



# Sowers of Justice Newsletter

St. Mary of the Lake, 105 Forestview Lane N., Plymouth MN 55441

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Archdiocesan Office  
for Social Justice



## Minnesota's Legislative Session 2013

***Each day we all face the choice to be Good Samaritans or indifferent travelers passing by.*** ---- Pope Francis, 2013 homily

Catholic Charities' Office of Social Justice and St. Mary of the Lake parish focused on these issues during the recently completed Minnesota legislative session with these results.

### HOUSING

The Legislature included an additional \$4 million for the **Homeless Youth Act** in the budget! It's true that this is not the increase of \$8 million that we asked for, but the total amount of \$4.238 million is 17.8 times the current funding for the HYA. This money will go very far in supporting homeless youth in Minnesota through funding programs that provide services, emergency shelter, transitional, and permanent supportive housing to youth ages 16-21. We will continue to work with you to advocate for more funding.

This year, we joined the **Homes for All coalition** in asking the state to invest an additional \$50 million in housing, split evenly between infrastructure and services. The final budget includes an increase of \$25.9 million for housing, and \$7 million for services (this includes the \$4 million increase for HYA), for a total increase of \$33 million toward helping to end homelessness!

We also advocated, with Homes for All, for \$50 million in **bonding** money for affordable housing (both new construction and maintenance), and supported the House bonding bill with that amount. At the eleventh hour, however, the Legislature decided to pass a relatively small bonding bill of \$156 million, which includes funds for a Minneapolis Veterans Home, but no other housing dollars. Next year is a bonding year in MN, and we will continue to ask for this important investment.

### HEALTH CARE

Minnesota established a state-run **health care exchange**, which is an online marketplace where small businesses and individuals can choose insurance. Eight board members have been appointed to run the exchange, called MNSure, and the board is expected to come out with some rules and guidelines this summer in preparation for the October 2013 enrollment for plans that will be effective on January 1, 2014.

**MinnesotaCare** will be our state's "basic health plan" for people with incomes from 138-200% of federal poverty guidelines (between about \$15,400-\$22,340 for a single adult). The Legislature also eliminated the \$10,000 cap on hospital care and the requirement that a person be uninsured for four months before being eligible for MNCare. Premium levels (currently up to \$100 for single adult) were also reduced between 10-50%, depending on family size. Lawfully present immigrants will also now be eligible for the program. All of these changes will be effective January 1, 2014.

The Legislature approved **expansion of Medicaid** (called "Medical Assistance" in Minnesota) to 138% of federal poverty guidelines - \$15,414 for a single adult - effective January 1, 2014. Current eligibility standards only extend to people living at or below 75% FPG, which is a little over \$8,300 for a single adult.

The Legislature increased funding for **school-linked mental health services** by \$7.4 million for 2014-15, and by \$9.8 million for 2016-2017! Catholic Charities is able to provide these services at schools in the metro area, and we recognize their importance to remove barriers so that children are able to learn in school. There are also other good policy and funding changes to children's mental health services.

### **SAFETY NET PROGRAMS**

In 2011, the Legislature reduced the number of days a child can be absent from daycare from 25 days to 10 before losing a subsidy provided through the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP). A medical exemption to this rule was also removed. This year, the Legislature **restored both the 25 absent days and the medical exemption**, which is good news for working families, and for all of us who benefit when sick children are able to stay home from child care. However, the change will not take effect until February 1, 2014.

The amount of money a family using the Minnesota Family Investment Program receives is based on the number of family members, but in 2003 the Legislature passed the "family cap" law, so that if a child is born into a family already using MFIP, the amount of their grant does not increase to accommodate a new family member. This year, the Legislature **repealed the family cap!** The change will take effect on January 1, 2015. The amount of money a family using MFIP receives has not changed since 1986. Unfortunately, this year the Legislature did not include a cost of living adjustment (COLA) to the MFIP grant, nor did it increase the grant amount; we joined other organizations in supporting both initiatives. Still, a positive change did occur: the MFIP program will now include a \$110 housing allowance to MFIP households not receiving housing subsidies, beginning July 1, 2015. There were other positive changes to MFIP as well, as suggested by the Department of Human Services.