

**St. Vincent de Paul Society**  **Milwaukee Archdiocese**

**Voice For the Poor Committee**

**Minutes from the Meeting held on May 11, 2024**

**In Attendance:** David Anderson, Randy Bedore, Dave Busch, Armand Carriere, Jim Erven, Richard Fedler, Tom Jozwik, Sister Julie Krahl, E. Michael McCann, John Weber, along with Linda Vargo, Vice President Ozaukee County Council, and Sharon Tenuta, president of the Kenosha Council

**Call to Order:** As we began the May meeting, we were pleased to be joined by Sharon Tenuta from the Kenosha Council. Sharon briefed us on her background and reported that she is searching and hoping to find someone from the Kenosha Council, willing to join the Voice For the Poor Committee.

The VFP meeting was formally called to order at 9:06 AM with all members praying together, the short version of the opening prayer for St. Vincent de Paul Society meetings.

**Minutes:** The minutes from the VFP meeting held on April 13, 2024 were sent to the members in advance of this meeting, and the chairperson asked that any changes be sent directly to him. No errors or omissions were received by the chair, and no questions were raised by the committee members, so the April VFP minutes were passed by general consent.

**Subcommittee Updates:**

**Energy** – Dave Busch reported that WEC Energy Group utilities, WE Energies and Wisconsin Public Service Corp, filed rate cases on Friday April 12, 2024, with the Public Service Commission asking for increases of more than \$800 million for customers in eastern and northern Wisconsin. The Citizens Utility Board will be looking to reduce the high return on equity or profit the two utilities are seeking in the case. Their experts will be digging in and looking hard for savings. “WEC Energy Group shareholders have done extremely well over the past 20 years at a time when costs for We Energies customers have doubled and risen faster than the cost of living,” said Tom Content, executive director of CUB. “Shareholders of WEC Energy Group have enjoyed profits that are the highest in the state and well above the national average. High profits drive up costs and cry out for a more balanced approach that keeps the concerns of customers paying the bills, top of mind.”

Another issue for CUB is how to deal with shutting down old coal plants, that are still reflected in customers’ rates, to make way for new solar and natural gas plants. “From the filing it appears that WE Energies wants to have its cake and eat it too: They want to make money on all the new solar and natural gas plants they ‘re looking to build, and they want to keep profiting on coal plants, long after they’re shut down” continued Content. “Saddling hundreds of millions of dollars of additional costs on customers who are already paying among the highest prices in the Midwest for electricity is something the Public Service Commission will need to evaluate very carefully.”

Busch will research the details on the rate increase proposal and report back as this develops.

**Criminal Justice** - E. Michael McCann reported first on [AB975](#). This Republican sponsored abortion bill amends the 20-week prohibition on abortions, to prohibit any person from performing, inducing, or attempting to perform or induce an abortion if the probable age of the unborn child is 14 or more weeks, except in the case of a medical emergency, was opposed by the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, passed by the Assembly but failed to pass in the Senate. This bill was also unique in that it would also require a referendum vote. Under the bill, at the April 2024 election, the electors would have had to vote on the question whether the statutory provisions treated in the bill shall take effect. In a case in a Dane County challenging [Wisconsin's 1849 abortion law](#), the judge ruled that the law is not an abortion ban, and Planned Parenthood has resumed providing abortion referrals in Milwaukee and Madison.

Next McCann reported that our push for expanding Medicaid coverage in Wisconsin never got introduced in this session. However, a bill expanding postpartum benefits coverage for up to one year for pregnant women did pass the Senate but met with opposition in the Assembly. Governor Evers has stated that he supported this bill and would sign it, signaling that this bill may get reintroduced in the next session.

McCann also told us that Governor Evers signed a bill to extend the Child Tax Care Credits that went into effect during COVID in Wisconsin.

Also, [SB172](#) which requires the Department of Corrections (DOC) to contract with at least one nonprofit organization, for-profit entity, or public agency to establish a community reentry center, was signed into law. A community reentry center is a community site offering individuals who are being released from a state correctional institution, initial points of contact for each of the following: health services, identification services, financial services, housing services, employment services, education services, and supervision services.

The Assembly passed the Earned Release Bill that we supported. [AB181](#) which expands the earned release program to also apply to eligible inmates who complete an employment readiness training program (ERTP) pursuant to DOC administrative rules. An "employment readiness training program" is an education, job training, employment, or other equivalent evidence-based program intended to lead to employment. The Senate failed to act on this bill and it is dead unless reintroduced in the next session.

McCann also reported that the bill to expand treatment programs and diversion programs passed in the Senate but was not passed by the Assembly.

There were a number of bills that *were* signed by the Governor. [AB573](#) became law, This bill directs the Department of Health Services to establish a pilot program to implement virtual behavioral health crisis care services for use by county or municipal law enforcement agencies in the field to connect law enforcement officers who encounter persons in crisis to behavioral healthcare services.

[AB576](#) requires the Department of Justice to establish and implement a program under which any law enforcement agency, a fire protection or emergency medical service agency, or any other agency that

employs public safety personnel, may establish peer support teams and critical incident stress management (CISM) services teams to help those personnel affected by an incident, with emotional and moral support.

[AB55](#) was passed, which increases the penalties in the state for reckless driving. Specifically increases penalties for fleeing or attempting to allude an officer, as well as creates a mandatory minimum sentence for convictions where reckless driving results in a death.

[AB973](#) also became law. This bill requires any employee of a community-based residential facility who has regular, direct contact with facility residents to receive training on identifying and preventing human trafficking crimes within 60 days after starting employment and at least every two years thereafter.

[AB976](#) also passed, this bill provides that, in a criminal prosecution for a human trafficking crime, the testimony of a child witness who is under 18 years of age may be taken in a room other than the courtroom and simultaneously televised in the courtroom provided that the court finds both:

1. That the presence of the defendant during the taking of the child's testimony will result in the child suffering serious emotional distress such that the child cannot reasonably communicate.
2. That taking the testimony of the child in a room other than the courtroom and simultaneously televising the testimony in the courtroom is necessary to minimize the trauma to the child of testifying in the courtroom setting.

[AB978](#) passed, and creates a Human Trafficking Council attached to the Department of Justice. The duties of the Human Trafficking Council are to compile an inventory of human trafficking prevention programs and services and maintain an online database to share information about human trafficking; review and assess the efficacy of the expenditure of state funds for human trafficking prevention.

[AB940](#) became law. The Department of Justice awards grants to nonprofit or public organizations that provide services to victims of sexual assault. This bill increases the amount for such grants by \$7,000,000 in fiscal year 2023-24 and \$18,000,000 in fiscal year 2024-25. Under the bill, DOJ must also annually provide a grant to a nonstate entity to provide ongoing training and technical assistance to the recipients of these grants in order to enhance the services given to the victims.

[Senate Bill 119](#) extends protections against identifying confidential informants. This bill extends that nondisclosure requirement concerning the personally identifiable information of confidential law enforcement informants, to records maintained by any official or body subject to the public records law, not just law enforcement agencies.

[SB314](#) Under this bill, a person is guilty of possession of child pornography if he or she knowingly receives, distributes, produces, possesses, or accesses with the intent to view, obscene photographs, film, motion pictures, or digital or computer-generated images or pictures that contain a visual representation that appears to depict an actual child engaged in sexually explicit conduct. The felony created under this bill is a Class D felony; has a three-year mandatory minimum period of confinement in prison.

[SB169](#) this bill establishes a free hotline for employers interested in hiring individuals with a conviction record. And it requires the state Department of Workforce Development to provide information and assistance relating to available incentives and programs under state and federal law for employing individuals with a criminal record, including individuals participating in certain work release programs.

[SB722](#) This bill provides that the Department of Corrections' training program for correctional officers must include training to identify symptoms of active psychosis among prisoners and training on how to report such symptoms to the superintendent of the correctional institution and to appropriate medical personnel at the correctional institution. The bill also provides that DOC must authorize an emergency transfer of a prisoner from a prison or jail to a mental health treatment facility or the Wisconsin Resource Center if there is cause to believe the prisoner is in active psychosis and is a danger to himself or herself or to others.

Also passed, [AB960](#) provides that a wireless communications provider must provide device location information to law enforcement without a warrant if the customer or subscriber consents to the disclosure; if the provider believes in good faith that an emergency involving the danger of death or serious physical injury to any person exists and that disclosure of the location is relevant to preventing the death or injury or to mitigating the injury. This bill also extends privacy consideration to judicial members, public elected officials, and any candidates for public office. McCann noted that there were a lot of bills passed into law at the end of the current legislative session and that all of these new laws had bipartisan support.

**Housing:** John Weber reported on a newspaper article about Stacy Baker, 57, who found a notice to vacate, on the ground outside her apartment door.

She would have about seven weeks to pack up her belongings, find her next apartment, hire movers, and scrounge up the funds to cover application fees and security deposit for her next place. Baker is on a month-to-month lease. She said it is the only type of lease that her landlord-the real estate company Becovic-offered. "How is this legal".

It is perfectly legal. In Wisconsin, landlords are legally required to give month-to-month tenants only 28-day notice to vacate before the first of the following month, said attorney Nick Toman from [Legal Aid Society](#) of Milwaukee.

Kirkendoll, chief operating officer for [Community Advocates](#) said, we see this all the time. When they receive a 28-day notice they're in shock, and say, I didn't do anything wrong, so I shouldn't be evicted. "Technically, a notice to vacate is not an eviction, which requires a court order.

Instead, the landlord is simply ending the rental agreement. They do not have to ask permission from the courts to do so. The average time to eviction in the city is three to four months.

Want to learn more about Milwaukee landlords? Check out this website.

A new website, [MKEPropertyOwnership.com](#), can help you discover who's really behind your apartment- and how many properties they're connected to across the city of Milwaukee.

On their website, you can find the code violations, eviction rate, and other properties associated with your landlord.

Largest landlords in Milwaukee:

Joe Berrada, owns more than 9,000 rental units in the city of Milwaukee.

VineBrook Homes Trust, which owns just under 800 single family properties across Milwaukee.

The Mandel Group, which owns more than 2,000 rental units in Milwaukee.

The Greater Milwaukee Area is 10th on [Rent.com](#)'s list of U.S. metro areas with the fastest-rising rents. Between March 2023 and March 2024, prices rose 6.39 percent.

Trendy Historic Third Ward average monthly rent \$1,895 for a one bedroom, a two bedroom goes for \$2,955/mo. In the Sherman Park neighborhood average \$675 for one bedroom and \$750 for a two bedroom.

**Hunger/FoodShare:** Tom Jozwik reported that Milwaukee Neighborhood News Service published an [article](#) which told of the food bank and advocacy organization Hunger Task Force (HTF) is

currently operating three FoodShare Resource Centers to address hunger in Milwaukee: the

Robles Center at 7<sup>th</sup> and Mitchell; Alicia's Place at 4144 N. 56<sup>th</sup> St.; and the Coggs Center at

12<sup>th</sup> and Vliet. Each is open Monday through Friday. The centers help clients with FoodShare.

Robles serves many Spanish speakers and served 863 clients in a recent month (February). Said

Allen Castillo of HTF, "We get a lot of the refugee populations over there because a lot of their

housing placements are on the South Side." Meanwhile, 59 persons patronized the Coggs Center

in February while Alicia's Place welcomed 312 clients. Blacks and Asians are regularly served at

Alicia's, and a wide variety of age groups.

The centers provide desks, computers, telephones and printers for no-cost use and FoodShare

advocates are available. An "advocate's job is to educate and empower people to sort of take

control of the benefits on their own," according to Castillo. Staffers can guide clients through an

application or renewal process and can help in replacing food spoiled during power outages. HTF

boasts a 15-member team of advocates who speak a total of 15 languages.

On April 30, the same [news service reported](#) that the federal Special Supplemental Nutrition

program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC), faced a billion-dollar budget shortfall earlier this

year, but Congress approved an 11th-hour funding agreement for fiscal 2024. (In Wisconsin, this

translates as assurance of food assistance for thousands of families.)

Had it not been for the Congressional approval, 27,000 families may not have received WIC support. WIC covers infant food and formula costs, as well as educational resources, and has been called a vital lifeline for families struggling to put food on the table.

The April 30 article also referenced [Blanket of Love](#), a social-support program that helps (particularly African American and Spanish-speaking) expectant mothers and families from pregnancy until the child's first birthday. There are Blanket of Love sites throughout Milwaukee, including at St. Francis, St. Joseph and Columbia St. Mary's Hospitals. A number of churches are involved as well.

Acute malnutrition worsened in 2023, particularly among people displaced through conflict and disasters. According to the [United Nations secretary-general](#), "Using the data in this report to transform food systems and address the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition will be vital." Secretary-General Guterres added, "This crisis demands an urgent response."

Jozwik also told us that Catholic Relief Services ([CRS](#)) has launched a multi-year campaign to raise funds and advocate to end world hunger. Labeled one of the world's most trusted aid organizations, CRS reports, "The single most important fact about world hunger is this: You can help end it. You can start at home by shopping and eating locally, aiming to achieve zero food waste, and by joining CRS in the fight to end this crisis."

**Human Trafficking** – The VOP 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.

Armand Carrier told us Anne Haines is reporting that a landscape architecture firm has been identified to begin work on the contemplative garden Anne has planned on the property next door to [St. Bakhita Catholic Worker House](#). A derelict building next door will be demolished and work will begin on the garden this summer. Randy Bedore added that he was especially thrilled to here that the house next door was finally coming down. Over the last ten years, he and his wife have done several home visits in this rundown property.

Carriere also reported that St Bakhita Catholic Worker House is sponsoring an art exhibit/fund raiser at the House on Sunday, May 19, from 1 to 4 PM. All are invited.

**Immigration** - Armand Carriere reported that for the last 4 months of 2023 and into the first four months of 2024, Illegal crossings into the US fell 40 percent, making the case for a "border crisis" a little out of date. Some of this decline can be traced to additional pathways to legal entry being expanded. Another factor involves [greater cooperation from the Mexican government](#) as they take additional steps to slow the flow of migrants from South and Central America attempting to pass through Mexico to the US. And other allied countries (Canada, Greece, Spain) have opened up pathways for migrants to enter those countries legally, taking some of the pressure off the US border.

Despite all the criticisms of immigrants entering the country, legally or otherwise, [studies](#) have shown that this influx of immigrants has fueled our current economic growth. Post-pandemic woes of worker shortages have evaporated as this influx of new workers fill those vacancies, particularly in supply chain situations. In other cases, immigrants have been willing to fill jobs that native-born workers are unwilling to do, e.g., agricultural jobs or meat packing jobs. Immigrants are [starting new businesses](#) at a much higher rate than native-born citizens. And finally, as more native-born citizens retire and the US birthrate declines, job vacancies that once were filled by US citizens are now being filled by immigrants. So as one columnist put it, "If you don't want immigrants in this country, then tell grandma she can never retire."

Mike McCann then asked if the reports immigrants being transferred here from the Chicago area has started to show up. Armand referred this question to Jim Erven. Erven responded that the [Racine Interfaith Council](#) has another meeting planned to determine the specific roles for the

many state and local agencies involved in relocating immigrants using the Milwaukee Plan (which Jim had presented at our last VFP meeting). Sharon Tenuta added that her Kenosha parish, St. Mark's already has many Hispanic immigrant families.

Locally, the [Catholic Charities](#) Office of Immigrant and Refugee Services continues to work on a program that provides immigrants coming across the southern border with short-term representation so they can apply for asylum and qualify for work permits. Now operating for about a month, the program has already met with, or have on a waiting list, about 85 people mostly from Spanish speaking countries.

Since the beginning of the year, CC Office of Immigrant and Refugee Services has met with 85 Welcome Corps groups and have submitted applications for 43 of them to sponsor 205 immigrants. [Welcome Corps](#) is a private organization that seeks to establish small groups of people to support and provide assistance to immigrant families for a minimum of 6 months. Catholic Charities is the only agency in Milwaukee helping people form a Welcome Corps group. The [Office of Immigrant and Refugee Services](#) is always looking for sustainable, flexible funding, especially to support the Southern Border and Welcome Corps initiatives. They are always open to ideas and suggestions to generate this funding.

**Mental Health Care** – Sister Julie Krahl told us that she had nothing to update on this topic at this time. She also reported that she had attended training sessions with [Network](#) advocates for social justice, inspired by catholic sisters. She ceded her time for reporting on mental health care in favor of speaking later on her Network leadership workshop.

**Minimum Wage/Labor** – Dave Busch reported that the [Department of Workforce Development](#) released the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) preliminary job totals for March 2024, which showed year-over-year growth in Wisconsin's labor force, growth in employment, and total jobs. Over the year, Wisconsin's labor force increased 23,800 and the number of people employed grew by almost 13,000. Meanwhile, total nonfarm jobs remain near the record high set in February 2024, at 3,034,400.

Preliminary employment estimates for March 2024 also showed Wisconsin's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate held steady at 3.0percent, 0.8 percentage points below the national rate. Wisconsin's labor force participation rate for March 2024 was 65.6 percent, 2.9 percentage points higher than the national labor force participation rate of 62.7 percent.

- **Place of Residence Data:** Wisconsin's March 2024 unemployment rate held steady at 3.0 percent. The labor force decreased 3,500 over the month, to 3,140,000. The number of people employed decreased 800 over the month, to 3,047,100. The number of unemployed people decreased 2,600 over the month, to 93,000.
- **Place of Work Data:** Total nonfarm jobs decreased 1,700 over the month and increased 22,700 over the year, to 3,034,400 in March. Private sector jobs decreased 2,900 over the month and increased 14,300 over the year to 2,623,400. Construction jobs grew by 3,100 jobs over the month, to a record high 143,900 jobs.

**Racine Update:** Jim Erven reported that the Racine Council is now fully compliant with the [Safeguarding](#) policy for the Archdiocese SVDP Society. All active members have completed the background check and the online training. This excludes many of the associate members who largely work only behind the scenes and do not have contact with those we serve.

Jim also reported on several bills that were passed this year that he feels have statewide appeal. He told us that out of 21 different bills that became law there were several affecting the poor. As Mike McCann mentioned, SB172 became law and establishes re-entry centers throughout the state. Erven speculated that possibly our Society could be involved in some way with the local reentry center.

Other bills worth noting: [SB462](#) which requires the Department of Health Services to establish a certification process for crisis urgent care and observation facilities and a grant program to award grants to develop and support these facilities.

[SB476](#) is now law and prohibits the Department of Health Services from requiring a health care provider that is licensed, certified, registered, or otherwise authorized to provide health care services in this state and that exclusively offers health care services in this state through telehealth to maintain a physical address or site in this state.

[SB672](#) This bill allows the Department of Health Services to enter into a value-based purchasing arrangement with a drug manufacturer for prescription medications purchases in the Medical Assistance program, to include rebates, discounts, price reductions, risk sharing, reimbursements, payment deferrals or installment payments, guarantees, shared savings payments, withholds, bonuses, for those in need.

[AB616](#) became law and now requires the Department of Health Services to cover stays for acute care in an institution for mental disease.

[SB985](#) also became law. Current law requires WHEDA to divide the state into housing regions based on the service jurisdiction of each regional planning commission, with the counties not served by a regional planning commission constituting collectively one region.

Current law provides that no such region may receive more than 25 percent of such loan amounts in any given application cycle.

This bill changes that 25 percent loan award allocation requirement to provide that no such region may receive more than 12.5 percent of the moneys appropriated for such loans in the 2023-25 fiscal biennium.

**Waukesha Update:** David Anderson reported that long time Executive Director of St. Vincent de Paul in Waukesha, Julie McIntyre, is retiring at the end of this year. She has agreed to stay on until the end of the year to help with the transition to new leadership. A special committee will be looking at several candidates to fill the Executive Director position. Julie has been a stalwart of the Waukesha Council for over 15 years and will be missed. Rob Shelledy who formerly worked for the Milwaukee Archdiocese as Director Catholic Social Action, has been working closely with her as the Associate Director.

Waukesha Council has another group that successfully completed the Getting Ahead program, ten Spanish speaking, and eleven English speaking candidates completed the 16 week course. Waukesha Conferences continue to recruit people from home visits that are interested in getting ahead. The program, directed by Liliana Cavazos, has been a big asset to the Waukesha area. A total of 526 Vincentians in Waukesha Council enrolled in the Safeguarding program and over 440 have completed the Safeguarding training. They have lost a few members in the process but are very close to getting 100 percent compliance.

### Old Business:

**Guest Speaker from NAMI** – Dave Busch reported that Robert Hagen, Crisis training Supervisor for [NAMI](#) Southeastern WI, is available and will speak to our group at our June meeting. on how to spot the signs of mental illness or distress.

Mr. Hagen trains police officers in [Crisis Intervention Team](#) procedures (CIT) and also offers a shorter course for anyone working with individuals with a mental illness, [Crisis Intervention Partner](#) (CIP). Bob will discuss spotting the signs of mental distress and will also share some techniques and insights on how to de-escalate a person that may be experiencing mental stress.

## New Business:

**Report to the Executive Board** – Dave Busch told us that he attended the spring meeting of the Archdiocesan Executive Board on April 21<sup>st</sup> at Our Lady of the Lake parish in Random Lake. He reported to the Board that our second VoterVoice ActionAlert was scrapped when it became clear that [AB37](#), the bill to expand eligibility for expungement of records will not make it to the floor for a vote. Busch also told the Board that our efforts to support the proposal to offer a tax deduction for mental health practitioners in Wisconsin, bill [AB32/SB31](#), was also dead. No actions were scheduled on this bill so that when the current Legislature adjourned, this bill also received adverse disposition.

Busch also told us about this year's winners of the Ozanam Medallion. The individual Ozanam Medallion Award was presented to Dr. Robert (Bob) Weber, Blessed Trinity/St. John Evangelist Conference, Sheboygan County Council. Bob has been actively involved in the Society longer than Busch has been alive(!) and has also done philanthropic work in the broader community. The Conference to receive the Ozanam Medallion Award is St. Jerome's Conference of the Waukesha County Council. They are active in the community assisting neighbors in need and have been awarded grants from the Oconomowoc Area Foundation for the past four years. Lastly, Busch made an appeal to those Council's that do not have a representative on the VFP Committee, to continue to seek a Vincentian from their Council to take part in our VFP meetings.

**Network, Advocate For Justice workshop** – Sister Julie Krahl told us about the [Network](#) Group, a national Catholic lobbying group inspired by Catholic Sisters. Network is taking their direction from the Pope and the USCCB. They are currently advocating for the idea of making voters, multiple issue voters, instead of focusing and voting over a single issue. A clear example is backing a candidate because they are anti-abortion. Yet the same candidate may not back post partem health care, at the same time supporting the death penalty. Voters need to look across the candidates total voting record to decide if they are worthy of their vote. The [workshop](#) also focused on how to engage in discussion with the single issue voter. If someone brings up an issue that is strongly catholic but is not looking at multiple issues, the workshops are teaching people how to pivot the conversation around to the bigger picture. How can we know we are voting for candidates who promote the common good? Pope Francis makes it clear: Catholics and all people of good will are called to be multi-issue voters, not single-issue voters, in the 2024 elections and in our continued participation in public life. More information on workshops can be found here: <https://www.mobilize.us/network/>

**Next Meeting:** The next VOP meeting will be held online on the second Saturday in June. Please plan to join us via ZOOM on Saturday June 8, 2024 at 9 AM. The login information can be found at the bottom of the last page of these minutes.

**Adjournment:** The meeting ended with an important note from Dave Busch to watch carefully for our Zoom meeting invitation to change. There will likely be a new link and password to the login page for our meetings going forward, due to the need to schedule meetings anew and in advance in the Zoom application. So, keep your eyes out for a new link to be sent. The May meeting officially adjourned at 11:05 AM with all VOP members saying a prayer for peace in Israel and Gaza...

*"We pray also for those who have the power to bring peace.  
May they be touched by your spirit of compassion and kindness."*

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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=KzZhR0xyWWY0QXlqNUNEYktaEIXZz09>

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

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

Meeting ID: 898 9678 4028

Passcode: 732237