



2018 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 family-sustaining income. Issues to be addressed may include tax and wage policies, protection of the environment in which people live and work, and improving access to adequate healthcare.
 - **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 through Colorado PEAK and the Food Assistance Program of the Office of Economic Security in CDHS
 - Protecting the current economic impact of the SNAP program in Colorado through concurrent federal-level advocacy
- **Reducing Poverty**
 - Protecting access to assistance programs for people living in poverty, including through concurrent federal advocacy

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- Supporting economic development and opportunities statewide, particularly in impoverished rural and urban areas of Colorado
- Supporting reform of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights for the sake of reinvesting collected tax revenues into human and social services
- Promoting opportunities for those exiting the criminal justice system to successfully reintegrate
- Supporting transit system access for low-income neighborhoods
- Supporting equitable access to educational opportunities
- Supporting legislation that supports the local work of Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains
- **Supporting Access to Housing**
 - Banning income source discrimination for those seeking to qualify for housing
 - Opposing dis-incentives for developers to build more housing for low-income families, including the repeal of federal affordable housing tax credits
 - Ensuring that persons experiencing homelessness have access to services and support
 - Supporting the rights as well as responsibilities of persons experiencing homelessness
- **Supporting Access to Healthcare**
 - Continued effective implementation of Connect for Health Colorado, the state-based health insurance exchange created under the Affordable Care Act
 - Work to preserve Medicaid as a public good and to articulate its importance to low-income adults in all eligible groups, especially vulnerable and underserved groups such as seniors, children, the disabled, and recently released prison inmates
 - Working with medically underserved groups to improve access to effective treatment
- **Caring for Our Environment**

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- Supporting efforts to improve health outcomes in vulnerable and low-income neighborhoods through environmental protection and impact assessments
- Support ongoing efforts to implement and safeguard the Clean Power Plan in Colorado
- Uplifting the ELCA Social Statement on Caring for Creation and promoting awareness of climate change realities
- Supporting efforts that empower neighborhoods to improve their local environmental quality, particularly air quality, with particular emphasis on schools, parks, and hospitals

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 11.5% of Colorado residents live at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Approximately 14% of Colorado children live in poverty.
- 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.
- Hunger Free Colorado's latest report showed that 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 continues to grow 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 10,550 in 2016, making it the worst of all states in the interior Mountain West, and 12th-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 11, 2017 by the LAM-CO Policy Committee:

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