



**Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-Colorado**

**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.

## 2019 Advocacy Goals and Priorities

### Advocacy Goals

- In response to the realities of poverty and hunger in this state, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-Colorado focuses its work primarily on public policy that has a positive impact on people dealing with these challenges. The primary goals of this work shall be:
  - **To ensure that assistance is available for people living in poverty** so they can meet basic needs. Adequate funding is required for basic assistance programs like Medicaid, Connect for Health Colorado, low-income housing, nutrition assistance, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.
  - **To address systemic issues** that prevent people living in poverty from earning a self- or family-sustaining income. Issues to be addressed may include tax, labor, and wage policies; protection of the environment; and improving access to safe, stable and affordable housing.
  - **To show heightened concern for those who are disproportionately impacted** by policy changes in our primary areas of work, including communities of color, non-native English speakers, and immigrants and refugees.

### Agenda Summary

- **Combating Hunger**
  - Improving access and usage rates for SNAP benefits for already-qualified individuals through Colorado PEAK and the Colorado Department of Human Services
  - Encouraging greater participation in food and nutrition programs, particularly for children age 0-18
  - Addressing the social inequities that arise later in life from irregular access to healthy food through research-based policy

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- **Reducing Poverty**
  - Protecting access to assistance programs for people living in poverty, including through concurrent federal advocacy
  - Supporting reform of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights for the sake of reinvesting revenues collected at existing tax rates into human and social services, instead of non-impactful refunds
  - Promoting opportunities for those exiting the criminal justice system to successfully reintegrate
  - Supporting equitable access to educational opportunities and addressing inequities in district funding and graduation rates
  - Supporting legislation that supports the local work of Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains
- **Supporting Access to Housing**
  - Promoting all measures to expand access to housing options for low-income individuals and families
  - Ensuring that persons experiencing homelessness have access to services and support, and advocating for the rights as well as responsibilities of the same
- **Addressing Public Health Concerns**
  - Supporting health care access as a public good and human right that should be available to everyone regardless of ability to pay, particularly for the sake of seniors, children, the disabled, and other vulnerable populations
  - Supporting awareness of public safety in relation to firearms, and understanding firearm-involved deaths (homicides and suicides) as a significant public health concern
  - Highlighting the scourge of opioid addiction and promoting access to care and treatment
- **Caring for Our Environment**
  - Engaging proactively with Colorado legislators (both state and federal) to encourage legislation to address the root causes of climate change, including greenhouse gas emissions
  - Supporting efforts to improve health outcomes in vulnerable and low-income neighborhoods through environmental

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- protection and impact assessments, and empowering residents to improve their local air, water, and soil quality
- Uplifting the ELCA Social Statement on Caring for Creation and promoting awareness of climate change realities, including adding measurable goals to the State Climate Action Plan

## Theological Background

- Advocacy ministry in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has an **institutional mandate** that is rooted in the church's constitution and in the actions and statements of the ELCA. The ELCA Social Statements, Messages and Resolutions provide the basis for the positions and issues for which Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-Colorado will advocate.
- The **constitution of the ELCA** authorizes and endorses advocacy when it states that the church is to "serve in response to God's love to meet human needs, caring for the sick and the aged, advocating dignity and justice for all people, working for peace [...] and standing with the poor and powerless and committing itself to their needs."
- The ELCA Social Statement **Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective** (1991) sets forth the church's specific commitment to advocacy: "This church shall [...] work with and on behalf of the poor, the powerless, and those who suffer, using its power and influence to develop and advocate policies that seek to advance justice, peace, and the care of creation."
- The **Continuing Resolutions** of the ELCA Constitution endorse state advocacy ministries by directing the Churchwide Office to "establish and maintain, in partnership with synods and social ministry organizations, state public policy offices for advocacy to state governments on behalf of this church."

## Context for Advocacy in Colorado

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- The Census Bureau reports that approximately 8% of Colorado residents lived at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in 2017. Approximately 12% of Colorado children live in poverty.
- More than 25% of households in Colorado don't earn enough to cover basic costs of living, with two-thirds of those families not meeting the official definition of poverty, according to the Colorado Center on Law & Policy Self-Sufficiency Standard
- Colorado is uniquely susceptible to the risk of cuts to human services programs at the federal level. The restrictions of TABOR mean that Colorado cannot raise revenue to make up for these cuts in the way other states can. Federal dollars constitute over \$6 billion of our state budget.
- Nearly 1 in 8 Coloradans are food insecure, meaning that they have infrequent or irregular access to food, have cut back on or skipped meals, or have made changes in the quality or quantity of their food due to limited income.
- Income inequality has grown in Colorado, following national trends. Colorado ranks low in the Gini coefficient, which is a measure of income distribution. Between 1979 and 2007, the top 1% of earners captured almost half (48.7%) of all real income growth in Colorado.
- Colorado's homeless population was 10,940 in 2017, making it the worst of all states in the interior Mountain West, and 9<sup>th</sup>-worst nationwide, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Homelessness affects all communities, including metropolitan areas, mountain towns, and rural communities.

*Adopted on November 30, 2018 by the LAM-CO Policy Committee:*

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