

Senate Committee on Health, Housing and Family Security: Senate File 2243

February 15, 2010



Good Afternoon Chairman Marty and Members of the Committee. My name is Alexandra Fitzsimmons and I am the Policy Director for the Minnesota Catholic Conference. The Minnesota Catholic Conference is the public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Minnesota and represents the dioceses of Crookston, Duluth, St. Cloud, New Ulm, Winona and the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis.

I am here today to speak in support of Senator Berglin's bill - Senate File 2243 – which temporarily suspends the five-year lifetime limit for families receiving MFIP cash assistance. Because we are all responsible for all, we must address the struggles that our neighbors throughout Minnesota are facing. Senate File 2243 does this, *within the specific context of our state's current economic situation*, by pausing the clock at a time when job opportunities are decreasing. The members of this Committee know full well that Minnesotans throughout our state are struggling – whether they live in Roseville, Minneapolis, Duluth, Winona, Fort Ripley or Rochester. Our neighbors are hurting.

Catholic social teaching requires our community to place first the needs of our neighbors who are poor and vulnerable. Our sisters and brothers with the greatest needs are to come *first* in our decisions. This bill – Senate File 2243 – does that. This bill shows our neighbors that we are standing with them – in solidarity. This bill creates a policy that tells Minnesota that we will not punish families who face multiple barriers and are struggling to move themselves and their families out of poverty.

Temporarily suspending the time limit for families receiving MFIP cash assistance during a time when job opportunities are scarce is the *just* thing to do. Punishing families when jobs aren't available is wrong. And furthermore, it is a shortsighted and, in many ways, a nonsensical economic policy. Minnesota's families who reach the MFIP time limit have significant and oftentimes multiple physical and or cognitive impairments and/or disabilities. According to a 2003 report from the Minnesota Department of Human Services, 44 percent of parents who left MFIP as a result of time limits were found to require referral for diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. MFIP recipients with serious barriers to employment are less likely to find jobs, more likely to lose cash assistance because of non-compliance and more likely to exhaust their 60 months of eligibility for cash assistance.

Please support Senate File 2243. Poverty diminishes the lives of our sisters and brothers and undermines human life and dignity. Thank you for your time, leadership and courage – especially during these difficult times.