



Lutheran Advocacy - Minnesota

As a reconciling and healing presence, this church...strives to pioneer new ways of addressing emerging social problems and environmental degradation. This church has a responsibility...to advocate just and peaceful resolutions... It should support institutions and policies that serve the common good and work with and learn from others in caring for and changing global society.

-- From The Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective (ELCA Social Statement)

In this Session Summary...

Affordable Housing

- Sacred Tiny Home Communities (Sacred Settlements)
- Renter Reforms
- Funding for the Housing Continuum – Housing Omnibus Bill
- Funding for the Housing Continuum – Health & Human Services Omnibus Bill (Homelessness & Poverty Reduction Sections)

Clean Energy/Climate Crisis Mitigation

- Clean Energy Standard
- State Competitiveness Fund
- Environment, Climate, Energy Omnibus
- Various Projects & Programs (Ag, Buildings, Transportation, etc)

SESSION SUMMARY – 2023

Affordable Housing

Sacred Tiny Home Communities (or Sacred Settlements): Communities of tiny homes on premises of places of worship with formerly homeless and “missioner” households. This was a key component of our advocacy this year.

- **Bill Passed/Signed into Law:** New zoning goes into effect at the beginning of 2024 allowing churches and other places of worship to host tiny home communities. Cities or municipalities will not be able to “opt out” or ban the Sacred Settlements, and each community must have 33-40% of the residents as “Good Neighbors” or “missioners.”
- **Partnerships:** It was fun working with the nonprofit, Settled, and the Joint Religious Legislative Coalition (JRLC). We look forward to continuing those partnerships.
- **What Next?** Some of you passed resolutions at Conference or Synod Assemblies, not just in support of the concept and the legislation, but also **committing to work with and/or help support the Sacred Communities**. As a result of those efforts and our Lenten Letter Challenge which included this legislation, I’ve gotten lots of great questions about how to be involved. There are lots of options – Check out the resource I

pulled together from Settled's website & JRLC interviews with someone from Settled & Mosaic Christian Community which created the 1st settlement: It will soon be up at [this link](#).

Renter Reforms (Part of Homes for All main agenda; Effort started in 2019 or 2020):

- **Passed Pre-Eviction Notice, Eviction Expungement & Renter Records Protection:** Mandates a landlord provides 14-days notice before filing an eviction, evictions may be removed from a renter's record after 3 years, & an eviction filing may not show up on a renter's record unless the court rules against them & they are evicted.
- **Did NOT Pass Source of Income Protection:** A landlord may still discriminate against renters if they are paying with a voucher (Unfortunately, there are renters who qualify for assistance that are returning payment vouchers because they can't find landlords willing to accept them).

Funding for the Housing Continuum – Housing Omnibus Bill: Lutheran Advocacy-MN focused on big-picture funding/investments, as the Homes for All Coalition's 2023 Agenda was long, detailed, and complicated. We are pleased so many Homes for All priorities were addressed, and that our big-picture advocacy helped secure bipartisan support for the original Senate Housing bill!

- **More Than \$1 Billion Passed** – For the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency for *ongoing programs, new construction, rehabilitation, preservation of existing Naturally Affordable Occurring Housing (NOAH – usually older buildings), the Family Homeless Prevention Assistance Program, & downpayment assistance for low-income/BIPOC new homeowners*. Much of this was from the budget surplus for one-time cash infusions. Although this is an historic amount, it does not get us out of the hole with regards to our affordable housing crisis AND as mentioned before, much of it is a one-time infusion.
- **\$5 million for Lead-Free Homes:** This will be a small grants program to do lead-remediation in low-income rental homes. This has been on our Homes for All agenda several years now, with Metropolitan Interfaith Coalition for Affordable Housing (MICAHA) leading this effort. (See also replacement of lead drinking water pipes in Environmental bills below – a priority for many Minnesota Environmental Partnership members, including LA-MN, for several years).
- **New Metro Area Sales Taxes for Affordable Housing** – This 0.25% sales tax came up toward the end of session & was part of the original House bill. Its *inclusion in the Final Housing Omnibus cost us the bipartisan support* that we had worked hard to maintain on the Senate bill. *We did not support this tax* since it is a regressive tax which will impact low-income households the most. However, we did not work against it either since some of our partners did support it. It is projected to generate around \$300 million per biennium in ongoing funding for Metro Area counties/communities to provide affordable housing and find long-term solutions to the housing crisis (60% for metro county aid, 25% for state rental assistance, 15% for metro city aid). We **agree that sources of ongoing funding are VERY needed but aren't sure that this was the best solution.**

Funding for the Housing Continuum – Health & Human Services Omnibus Bill (Homelessness/Poverty Reduction Sections): We've worked on some of these in the past. However, this year, aside from work on shelter funding, we left the homelessness work on this massive bill to other Homes for All partners, including Lutheran Social Services of Minnesota (LSS-MN), Catholic Charities, and Minnesota Coalition for the Homeless.

- **Passed \$100 million for Homeless Shelter Creation & Safety** – This is less than half of what studies show is needed statewide, but it is a *tremendous start*
- **Additional Funding for Homelessness Programs:** Around 85 million in additional resources for homelessness. This includes increases for the *Emergency Services Program (ESP)* and *Homeless Youth Act (more than 60% increase)*. Also included are resources dedicated to Hennepin & Ramsey Counties for specific shelter & wrap-around services requests, and a small Homeless Elders Program at Catholic Charities (1.5 million). [ESP and Homeless Youth Act funding increases have been on the Homes for All agenda for many years, and we have worked on those previously. We supported them this year, but didn't work to get them like we did with the housing funding.]

- **Other Inclusions:** Safe Harbor shelter & housing; Child Care Assistance Program updates to help more families access affordable childcare & help providers get/keep workers; Transitional Housing reforms to cap housing costs at 30% of income for vets & people on disability or similar programs (some people have been spending as much as 90% on housing, leaving little for food and other necessities); recuperative care for those experiencing homelessness discharged from the hospital; a 3% increase for community mental health; funding for food security; and reforms to reporting requirements for Minnesota Family Investment Program participants. (This list does not include all the health care pieces which make up much of the bill).

Clean Energy/Climate Crisis Mitigation

Passed 100% Clean Energy Standard: Establishes the goal to *achieve a transition to 100% clean electricity in Minnesota by 2040*. This passed as a stand-alone bill within just a few weeks at the beginning of the legislative session. LA-MN has been working on Clean Energy Standards since early in the days of my predecessor. He was engaged in the 2007 legislation which set the Renewable Energy Standard (RES) at 25% renewable electricity statewide by 2025, with 30% for Xcel. We reached that goal 4-5 years ago, many years ahead of schedule. Along with coalition partners, we've been trying to improve the RES since I arrived at LA-MN in 2014.

Minnesota State Competitiveness Fund: We were very concerned last year when legislation wasn't passed to provide matches to receive federal funding through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Act (and later the Inflation Reduction Act). Although we missed a few opportunities, mid-session the legislature created a *fund of \$190 million to leverage federal funding*.

Environment, Natural Resources, Climate, & Energy Omnibus: This was a massive bill which combined many pieces of legislation and covered various department budgets, in addition to addressing the climate crisis and transition to a clean energy economy. We worked on pieces relating to clean energy and the climate crisis.

- **Next Generation Climate Act:** This *updates* the state greenhouse gas *emissions reduction goals* first established in the 2007 Next Generation Energy Act to match current science. It establishes a *50% reduction target (on a 2005 base) by 2030* and a net *zero target by 2050*. We worked on this last year, and pushed hard for it again at the end of this session when it looked like it was going to be left out of the final omnibus bill.
- **Energy Transition (MnCIFA):** The *Minnesota Climate Innovation Finance Authority (MnCIFA)* was established to *help workers and communities transition to the clean energy economy*. It prioritizes low-income communities, BIPOC* communities, and workers/communities experiencing significant changes in the transition (like where a power plant is closed). [*BIPOC refers to Black, Indigenous, People of Color.] It also helps bolster climate solutions that benefit everyone. MnCIFA *needed adequate funding to leverage other funding sources*, and in the end got \$45 million (\$20 million from the Environment Omnibus bill and \$25 million in the Economic Development/Jobs Omnibus). We joined with Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light (MNIPL) and other partners toward the end of session to address this opportunity.
- **Energy Transition (Energy Transition Office):** When the session started, we thought this new office (created in 2021) would need additional funding and staff to do what MnCIFA is now set up to do. The Energy Transition Office got a small increase in funding. I assume it will likely continue help communities do feasibility studies and assess needs, while MnCIFA does the heavy lifting.
- **Pre-weatherization for Low-Income Homeowners.:** Many low-income families are *not eligible for assistance to weatherize* their homes *due to other structural issues*. This program, which we worked on last year with some housing and environmental partners, was included this year to *help address the barriers that keep people from being able to weatherize their homes*.
- **Various Projects & Programs:** Included in the omnibus bill were heat pump incentives, residential electric panel upgrade incentives, energy storage incentives, *Community Solar Garden improvements*, an expansion of Solar on Schools, ending Homeowner Association bans on rooftop solar, establishment of Solar on Public Buildings, expansion of the Solar Rewards Program, creation of a school HVAC Upgrade Program, the creation of a Distributed Solar Energy Standard for Utilities, Distributed Energy Upgrade Grants, ordering the creation of a Utility Energy Storage System, Electric Grid Resiliency Grants, a high voltage transmission line in

Northern Minnesota, allowing power line siting along public highways (to prevent appropriation of land from Minnesota residents), Drinking Water Lead Pipe replacement, Xcel required to plan for Allen S. King **Coal Plant Decommissioning**, Electric Utility Transition Aid to local governments, increased annual payments to Prairie Island Indian Community for nuclear waste storage, MN Iron Ore Battery Storage Feasibility Study, natural gas price gouging rebates, consumer access to energy use data, requirement of **Cumulative Impacts Analysis** for new & ongoing pollution permits in low-income/BIPOC/Environmental Justice Communities (so that if a community already has polluters and other projects or plants are looking to be built in close proximity, they can't just do an environmental impact study for the new entity, but must consider the impact of what it adds on top of what already exists in the community), and more. **Many of these items had passed previously in the Minnesota House, but never reached final passage until this year.** (Interestingly, utilities were in favor of these items impacting them, and no utilities worked to oppose them this year).

Other Areas Impacting Climate Mitigation, Adaptation, or Solutions (in various bills): Aside from **previous work and/or support of cover crops, the Forever Green Program, and Soil Health programs**, Lutheran Advocacy-MN has not worked on any of these issues. Many of the programs listed below already exist and are getting some funding increases, others have passed either the MN House or Senate previously but did not get full final passage until this year, and some are new. I'm including this detail for the people who keep asking what happened for the climate in various other areas/sectors.

- **Agriculture/Land Conservation: Soil Health Financial Assistance** Program & Grants, Agriculture Best Practices Loan Program, expansion of **Cover Crop incentives** for Landowners, Soil Health Equipment Grants, **Forever Green Research** at the University of Minnesota (for things like Kernza, a perennial wheat hybrid), Deep Winter Greenhouse Program, Conservation Reserve Program, Reinvest in Minnesota Program, new funding for Climate-Related Land Conservation, addition of farmlands to PACE Program, Green Fertilizer Production Facilities investment.
- **Natural Environment Protection, Enhancement, or Improvement:** Grasslands Protection Carbon Sequestration, Peatland Protection Carbon Sequestration, **Lawns to Legumes** Program expansion, Habitat Enhancement Landscape Program, establishment of Habitat Friendly Utilities Program, **Highways for Habitat program** implementation, Private Forest Landowner Assistance, Community Tree Planting Grants, Planting Tomorrow's Forests Today program, State Forest Reforestation, Emerald Ash Borer Tree Replacement, ReLeaf Program, Accelerated Tree Seed Collection, Lowland Conifer Reserve Program Study.
- **Climate Action Planning, Adaptation, & Resilience:** Local Climate Action Planning Grants, Small Communities Partnership Grants, Clean Energy Resource Teams, Creating Resilient Communities grants for local governments, GreenStep Cities, Tribal Advocacy Council on Energy, Climate Pathways Analysis funding for State Decarbonization Planning, creation of Agriculture Department Climate Implementation Coordinator, Health Department Climate & Public Health Program staff funding, Disaster Assistance Contingency Account, additional investments in wildfire aviation infrastructure, flood mitigation, living snow fences, Weather Ready Program expansion at the University of Minnesota, Climate-Related Planning requirement in Metro Area Comprehensive Plans.
- **Workforce Development:** Growing Clean Economy Apprenticeships, Clean Economy Equitable Workforce program, Environmental Careers Pathway Program, North Minneapolis Rise Up Center, Minnesota GreenCorp, Tribal construction workforce training programs, Expanding Equity in Apprenticeship (LEAP Grants), requiring prevailing wages for clean energy investments, Utility Diversity Reporting Requirements strengthened, Building Strong Communities Program.
- **Residential Housing/Commercial Building Climate Resiliency:** Strengthen Minnesota Homes Program to prepare homes for high wind & hail events, Commercial Building Code updates, establishment of Commercial Building Benchmarking Program, Climate Impacts on Public Buildings Study, addition of Climate Resiliency to Minnesota's Sustainable Building Guidelines.
- **Air Pollution:** Community Air Monitoring expansion, Metro Air Toxics Emissions Reporting, Industrial Facility Air Toxics & Criteria Air Emission Reduction Grants, strengthening of air emissions permitting, air compliance equipment investments, establishment of Odor Management Program for Metro facilities, dedication of 40% of large Pollution Control Agency Settlement to community health boards.
- **Waste Reduction:** Waste Prevention & Reduction Grants/Loans, expansion of local recycling programs, Olmsted County Waste Diversion Improvements, small businesses pollution prevention acceleration, Digital Fair

Repair Consumer Protections (more repairs, less waste of electronics), Biodegradable & Compostable Product Labeling Standards, Statewide Zero Waste Study, Solar Energy Equipment End of Life Management Study.

- **Transportation:** dedicated Metro Transit Funding, expansion of Metro Area Transit bonding authority, Northern Lights Express Passenger Train, Greater Minnesota transit investments, Bus Rapid Transit expansion, Blue Line Train extension, Passenger Rail to Chicago increase, Highway 169 Bus Rapid Transit, Intercity Passenger Rail Planning requirement, Northstar Commuter Rail Study, Transit Fair Elimination Pilot Program, Utility Transportation Electrification Planning requirement, bringing of National EV Infrastructure (NEVI) Program to Minnesota, Electric School Bus Program, electric vehicle incentives, state vehicle fleets Preference for EVs, EV Dealer Training requirement & funding, requirement of MNDOT to set Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Reduction Targets, GHG Emissions Impact Mitigation Working Group creation, MSP Airport Progress Reports regarding 80% GHG reductions by 2030 goal, Clean Fuel Standard Working Group, Train Derailment Emergency Response Preparedness, Sustainable Aviation Fuel Credit funding.
- **Bonding & Cash Infrastructure:** There were a number of climate related infrastructure projects in the bills that were negotiated on the last day. I recall from earlier in the session that a number of communities were asking for bonds to help in updating or rebuilding storm systems to manage the deluges we now get from extreme rain events. Maybe someday I'll get the chance to go through the bills carefully.