

# **Lutheran Advocacy Ministry – New Mexico** ***Rocky Mountain Synod-ELCA***

## **2020** **Advocacy Agenda**

*Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM is called to advocate for justice in public policy, with a particular emphasis on alleviating poverty and hunger and supporting ELCA members and congregations, as well as our ecumenical and interfaith partners in the ministry of advocacy.*

**Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM works in an advocacy partnership with the NM Conference of Churches and the Presbytery of Santa Fe.**



**Rocky Mountain Synod**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.



**ELCA World Hunger**  
**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**  
God's work. Our hands.

*Together we proclaim and embody God's unconditional love for the sake of the world*  
**Christ's Church, Better Together**

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Become a part of our Advocacy Network by going to our website ([lutheranadvocacynm.org](http://lutheranadvocacynm.org)) and using "Join our Advocacy Network" on our home page.

## Background

### **Advocacy Policy Base**

The **institutional mandate** for the advocacy ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) 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-NM advocates.



- The **ELCA Constitution** authorizes and encourages advocacy when it states that the church is to “*study social issues and trends, work to discover the causes of oppression and injustice, and develop programs of ministry and advocacy to further human dignity, freedom, justice, and peace in the world.*”
- The **ELCA Social Statement**, “*The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective*” sets forth the church’s 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 **ELCA Constitution’s Continuing Resolutions** endorse state advocacy ministries by directing the Domestic Mission unit in “*facilitating the engagement of this church in advocacy.*”

***Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM speaks on behalf of  
the official positions of the ELCA as applied to  
the specific context of public policy issues in New Mexico.***

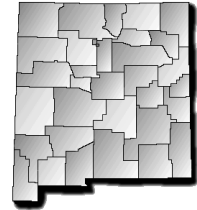
### **Developing the Advocacy Agenda**

Our Advocacy Agenda is established every fall by the Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM Policy Committee. Four basic filters are used in prioritizing the issues for which we advocate:

- ✓ Do the official statements or actions of the ELCA provide a basis for addressing the issue? *References listed under **ELCA Policy Base** on the following pages are not exhaustive.*
- ✓ Is the issue timely and/or active in the context of public policy issues in New Mexico?
- ✓ Are there sufficient resources within Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM for effective advocacy on the issue?
- ✓ Are there other state advocacy groups or organizations working on the issue?

## Context for Advocacy

The 2018 U.S. Census American Community Survey reports that New Mexico's overall rate of poverty is 19.5% (The 2019 Federal Poverty Level for a family of three is \$21,330). Beyond the overall state poverty rate, the situation for New Mexico's children is worse. It was recently reported that 27% of our children (under the age of 18) live in poverty. Additionally, over 12% of New Mexico's seniors live in poverty. The current Kids Count study reports that our state ranks 50<sup>th</sup> in child well-being.



The 2019 Map the Meal Gap report by Feeding America found that 16.6% of people living in our state are "food insecure," which means they have had to make changes in the quality or quantity of their food due to limited income or they have cut back or skipped meals on a frequent basis. In other words, at least 340,000 of New Mexicans experience hunger. Even worse is that 24% of New Mexico's children (118,000) are experiencing hunger.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition's "Out of Reach 2019" reports that a New Mexican, working at our statewide minimum wage of \$7.50 (there are higher minimum wages in Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, Las Cruces, Santa Fe, and Santa Fe County), would have to work 87 hours a week to be able to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's 2019 Fair Market Rent of \$850 per month.

In response to the needs of people living in poverty and with hunger in our state, Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM continues to focus our work primarily on public policies and programs that can have a positive impact on people living in poverty and experiencing hunger. These policies and programs have two major goals:

- **To address systemic issues that can enable people living in poverty to earn a family-sustaining income. Those issues can include tax policy, increasing the minimum wage, restricting predatory lending, and protecting workers' rights.**
- **To make various types of assistance available to people living in poverty to help meet basic living expenses. Adequate funding is required for basic assistance programs like Medicaid, affordable housing, nutrition assistance like SNAP, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, as well as child care assistance. Programs must be administered in an efficient and fair manner.**

# Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-New Mexico

## 2020 Advocacy Agenda Summary



### **Affordable Housing & Homelessness**

- Support for the state Housing Trust Fund
- Funding for programs that assist people experiencing homelessness
- Funding for programs that can prevent homelessness

### **Family-Sustaining Income**

- Support for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families & other cash assistance programs
- Funding for child care assistance & quality early childhood education programs
- Restricting predatory lending

### **Health Care**

- Outreach to & enrollment of those eligible for Medicaid or the NM Health Insurance Exchange
- Increase funding for the DD (Developmental Disabilities) Waiver

### **Hunger**

- Sufficient funding for the state SNAP supplement program & removing barriers to SNAP enrollment
- Efforts to close New Mexico's food gap & funding for food banks

### **Tax Policy**

- Tax policy that is fair and provides stable, sustainable & adequate revenue to meet the needs of our state, particularly the most vulnerable
- Increase the Working Families Tax Credit to 20% of the federal EITC
- Enacting a new Child Tax Credit
- Funding for Tax Help NM

### **Notes:**

- The 2020 Legislative Session is a 30 day session with the focus on the state budget and legislation that the governor puts forward for consideration.
- The LAM-NM Policy Committee may add issues as opportunities might arise.

## **Affordable Housing & Homelessness**

**Overview:** The cost of obtaining adequate and safe housing in New Mexico continues to be difficult for many low-income people and families. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines affordable housing as that which does not cost more than 30% of a household's gross income. HUD reports that the 2019 Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom unit in New Mexico is \$850 per month. The National Low Income Housing Coalition has calculated that a worker would have to earn \$16.34 per hour, working 40 hours per week, to be able to afford a 2-bedroom unit at the HUD 2019 New Mexico Fair Market Rent.



### ***Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM will advocate for:***

- **Support for the state Housing Trust Fund:** Created in 2005, this fund provides a much-needed flexible source of funding for bricks and mortar projects designed to meet affordable housing needs of low-income people throughout our state. Over 3,500 units of low-income affordable housing have been partially funded by the state Housing Trust Fund.
- **Funding for programs that assist people experiencing homelessness:** State funding is important to sustaining the capacity of programs that work to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Funding is needed to increase the availability of permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing.
- **Funding for programs that can prevent homelessness:** The NM Coalition to End Homelessness is proposing a Deep Prevention program which is a flexible and comprehensive approach to preventing homelessness in the earliest stages of housing instability. The goal is to leverage money spent by the social services system by preventing trauma experienced in eviction, homelessness, as well as discrimination in race, household type, and gender.

**ELCA Policy Base:** The ELCA social statement, *"Economic Life – A Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All"* states: "Sufficiency means adequate access to income and other resources that enable people to meet their basic needs, including nutrition, clothing, housing, health care, personal development, and participation in community with dignity."

The ELCA Message on *"Homelessness"* states: "Christians walk with the homeless when they join with others to . . . advocate policies that seek to provide job training, employment opportunities, housing, education, health care, and support for the homeless." "Adequate housing is needed for humane living." "Housing is a fundamental human right."

## **Family-Sustaining Income**

**Overview:** New Mexico's poverty rate of almost 20% is among the highest in the nation. More alarming is the fact that 27% of our children live in poverty. It is important that family-sustaining jobs are available throughout our state. When such jobs are not available, public policies and programs that assist low-income people to meet their basic living expenses and address barriers to employment are necessary. These supportive programs include cash assistance as well as programs like child care assistance that can help people living in poverty to achieve family-sustaining income. It is also important that public policies to address systemic issues that can enable families to earn family-sustaining income be enacted.

### ***Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM will advocate for:***

- **Support for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families & other cash assistance programs:** Many recipients have multiple barriers to employment, including lack of education, child care, transportation, domestic violence and chronic health problems. It is crucial that these barriers be addressed so that recipients can move into long-term family-sustaining employment.
- **Funding for child care assistance & quality early childhood programs:** It is important that quality child care assistance be available to working parents so that they know that their children are being cared for in a quality safe environment. It is also important that there be dedicated funding for quality early childhood education and programs like home visiting and Pre-K.
- **Restricting predatory lending:** Current laws must be enforced and further reduction in interest rates are needed.

**ELCA Policy Base:** The ELCA Social Statement “*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*” calls for: “addressing the barriers individuals face in preparing for and sustaining a livelihood (such as lack of education, transportation, child care, and health care).”

The ELCA Social Statement “*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*” also calls for: “tax credits and other means of supplementing the insufficient income of low-paid workers in order to move them out of poverty ...”

The ELCA Social Statement “*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*” also calls for: “government enforcement of regulations against discrimination, exploitative work conditions and labor practices (including child labor), and for the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively.”

## **Health Care**

**Overview:** The church is called to be an active participant in bringing about a just and effective health care system that is available to all, particularly people living in poverty. The rates of the uninsured have dropped under the Affordable Care Act, it remains very important that eligible New Mexicans are aware of and enroll in health coverage that is available to them.

### **Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM will advocate for:**

- **Outreach to & enrollment of those eligible for Medicaid or the NM Health Insurance Exchange:** The Affordable Care Act relies on implementation by states. The New Mexico Health Insurance Exchange assists low-income people and small businesses to find affordable health insurance.



Medicaid is a means-tested entitlement program that provides health insurance benefits to low-income families and individuals who meet certain requirements. Medicaid is an effective income support program for people living in poverty. Under the Affordable Care Act, Medicaid is now available to adults with income up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level

- **Funding for the DD (Developmental Disabilities) waiver:** \$20 million for the DD waiver program was appropriated for the current fiscal year. While this amount is a great step forward, more funding to support this important program is needed.

**ELCA Policy Base:** The ELCA Social Statement “*Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor*” states: “Health care is the kind of good most appropriately given on the basis of need.” . . . “Justice also requires a fair distribution of the benefits and burdens of health care.” . . . “we urge all people to advocate for access to basic health care for all and to participate vigorously and responsibly in the public discussion on how best to fulfill this obligation.” . . . “As the guarantors of justice and promoters of the general welfare, governments also have the unique role of ensuring equitable access to health care for all.”

The ELCA social statement “*Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor*” supports: “. . . equitable access for all people to basic health care services and to the benefits of public health efforts.”

The ELCA Social Statement “*Economic Life – A Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*” calls for: “addressing the barriers individuals face in preparing for and sustaining a livelihood (such as lack of education, transportation, child care, and health care) . . . public policies that ensure adequate social security, unemployment insurance, and health care coverage.”

## **Hunger**

**Overview:** While hunger in New Mexico may not look as stark as in the Third World, it is a reality. Our state is consistently ranked among those with the highest rates of poverty in the country. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports on hunger and food insecurity: “Food insecurity” means that a household has limited or uncertain access to enough safe, nutritious food. These households have reduced quality and variety of meals, and may have irregular food intake. There may be a need to seek emergency food sources or other extraordinary coping behaviors to meet their basic food needs.” New Mexico’s incidence of food insecurity is among the highest in the nation. Since poverty and hunger are solidly linked, we must work to reduce poverty.



### **Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM will advocate for:**

- **Sufficient funding for the state SNAP supplement program & against barriers to SNAP eligibility:** Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM helped to create the State SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) Supplement program, which ensures that seniors and others in New Mexico, who receive the federal minimum monthly benefit of \$15, receive a minimum benefit of at least \$25 through state funding. We advocate increasing that minimum amount to \$30 per month for the over 16,000 people that use this vital state program.
- **Efforts to close New Mexico's food gap & funding for food banks:** Many low-income New Mexicans live in rural areas. Recent studies have confirmed that there is a need to increase access to nutritious and affordable foods in these rural areas. New Mexico's food banks provide emergency nutrition assistance to many low-income families. State funding has assisted the transportation of fresh produce for use in food banks and the other agencies that distribute food.

**ELCA Policy Base:** The ELCA Social Statement "*Economic Life – A Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*" states: "We call for . . . government to provide adequate income assistance and related services for citizens, documented immigrants, and refugees who are unable to provide for their livelihood through employment."

The ELCA Social Statement "*Economic Life – A Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*" also states: "We call for . . . adequate, consistent public funding for the various low-income services non-profit organizations provide for the common good of all."

### **Tax Policy**

**Overview:** Government budgets involve two major elements: expenditures and revenues. Government budgets are reflections of our values and priorities and can thus be considered moral documents. How and from whom revenues are raised, as well as on what and for whom those revenues are expended, are strong indicators of our community's values. Government is an expression of our community together. As people of faith, we value community and we are dedicated to serving "the least of these." Consequently, when public policy is made regarding our tax system, as well as when the state budget is developed, that policy must be evaluated in terms of how it affects the community and especially how it affects the most vulnerable among us.



### **Lutheran Advocacy Ministry-NM will advocate for:**

- **Tax policy that is fair and provides stable, sustainable & adequate revenue to meet the needs of our state, particularly the most vulnerable:** A good tax system should be fair (distribute the tax burden broadly and progressively, with those with higher income paying more), balanced, accountable, and able to be efficiently administered. Tax policy should also provide adequate, stable and sustainable revenue to meet the needs of all, particularly the most vulnerable among us.
- **Increasing the Working Families Tax Credit to 20% of the federal EITC:** This effective tax credit has been proven to incentivize work and benefit businesses when the refunds are spent quickly and locally.
- **Enacting a new Child Tax Credit:** This credit would be refundable and provide \$25 to \$175 per child, depending on income.
- **Funding for Tax Help NM:** Programs like these help low income people and families file their tax returns and insure that they received the credits for which they are eligible.

**ELCA Policy Base:** The ELCA Social Statement "*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*" states: "Government is intended to serve God's purposes by limiting or countering narrow economic interests and promoting the common good. Paying taxes to enable government to carry out these and other purposes is an appropriate expression of our stewardship in society, rather than something to be avoided."

The ELCA Social Statement "*Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All*" also calls for: "tax credits and other means of supplementing the insufficient income of low-paid workers in order to move them out of poverty ... correction of regressive tax systems, so that people are taxed progressively in relation to their ability to pay."