

M E M O R A N D U M

TO: The Honorable Jase Bolger, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Ken Kurtz, Chair, House Families, Children and Seniors Committee

FROM: Tom Hickson
Vice President, Public Policy and Advocacy

RE: Welfare Reform Legislation

DATE: 27 July 2011

Michigan's recent unemployment rate increase to 10.5 percent is one reason among many as to why the Michigan House of Representatives should take a prudent and deliberative approach to welfare reform legislation that is expected to arrive from the State Senate.

From the outset of this legislative session Michigan Catholic Conference has called for a moral approach to the state budget, one that indicates the priorities of the state to provide basic and necessary care for its most vulnerable citizens. This message was addressed further in a letter dated 11 April sent by the seven diocesan Catholic Bishops to Governor Snyder and members of the Michigan Legislature. The message of the Bishops, and the advocacy of the Conference, applies unconditionally to the welfare reform debate, where the Conference has advocated for language that would lend increased assistance to those who most need it. To this point, we are appreciative of the increase in the earned income disregard passed by the House, as well as exemptions from the running clock for disabled persons and their caregivers passed by the Senate.

Unfortunately, however, House Bills 4409 and 4410 in their entirety fail to meet the criteria addressed above. As you are aware, the legislation, if enacted, will mean thousands of vulnerable Michigan families and their children will be eliminated from state assistance due to the retroactive 48-month clock. The number of children who will be impacted, and the importance this state places on caring for vulnerable children (the MiDashboard includes a "children in poverty category") demands a more thorough discussion of the bills than what took place in the State Senate.

When House Bills 4409 and 4410 arrive from the Senate, Michigan Catholic Conference respectfully, and strongly, urges the House of Representatives to give a more thorough and compassionate review of this legislation, and to consider sending the bills to conference committee in order to allow for a discussion of how the state will prevent thousands of children from falling deeper into poverty if and when these bills become law. The welfare and dignity of vulnerable children must take priority over budget targets.

Thank you.

cc: Governor Rick Snyder
Members of the Michigan House of Representatives
The Honorable Maura Corrigan, Director, Michigan Department of Human Services