



2023 Advocacy Agenda



• Ending Hunger

- Improve **access to healthy, Colorado-grown produce** for local communities
- Promote implementation of **Proposition FF**, Healthy School Meals for All, and related issues for school districts
- Encourage **greater participation** in food & nutrition programs, particularly for children and youth
- Support and collaborate with allied faith-based entities in local and regional work, including ELCA World Hunger, the Rocky Mountain Synod World Hunger Team and Bread for the World



• Poverty Reduction

- Protect **access to federal programs** for people living in poverty and support statewide direct assistance programs, including energy assistance, legal defense, and more
- Support **reform** of the Taxpayer Bill of Rights to give our democratically-elected legislature fiscal authority in taxation
- Work to **reform medical debt** reporting as a barrier to using credit to access housing and other human needs



• Access to Housing

- Support follow-up legislative work to implement voter-approved **Proposition 123**, which sets aside a portion of income tax revenue for a variety of housing programs
- Promote measures to **expand and protect housing options** for low-income individuals and families, particularly renters
- Ensure that people experiencing homelessness have the right and responsibility to access **robust services and support**, particularly emergency shelter and health care
- Engage bills from the legislature's Interim Housing Task Force

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• Criminal Justice Reform

- Work with advocates on **sentencing reform**, with a focus on sentences for which there is evidence of disproportionate racialized impacts
- Advocate for **reduced and/or safer police interaction** and increased intervention by trained mental health professionals for those experiencing mental health crises



• Public Health

- Protect health care access as a **public good and human right** that should be available to everyone regardless of ability to pay
- Support awareness of public safety in relation to **firearms**, and understanding firearm-involved deaths (homicides and suicides) as a major public health concern
- Promote **access to care and treatment** for those suffering from opioid addiction
- Address the **impacts of anxiety, depression, stress, suicidal ideation** and other mental health conditions exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly among front-line health care workers and young people



• Migrants and Refugees

- Support ELCA Washington Office advocacy around asylum, refugee, and immigration policies and collaborate, where possible, with Lutheran Immigration & Refugee Services and Lutheran Family Services Rocky Mountains



• Caring for Our Environment

- Engage legislation to **address the root causes of the climate crisis**, particularly fossil fuel extraction and greenhouse gas emissions
- Support **incentive-building programs** and grants to local communities to build renewable infrastructure
- Address economic implications of **transitioning communities** away from fossil fuel and extraction-based energy economy
- Support and collaborate with allied Lutheran entities in local and regional work, including the Rocky Mountain Synod Creation Care Team and Lutherans Restoring Creation

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Overarching Advocacy Principles

- **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, with a focus on people living in poverty and the global impact of collective decisions; and improving access to safe, stable and affordable housing.
- **To show heightened concern for those who are impacted disproportionately** by policy changes in our primary areas of work, including children & youth, young adults, communities of color, non-native English speakers, people with limited economic means and immigrants and refugees. We support the Rocky Mountain Synod's commitment to anti-racism.

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."

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Context for Advocacy in Colorado

- The Census Bureau reports that approximately 9.3% of Colorado residents lived at or below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) in 2019. Around 12% of Colorado children live in poverty.
- According to the Self-Sufficiency Standard from the Colorado Center on Law and Policy, the federal poverty guideline is less than half of the actual cost for self-sufficiency for most households, meaning that many Coloradans struggle to get by even if they don't meet the federal poverty 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 \$8 billion of our state budget.
- Before the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly 1 in 8 Coloradans experienced food insecurity, 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. The pandemic has increased food insecurity substantially.
- 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 9,619 in 2019 and likely grew during the COVID-19 pandemic. Homelessness affects all communities, including metropolitan areas, mountain towns, and rural communities.

2023 LAM-CO Policy Committee:

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