about 60 to 80 meals per night. The meal site is running out of a former Chase bank building. The SVDP sponsors one night each week so each conference volunteers to run the site once per month.

Next Anderson told us that if your Conference is still looking at getting its own liability insurance, Waukesha is extending the period for signing up for Conference insurance. The renewal documents are being finalized by Lockton Affinity and are expected to be sent out by 5/30/25. In light of being so close to the renewal date, there will be a larger grace period for when payment will be due, past the renewal date.

Armand mentioned that he was told by Michelle Martin in the SVDP Central Office this insurance may be unnecessary as the Society already has a blanket liability policy. Busch speculated that the blanket policy covers only major liability and the policy Anderson is referring to likely cover smaller liabilities. Or it may be that the coverage Michelle is referring to might only cover the Milwaukee Council.

Linda Vargo added that the Ozaukee Council just purchased new and improved insurance that covers more of an individual's liability but still does not cover individual's injuries or vehicles. More clarity is needed on this issue of Conference insurance.

Old Business:

Regional VFP Committee Update: – Jim Erven reported that the [North Central Regional Meeting](#) is coming up on June 12 through June 14 at the Hilton Minneapolis St. Paul located in Bloomington, MN. The Regional Voice For the Poor meets online, quarterly, and at the top of the agenda for their last meeting on May 19th, the president of the North Central Region stated that their goal this year is to get out a VoterVoice Action Alert from each state. Erven told the group in that meeting that in Milwaukee we have been looking at [SB252](#) which would allow an individual to deposit up to \$15,000 of the individual's gross earnings in an independence account over a 12-month period.

The Medical Assistance Purchase Plan is a subprogram of the Medical Assistance program that allows individuals who have a qualifying disability and who are working or who want to work to remain eligible for Medical Assistance benefits. To be eligible for benefits under the Medical Assistance purchase plan, among other things, an individual's assets must not exceed \$15,000, but assets accumulated in an independence account *will be excluded* from the calculation. More importantly, this bill will prohibit the state from including assets acquired by an individual from an inheritance when determining the individual's financial eligibility for Medical Assistance benefits. This would be a great benefit to the poor because previously, to be eligible for Medical Assistance a person cannot have more than \$2,000 in assets. Marking this as one of the first attempts we have seen that would help people overcome the problem of losing benefits as soon as they reach certain thresholds. Erven stated that timing may become critical if we are going to advocate for this, as some clarity is still needed regarding how this bill might affect work requirements for Medical Assistance, and does the bill allow for sheltering 15,000 dollars annually or is this a one time and done proposal. Erven has reached out to State Sen. André Jacque (R - New Franken), one of the authors of this bill for more information and is waiting for a reply. Jim will keep us posted on any news or answers regarding this bill.

New Business:

SVDP Awareness Month – Dave Busch proposed that we sponsor a St. Vincent de Paul Society Awareness month campaign again this October. All VFP member support this idea, so Busch said that he will contact the Central Office staff and ask them for their help in preparing the guide book. The story of our work on this committee and the work of our lay society at large, is still not well known. We still hear people tell us things such as “I didn't know where to get help” and “I didn't know our church did this”. Much of our efforts go unrecognized by our own community.

Because our Society is always changing and taking on new causes, promoting the SVDP Society is something that should always be done. We have learned by twice polling the conferences that about 50 percent of all Conferences have taken on at least one week in October to promote Awareness of the Society. We could still do better, and another poll of Conference Presidents should be done after this year's Awareness Month ends.

Dick Fedler mentioned that his conference at St. John Vianney will speak from the pulpit at all masses on one Sunday in October each year. They have found this to be one of the most effective Awareness activities.

David Anderson reminded us to not be afraid to ask for money during Awareness month. Busch has promised to keep us informed on the progress. Please plan to participate in some Awareness month activities in your own parish.

Next Meeting – August 9, 2025

The Voice For the Poor Committee has once again voted to take a summer recess in July. Our next VFP committee meeting will be held on the second Saturday in August, via Zoom, from 9:00 to 11:00 AM.

Please plan to join us online on August 9th. All Vincentians are welcome to attend.

The login information can be found at the bottom of the last page of these minutes.

POST MEETING NOTE: The August meeting has been rescheduled to 9 am on **Saturday, August 16, 2025**.

Adjournment: The meeting ended with a brief discussion on the benefits getting representatives from all Councils in the Archdiocese to attend these VFP Committee meetings.

The June meeting officially adjourned at 11:02 AM with the VFP members saying a prayer together for summer...

*“Lord God, Creator of all things, guide our steps and strengthen our hearts,
during these months of summer and vacation days”*

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MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE FOR THE POOR COMMITTEE

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Here is the information for logging into the VFP ZOOM Meeting:

St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Milwaukee Archdiocese is inviting you to the next scheduled meeting of the Voice For the Poor Committee, online via ZOOM.

Click Here to Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89896784028?pwd=KzZhR0xyWWY0QXIqNUNEYktaEIXZz09>

Or call in (audio only): 312-626-6799

(Dial by your location. 312 626 6799 is Chicago)

Meeting ID: 898 9678 4028

Passcode: 732237