



St. Vincent de Paul Society Milwaukee Archdiocese

Voice Of the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on April 15, 2023

In Attendance: David Anderson, Randy Bedore, Dave Busch, Armand Carriere, Jim Erven, Richard Fedler, Tom Jozwik, Julie Krahl, E. Michael McCann, and John Weber

Call to Order: While waiting for all members to log into the Zoom meeting, the VOP Chairperson apologized for his failure to recognize THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT holiday of the church... and the need to reschedule this VOP meeting to the third Saturday, due to the second Saturday in April falling on Easter weekend.

The Chairperson then called the meeting to order at 9:10 AM and together we prayed the short version of the opening prayer for St. Vincent de Paul Society meetings.

Minutes: The minutes from the VOP meeting held on March 11th, 2023 were emailed to committee members for their review before the start of this meeting. No corrections or additions were submitted and the March minutes were accepted by general consent.

Subcommittee Updates:

Energy – Dave Busch reported on his progress in response to Jim Erven’s question at our February meeting regarding whether or not there had been any movement yet on the Public Service Commission’s allowance for a special rate or discount program for those in need. Busch reported that he had contacted both the Citizens Utility Board ([CUB](#)) and the Public Service Commission ([PSC](#)) by email and asked them for an update on this important allowance. Busch stated that he had not gotten a reply from either group at the time of this meeting. However, he was able to report that he was recently helping a neighbor in need who was facing a shutoff, and they did receive some immediate relief from their energy bill, after proving their income to WE Energies, and they were put on a low income fixed rate billing plan.

If you are visiting neighbors in need that have requested help on their utility bills and they have received a shutoff notice, let them know that the fastest way to get help in southeastern Wisconsin is by contacting a WE Energies customer service representative in person at 800-842-4565. Let them know about your situation and they will see if you qualify for this fixed rate energy bill or one of several other billing options.

Criminal Justice - E. Michael McCann opened by following up on the bill requiring judicial approval of charging agreements, [AB57/SB86](#). Under current law, a prosecutor may dismiss or amend a criminal charge without approval from the court. Under this new bill, a prosecutor must get the court's approval to dismiss, defer prosecution, or amend a charge if the charge is for any of a number of serious crimes such as: a crime of domestic abuse or a violation of a domestic violence temporary restraining order or injunction; theft of an automobile;

a crime of abuse of an individual at risk; first-degree, second-degree, or third-degree sexual assault; a crime against a child; and a number of other felonies.

McCann reports that the bill was passed by the Wisconsin Assembly on March 22nd and has been sent to the Senate. McCann believes that prosecutors should be allowed to defer prosecution and make deals that make sense in moving trials through the system. There is no evidence that suggests judges will somehow be better at making these decisions than the DA's, and ultimately this will further slowdown the already overburdened justice system and further affect youthful offenders ability to get meaningful jobs. (If a person receives a deferred prosecution, they do not have to report a criminal record when asked.)

McCann made a motion that we vote to ask the Archdiocesan SVDP Executive Board to allow us to take a position opposed to [AB57/SB86](#) on the basis that this will impact the poor because it will directly affect the number of people that will have to report a criminal record when applying for a job.

The motion was seconded by Randy Bedore, and before we could take a vote on this, Dick Fedler raised some important concerns that he had. The most pertinent concern was that because the affects of this legislation will impact the poor to a somewhat lesser degree, should we bother to pursue speaking out on this if there is a likelihood of alienating some of our board members. McCann noted that this bill will affect young and first time offenders the most, because once you have any ongoing criminal record, you are not going to be able to get a deferred prosecution or a plea agreement, nor hide your criminal record from potential employers. He felt it is better to keep these marginal offenders out of the system when possible.

Sister Julie Krahl commented that if we as a group feel that this issue will truly impact the poor then we need to speak out on this. She stated that it is always better to get on the record with our reasons rather than refrain from "going to the well, too often".

A vote was taken and the motion was passed unanimously. Busch will petition the Executive Board for their go ahead to speak in opposition to this bill at their next meeting on Sun. April 30. Next, McCann reported that he had attended a public hearing on the Governor's proposed budget bill was held in Waukesha on April 5th. A large number of people were in attendance for this hearing and many had registered to speak on a variety of issues in the budget. In order to hear from as many people as possible, the finance committee agreed to extend the meeting by one hour. Despite the extra time allowed, McCann was not able to voice our support for the expansion of Medicaid in Wisconsin. Several other people representing other concerns did testify in favor of this proposal and only one person spoke in opposition to expansion. The format of these joint finance committee hearings allows that if you do not get the opportunity to testify at the meeting, you can submit your testimony in writing. Mike preferred to ask this Committee first before submitting our written testimony, and the Chairperson agreed that we should submit the position paper we had previously prepared and gotten approved by the SVDP Archdiocesan Board. [Medicaid expansion](#) will extend access to health coverage to an estimated 89,700 additional people in Wisconsin. It is expected to generate \$1.6 billion in savings to Wisconsin due to enhanced federal funding.

Housing: John Weber reported on attending a housing forum held at the Unitarian Church in Waukesha on March 18th sponsored by [SOPHIA](#) a member of Wisdom. The forum was titled [In the Spirit of Community "A Call to End Homelessness"](#). This event featured guest speaker Kevin Nye author of "[Grace Can Lead Us Home](#), A Christian Call to End Homelessness". Weber stated that he was inspired to buy the book and reports that it is an excellent read that covers all aspects of homelessness, including mental health, addiction and recovery, and he recommended that we should all read it, describing the book as "very enlightening". Nye is an assistant director of programs at the Center in Hollywood serving unhoused people. He encourages Christians to extend grace to unhoused people and provides ideas for remedying homelessness.

Julie Krahl asked if the book is about an individual approach to grace or speaks to a societal approach. John replied that the book covers both and has many practical examples included. Weber also reported on the process of [receivership](#) as being a solution to identify and abate properties that had become nuisances in their neighborhoods, whether they were vacant or belonged to landlords who refused to address health hazards in their properties. A receiver is a party, typically nominated by the city or judge, who is responsible for ensuring abatement to a property that has been identified as a nuisance or as containing hazardous to human health. The process usually involves a tenant identifying a nuisance property and reaching out to the city or a community organization. Then representatives of that organization (or a city or county) petition a city clerk or judge to have the location legally declared a nuisance or health hazard. Usually, they will bring photos and other evidence demonstrating the property is uninhabitable or has building code violations.

Next Weber told us about how thousands of Milwaukeeans are struggling to access affordable housing options. The [Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee](#) has only about 5,000 units of public housing in the city, but 15,000 people are on a waitlist for it.

There also are thousands of people on a waitlist for project-based housing, which is a government-funded program that provides rental housing to low-income households in privately owned and managed rental units. The city has about 6,000 housing-choice vouchers for subsidized Section 8 housing provided by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, but 8,000 residents are on the waitlist. Section 8 distributes rental payments to private landlords on behalf of low-income residents.

Armand Carriere asked a general interest question about housing and wanted to know if it was legal in Wisconsin to rent property without a lease. Weber and Busch both replied that a lease is not required in Wisconsin. Armand wondered if not having a lease makes it easier to evict someone. Busch replied that eviction laws are fairly rigid across the state and the eviction process has to go through a number of legal steps regardless of whether or not a lease is in place. John then reported on a Milwaukee Magazine article that listed ten different agencies in Milwaukee that provide help to unhoused persons.

Go to: <https://www.milwaukeeimag.com/homeless/> to find information about these agencies.

Hunger/FoodShare: Tom Jozwik was up next, reporting on [S. 1036](#)—The Senior Hunger Prevention Act of 2023. The bill is meant “to amend the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 to streamline nutrition access for older adults and adults with disabilities.”

This bill was introduced in congress on March 29, 2023 and was referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. The bill was introduced by Senator Robert Casey Jr., a Democrat from Pennsylvania. Its five co-sponsors—all Democrats—are Sens. John Fetterman, also of Pennsylvania, Kirsten Gillibrand of New York, Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, Mark Kelly of Arizona and Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. Although the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry is dominated (slightly) by Democrats, [Skopos Labs](#) gives the bill only a two percent chance of enactment.

Under the bill, any state, in carrying out the SNAP program, may elect to implement a streamlined application and certification process for households whose adult members are disabled or elderly and have no income. The goal is to increase participation in SNAP by simplifying the application process through increased automation and simplified calculation of benefits, and to reduce the need for in-person interviews with state offices administering the [SNAP](#) program.

The bill somewhat echoes the efforts of our VOP Committee from a couple of years ago, when we made efforts to make the eligible elderly more aware of their rightful food benefits.

The state senate in neighboring Minnesota, by a vote of 38-26, recently passed a bill that would dedicate roughly \$400 million to ensuring [free lunch for all students](#) in the state. Minnesota’s Democratic governor, Tim Walz, said he would sign the bill and added that,

as a former teacher, he'd encountered many hungry children. A state senator from the Winona area named Steve Drazkowski opposed the bill, and claimed he'd [never met a Minnesotan who was hungry](#), and linked the bill with socialism. Drazkowski wondered whether students will next be expecting free clothing.

The bill passed easily, despite Drazkowski's opposition, and the legislator was lampooned on social media. News stories about the free lunch bill indicated that more than 60,000 Minnesota children were found to be living in poverty in 2022, while 5.5 million visits to food pantries were made in that state.

Tom suggested to a friend with Minnesota ties, who had brought this story to his attention (and had also opined that "church denominations" should formally contradict Drazkowski), that poverty and hunger should be recognized in lobbying legislators when issues like the Minnesota bill surface, or when helping out at meal programs and food pantries, in donating money to pertinent charities, and in responding positively to the needy encountered on the street.

Human Trafficking – The VOP Committee is looking for another person that may be interested, passionate, or knowledgeable on the subject of Human Trafficking and willing to report on this topic in future meetings. Please contact the VOP chairperson if you are interested. Or if you know of someone that might be interested in covering this important issue, please have them contact the chairperson directly at: dabusch99@yahoo.com

John Weber offered a few brief items on this topic: Franciscan Peacemakers, a nonprofit in Milwaukee, is receiving recognition for their efforts to end sex trafficking and exploitation of women in the city. The [Franciscan Peacemakers](#) provide resources and help for women engaging in prostitution due to trauma, human trafficking or drug addiction. This includes daily outreach, a two-year residential program, employment and advocacy work.

The national FBI honored them by presenting an award for their work in the Milwaukee community to end abuse against women, specifically sexual violence, homelessness and other types of traumas.

The Decatur, Illinois-based [Howard G. Buffett Foundation](#) has awarded Milwaukee-based nonprofit [UMOS](#) and its Wisconsin Labor Trafficking Project partners \$5.1 million in funding to fight labor trafficking. The three-year grant is to be administered statewide.

The "bottom-line mission" for the Wisconsin Labor Trafficking Project is to work with the Wisconsin Department of Justice Division of Criminal Investigations (DCI), the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD), advocates, and legal providers in "applying a well-coordinated approach to arresting and prosecuting traffickers while comprehensively supporting victims throughout the process".

Immigration: Next, Armand Carriere reported that he had the opportunity to attend a briefing for Ukrainian refugees at [St Michael's Ukrainian Catholic Church](#) held on March 26. Representatives from the [International Institute of Wisconsin](#) and [Maximus](#) (a local organization dedicated to assisting immigrants and refugees with finding employment) made presentations.

And on April 25th, Maximus sponsored a Refugee Career and Resource Fair, held at the Milwaukee City Center Hilton. The event featured many local resources available to refugees, including: Employ Milwaukee, Milwaukee Area Technical College, Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Dynamic Workforce Solutions, Literacy Services of Wisconsin, and many more.

Armand also reported that he was able to connect an Afghan refugee family with an attorney at [Catholic Charities](#) to begin the asylum process. Confirming that Catholic Charities Milwaukee is helping with refugee issues and not solely focused on immigration. He is helping the family work on applying for asylum in the US and one of the requirements for asylum is proof of residency. A lease signed by a landlord would easily qualify as proof, but the family is renting without a lease.

Carriere asked if there is a way to force a landlord to sign a lease. Mike McCann stated that there was no legal position to force a lease, but suggested that because of the situation surrounding this tenant, the landlord might not want any long term commitment. McCann suggested asking for a short term lease of maybe only three months, and the landlord might be agreeable to sign for the short term.

On national issues, the Biden administration has announced that DACA recipients will now be eligible for Medicaid and Obama Care.

Hundreds of thousands of recipients of the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) program will for the first time soon be eligible for affordable health care coverage after President Joe Biden announced a plan to expand access to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act insurance marketplace. Up until now, DACA immigrants have been able to work legally and pay taxes but they don't have full legal status and so are denied many benefits, including federally subsidized health insurance. Mike McCann asked if there have been any legal challenges to granting Medicaid rights to the Dreamers. Armand stated that although no suits have been filed to this date, legal challenges on this are likely.

The Biden administration is allowing thousands of Ukrainians who fled their homeland when Russia invaded a year ago to stay in the United States longer, the administration said Monday. The decision provides relief to Ukrainians whose one-year authorization to remain in the U.S. was set to expire soon.

The Homeland Security Department said the extension is for certain Ukrainian nationals and their immediate family members who were let into the U.S. before the Uniting for Ukraine program started.

Ukrainians who came in under the Uniting for Ukraine program generally got two years of humanitarian "parole" in the U.S. whereas those who arrived before them generally got permission to stay only for one year. Resettlement agencies have estimated that there are about 20,000 Ukrainians in the one-year group. There will be no need for refugees to file additional paperwork to claim this extension.

Mental Health Care – Julie Krahl opened by challenging our group to notice how many times during today's meeting the word healthcare was mentioned. She was making the point that healthcare, whether we are talking about Medicare, the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid or ACA for DACA immigrants, the subject of health pops up in almost everything we do as the VOP and all these topics dovetail into mental health issues.

Krahl then reported that [Gov. Evers' biennial budget proposal](#) makes one of the largest budget investments in mental health and substance use disorder treatment in the past 40 years, with more than \$500 million earmarked to expand access to mental and behavioral health services across Wisconsin. Julie stated that the details regarding how this money will be spent are just starting to emerge, and stated that it is unlikely that volunteer organizations such as SVDP would qualify for any funds. A good portion of the money will go to universities and technical colleges to be used specifically for training/teaching programs for mental health practitioners.

With her background as an assistant professor in the education program at Marian University, Sister Julie suggested that we keep an eye out for grants for training programs. She foresees that with the SVDP Society's experience with the poor, we could consider becoming a clinical training site for introducing mental health practitioners on how to work with those in need. Next Julie reported that the budget earmarks some money for some local organizations that deal with a component of mental or behavioral health. She suggested that our society's experience with home visits with the poor, and unhoused persons could qualify as a component of mental health and make SVDP eligible for training grants. Many of the organizations highlighted for receiving these mental healthcare funds are in the Milwaukee area. Julie stated that she will keep an eye on these organizations, looking out for training programs that Vincentians might also qualify to receive.

Dave Busch noted that our Ozanam orientation training does not give any insight into working with people with mental health issues. Any training that we could receive on this topic would greatly benefit Vincentians that regularly perform home visits.

Julie reported on some great news regarding the Fond du Lac Council. [SSM Health](#), a non-profit Catholic healthcare institution providing innovative community and regional health care services to the greater Fond du Lac area, awarded a \$6,000 grant to the SVDP Society of Fond du Lac to develop a training program for helping Vincentians working with neighbors in need that are dealing with mental health issues. In the process of applying for a grant from SSM, they discovered that many healthcare institutions have grant money available specifically for mental and/or behavioral care training. Sister Julie is encouraging all Councils to apply for mental health training grants from institutions in their area.

Armand Carriere asked Julie about the kind of training she had in mind, specifically what would it prepare a Vincentian to do? Armand was asking within the perspective of a typical home visit, wherein the people requesting help have already been screened, Vincentians show up at the home, the needs of the requestor are analyzed, and a finally a voucher or a referral is given out. Would we be recognizing signs of mental illness in the home and report that to someone who could provide assistance or would Vincentians be trained to provide some kind of mental help themselves? Julie stated that both of these things would be a possible solution, but further we could be talking about training to learn how we recognize things like physical abuse, spousal abuse or sexual abuse. Also, seeing people living under high stress, we could use training that teaches us how to present ourselves as being “trauma informed”, how to say the right things to traumatized people, and the like. [Trauma informed care](#) is a term currently receiving more widespread use and understanding. Randy Bedore reminded us that Catholic Charities has trained social workers that can help in some of these abuse situations. He also offered a few techniques for visits that could help, such as visiting outside of the home.

Julie also noted that she will be attending the annual [NAMI](#) statewide conference on April 28th and 29th, in Elkhart Lake. This year’s NAMI Wisconsin Annual Conference is focusing their conference theme on Uniting Hearts and Minds. The Conference will offer more than 30 workshops dedicated to mental health research, lived experience stories, advocacy updates, crisis response systems, and more. Julie hopes she can glean a few more good ideas for our VOP efforts from this conference and will report back to us on this event.

Minimum Wage/Labor – Dave Busch reported that 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.

The Department of Workforce Development (DWD) released the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) preliminary employment estimates for the month of February 2023, which showed Wisconsin's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate dropped to a record low of 2.7 percent. In addition, total seasonally adjusted nonfarm jobs increased 7,500 over the month of February and 50,300 year-over-year to hit a new record high of 2,997,400. The total jobs number puts the state 3,400 jobs above pre-COVID-19 peaks.

Wisconsin's record low unemployment rate of 2.7 percent for February is down 0.2 percentage points from January's rate of 2.9 percent and beats the previous record low of 2.8% set in January through April of 2022. Nationwide for the month of February, the U.S. unemployment rate was 3.6 percent.

Busch also reported that there is a proposal in the Governor Evers budget to include an increase in the minimum wage in Wisconsin. The bill requires the secretary of workforce development to establish a committee to study options to achieve a \$15 per hour minimum wage and other options to increase compensation for workers in this state. Under the bill, the committee consists of nine members, with five appointed by the governor,

and one each appointed by the speaker of the assembly, the assembly minority leader, the senate majority leader, and the senate minority leader. The committee is required to submit a report containing its recommendations for options to achieve a \$15 per hour minimum wage to the governor and the appropriate standing committees of the legislature no later than October 1, 2024.

Waukesha Update: David Anderson told us about the resource guide available from the Aging and Disability Resource Center of Waukesha County ([ADRC](#)) Anderson was certain that the resource guides are available in most counties, and suggested that your conference should have a few of these in hand to give out to neighbors in need.

Randy Bedore added that it is sometimes possible to get an ADRC representative to make a home visit with you, provided that the neighbor in need will accept the extra visitor.

All training events or meetings held by the Waukesha Council will now require pre-registration. Waukesha has a new Council President, Carol Maurer, and the new Vice President is Regge Krueger. The Waukesha Council holds quarterly leadership meetings and the next one will be held on April 24th. Anderson stated that he plans to bring up the topic of mental health with the Board members. He would like to see to element of mental health training incorporated into the Ozanam Orientation training.

The Archdiocesan Council will be holding virtual [Ozanam training](#) over three sessions on May 9, 11, and 16, online. You must attend all sessions to complete your training.

The North Central Region [annual meeting](#) will be held on June 15 thru 17 at the University of St Mary of the Lake in Mundelein IL. Registration is now open, and get more info by clicking here:

<https://meetingsvdpusa.regfox.com/2023-svdp-north-central-regional-meeting>

Racine Update: Jim Erven reported that he has so far been unable to get together with Jim Penczykowski to explore expanding the voice of the VOP statewide. Erven however has been using his time well in preparing for this task. He has been exploring bills in the Wisconsin legislature that have statewide appeal, particularly looking for issues that will have appeal in rural and farming communities in Wisconsin, with the idea of finding common ground with people outside of the greater Milwaukee and Madison metro areas. Erven has been monitoring bills related to issues such as changes to the low-income housing tax credit, extension of the time limit for Medicare [postpartum healthcare](#) for new mothers, expanded coverage for breast cancer screening by health insurance plans, and more recently the issue of disenrollment and redetermination of eligibility for medical assistance programs.

Erven noted that he is tracking a number of these issues and is keeping track of amendments, public hearings, and sponsorship changes on these bills, in the hope of finding common ground agreement on these things, in order to coordinate with Penczykowski on these, statewide. Dave Busch offered to call Penczykowski and remind him to mail Erven to set up a phone call or in person meeting to discuss ways they can stabilize VOP efforts in the western and northern parts of Wisconsin.

With an eye on issues with statewide appeal, Erven reported that the City of Wauwatosa [Equity and Inclusion Commission](#) has recommended legislation to remove racially charged covenant language that remains embedded in property deed documents in Wisconsin.

The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that UW Milwaukee is charting this language across deeds and bonds still in use throughout Milwaukee County. This is language still in use that prohibits resale of some properties to certain targeted groups, in perpetuity. This sort of language is not really enforceable but never the less continues in use in these documents for many decades.

Erven also reported on statewide action underway to expand access to affordable housing in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) has agreed to a rent increase cap of 5 percent per year on properties receiving state or federal low income housing tax credits. They estimate that this will affect over 1,200 properties statewide, encompassing as many as 28,000 rental units. They are also looking into establishing greater leniency for tenants that are behind on their rent.

Mike McCann asked Erven if he knew where majority leader Robin Voss lives.

Erven replied that he thought Voss resides in Burlington which is in Racine County.

McCann felt that we might be able to apply some influence on him if we had some Vincentians that live in his district.

Old Business:

SVDP Executive Board Vote on Expungement Law – Dave Busch reported that the Archdiocesan Board voted by email to support another VoterVoice campaign supporting the expansion of eligibility for expungement of criminal records in Wisconsin.

McCann, Busch and Penczykowski coordinated on a rewrite of last year's Action Alert, and Busch will send this wording on to the Executive Board for their review.

We are in contact with Barb Sella from the Wisconsin Catholic Conference and she will keep us informed of any movement on this bill in the legislature, so that we can plan for an effective launch of our call to action to have the most impact on our lawmakers.

New Business:

Motion to Oppose AB57/SB86 – Last month, Mike McCann made a motion to speak out publicly in opposition to removing prosecutors discretion in making charging or plea deals. Deferrals, plea deals and charging decisions would require pre-approval from a judge under the new law.

The added step of waiting for a judge to review charges, deferrals, and plea deals would in all likelihood further slowdown the justice system, imposing more hardship on those who cannot afford an attorney. And taking deferred prosecution deals out of the hands of the district attorneys will result in more persons missing out on good jobs, due to having a criminal record.

We were unable to vote on moving ahead with this motion when the chairperson observed that we did not have enough committee members in attendance to comprise a quorum.

This month we had enough members in attendance to make a simple majority. The motion was again made by McCann and Bedore seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken and the measure passed unanimously. Busch will brief the Executive Board at their next meeting on April 30th and will ask them for the go-ahead to make our opposition public.

Next Meeting: The next VOP meeting will be held on the second Saturday in May. Please plan to join us online on Saturday, May 13, 2023 at 9AM. The login information can be found at the bottom of these minutes on the last page.

Adjournment: The meeting was formally adjourned at 11:11 AM, with the VOP members reading a closing prayer together for Easter...

"Change our lives, and change our hearts"

to be messengers of Easter joy and hope.

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MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE OF POOR COMMITTEE

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Here is the information for logging into the ZOOM Meeting:

St. Vincent de Paul Society of Milwaukee is inviting you to a scheduled Zoom meeting for the VOP Committee monthly meeting.

Click Here to Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84435969715?pwd=WFN2NIhkV1c1SVpqd2I1RG5oVklyUT09>

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

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

Meeting ID: 844 3596 9715