

House Health Care and Human Services Policy and Oversight: House File 2564

February 24, 2010



Good afternoon Mr. Chair 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 Representative Hayden's bill - House File 2564 – 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. House File 2564 does this, *within the specific context of our state's current economic climate*, 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 Minneapolis, Apple Valley, Duluth, St. Cloud, Lake Elmo or Faribault. Our neighbors are hurting.

Our faith calls upon 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 – House File 2564 – does that. This bill creates a policy that tells Minnesota that we will not punish families who face multiple barriers, are struggling to move themselves and their families out of poverty *in an economy that is also struggling*.

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 shortsighted. 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 and more likely to exhaust their 60 months of eligibility for cash assistance. In fact, they are oftentimes the last hired, and the first hired.

We must work together to lighten the loads of our neighbors who are in economic need.

Please support House File 2564. Poverty diminishes the lives of our sisters and brothers and our community. Thank you for your time, leadership and courage – especially during these difficult times.