

**Resolutions Adopted by Diocesan Convention**  
**On Health Care, Criminal Justice Reform, and Food Security**

**R08-3 A Resolution Concerning Health Care (2008)**

**Resolved**, this 134<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Diocese of Southern Ohio supports health care reform that incorporates the following principles:

- Health care including mental health care should be available to all persons in the United States;
- Access to health care should be continuous;
- Health care should be affordable for individuals, families, and businesses;
- National and state health care policy should be affordable and sustainable for society;
- Health care should enhance health and well-being by promoting access to high-quality care that is effective, efficient, safe, timely, patient-centered and equitable;
- Health care providers should not be expected to assume a disproportionate share of the cost of providing health care; and be it further

**Resolved**, that this Convention will support:

- Reforms consistent with the Principles, including measures that promote fairness and affordability, and improve efficiency;
- Measures that provide financial support for insurance coverage and health care;
- Funding and policies that reflect shared responsibilities among public and private interests, including individuals, families, business, health care providers, insurers, and government;
- Measures that improve access and quality and promote efficient and effective use of the health care dollar;
- Accountability and transparency in health spending; and be it further

**Resolved**, that this Convention refer this Resolution to the Social Justice and Public Policy Network Committee to advise the Diocesan Council – as the convention between convention – and the bishops on the status of health care legislation and to advise whether particular legislation should be considered for endorsement.

## **R2010-R05 Criminal justice reform (2010)**

**Resolved** that the 136th Convention of the Diocese of Southern Ohio supports criminal justice reform that incorporates the following principles, based on our core belief that people can be redeemed:

- Excessively punishing criminal offenders harms communities. While a prime goal of the criminal justice system is to restore communities and heal victims, more needs to be done to rehabilitate offenders to become contributing members of society.
- While the criminal justice system proclaims equal and impartial judgment and treatment for all, it is well documented that our criminal justice system falls hardest and disproportionately on poor communities of color.
- Our government must be responsible with scarce, public resources in the current fiscal crisis. And be it further

**Resolved**, that this convention will support:

- Reforms that promote rehabilitative criminal sentencing and fairness;
- Sentencing that reduces excessive punishments that do not benefit the victim, the community, nor the offender;
- Programs that incorporate new and improved ways for former offenders to reintegrate productively into society; and
- Reduction of criminal-justice spending while improving community safety and wholeness; and be it further

**Resolved**, that this convention refer this Resolution to the Social Justice and Public Policy Network Committee to advise the Diocesan Council – as the convention between convention – and the bishops on proposed legislation.

### **Explanation**

Ohio's steadily rising prison census takes an enormous toll on families, communities, taxpayers and the state budget. According to the Ohio Department Of Rehabilitation and Correction, incarceration has become epidemic, with Ohio's prison census increasing more than 292% from 1978 to 2008, compared to a 6% growth in the state's population. Ohio's prisons are now crammed to 133% of capacity.

The state of Ohio must take drastic measures to close a projected \$7-8 billion deficit in the next biennial budget. Between 2000 and 2008, annual state spending on corrections climbed 21%, from \$1.04 to \$1.27 billion. It costs an average of \$25,000 to incarcerate someone for a year, compared to undergraduate tuition of \$10,065 this year at the University of Cincinnati. The Urban Institute reports that addiction treatment is 15 times

less expensive than incarcerating a person for a drug-related crime. The current state budget has cut funding for mental health by 12% and for addiction programs by 30%.

Nearly 30,000 people are released from Ohio prisons each year, returning to our communities. Once released, ex-felons face myriad barriers to housing and employment. Hundreds of these collateral sanctions are enacted in state law or local ordinance, making it almost impossible for ex-felons to start productive, law-abiding and stable lives in the community after completing their sentences.

More than half of Ohio prison inmates have child support orders, according to Child Support Collaboration Report 2009. In prison, parents have no way to earn sufficient wages to support their children. Once parents are released, their felony record can make it almost impossible to get a job paying enough for them to meet their responsibilities to overcome the accumulated debt and to meet their children's current needs. Using alternatives to incarceration for parents means fewer children needing foster care or Medicaid – preventing further disruption to families and saving state money.

Current law includes inequities in sentencing that disproportionately affect the poor and people of color, according to Cocaine And Federal Sentencing Policy 2007. For example, powder cocaine is as dangerous as crack, yet mandatory sentences are much longer for crack. Crack is found mostly in poor communities and in communities of color as it is a cheaper form of cocaine. Powder cocaine is more likely found in upper-middle class and rich communities, which are predominantly white. The disparity is obvious. This resolution authorizes the bishop and Social Justice Network to analyze and advocate on behalf of legislation that would improve the cost-effectiveness and fairness of sentencing or improve the chances for people with criminal records to be hired in legitimate jobs.

## **R2010-06 Public-sector funding for food and nutrition (2010)**

**Resolved**, in response to the Gospel's moral imperative to see and serve Christ in all people (Matthew 25), the 136th Convention of the Diocese of Southern Ohio supports federal and state budgets that ensure the following principles:

- Food security for all people living in this country, by ensuring that people in poverty have access to sufficient food and nutritional balance to promote the optimal physical and mental development of children and to prevent chronic diseases such as diabetes and hypertension, and
- Ensure that households in poverty do not have to choose between basic human needs, such as housing, health care or food, and be it further

**Resolved**, this 136th Convention of the Diocese of Southern Ohio will support:

- Federal and state budgets that sustain funding at the levels needed to provide adequate supplies of emergency food, food stamps and nutrition programs for pregnant women, infants, preschoolers and children – both during and beyond school hours.
- A pragmatic review of state tax policy to identify opportunities to increase revenue during the recession without further burdening households struggling with unemployment, low wages or fixed income, and be it further

**Resolved**, this 136th convention opposes cutting funding to one essential human need, such as food, to meet another, such as health care, and be it further

**Resolved**, this 136th convention authorizes the Social Justice Network to analyze federal and state bills and make advocacy recommendations to the bishop and Diocesan Council on tax and spending proposals, and be it further

**Resolved**, this 136th convention encourages the bishop, Social Justice Network and congregations of this diocese to advocate for food security of Ohio residents, through an efficient partnership of churches, non-profits, business and the public sector, by combining a sturdy safety net with strategies to help Ohio households achieve self-sufficiency.

### **Explanation**

The public sector is important to food security because federal and state funds provide infant and maternal nutrition (WIC), school meals, summer nutrition programs and commodities to the statewide non-profit network of food banks that are the major source of food to more than 3,000 emergency food programs, including many of our church-based pantries and soup kitchens. Ohio's non-profit and faith-based emergency food network is overwhelmed with rising need. The foods most important to optimal development and preventing obesity and diabetes – protein and fresh produce – are the

most expensive and increasingly scarce in the emergency food pipeline. Families can use food stamps to buy these crucial nutrients in grocery stores. Food stamps allow them to dedicate limited income to other essentials, like rent and utilities.

Ohio has the third highest rate in the U.S. of children under five at risk of hunger. By August 2010, with the state's unemployment rate at 10.5%, more than 1.7 million (1 in 7) Ohioans were depending on food stamps to meet their families' food needs, with an average monthly benefit of \$141 per household. Economists agree that food stamps are one of the most effective stimulus strategies because they are spent immediately in the local economy. Each food stamp dollar generates an average of \$1.84 in economic activity, according to Ohio Department of Jobs And Family Services County Profiles Report Data Sources.

Current fiscal policies endanger hunger and human services funding. Congress has adopted a pay-as-you-go rule requiring that new spending must be offset by cuts in other programs. This already has resulted in two moves to slash food stamp funding in order to cover other safety-net programs. In August 2010, Congress passed an emergency bill expanding funding for Medicaid, teacher's salaries and other key programs, but it included major cutbacks in food stamp funding to take effect in 2014. The Child Food Nutrition Reauthorization Bill passed by the Senate imposed an additional cutback on food stamp funding which would take place a year earlier, in 2013.

In addition to a significant cut in the average monthly food stamp allotment, the food stamp cuts in the Medicaid and teacher salary bill alone would result in a loss of more than 6,000 Ohio jobs and \$1.4 billion in economic activity, according to the Ohio Association of Second Harvest Food Banks.

The state of Ohio must maintain a balanced budget and faces a projected \$7-8 billion gap between revenues and expenditures which must be resolved in passing the next biennial budget in summer of 2011. Ohio already has drastically cut human services funding in the current biennium, including huge cuts to the county departments of Job and Family Services that administer public benefits and protect child welfare. The pressures to further cut hunger relief and human services funding will be huge in the coming budget debates.

Legislators have been afraid to endorse plans to increase tax revenue, but advocates for the poor have identified many opportunities. The state tax code is crammed with credits and exemptions (called tax expenditures), costing the state billions in lost revenue every year. These credits and exemptions typically go unexamined in biennial budget debates.

In addition, in 2005, Ohio began implementing a 21% income tax cut phased in over five years. The final year of cuts was postponed last winter, but the plan, when fully implemented, sends more than 40% of the tax savings to households with incomes in the top 5% and only 13% to households in the bottom 60%. In 2005 the state also

implemented major cuts in corporate taxes. Taken together, these tax cuts cost the state \$2.1 billion in annual revenue, according to the Ohio Department of Taxation.

*Source: "Report to the Ohio Budget Planning and Management Commission," Policy Matters Ohio*

<http://www.policymattersohio.org/OhioBudgetPlanningAndManagementCommission2010.htm>

As people in The Episcopal Church, we are called to speak of the real impact of public policy on the most vulnerable and to work for practical, fair and effective programs to return those in need to stability and security. The enormous effect of the recession – with many middle - class people losing jobs, homes, health insurance and retirement savings – only brings home the spiritual truth that we are all in this together, that we must care for each other and that we must work together to ensure a just and wholesome commonwealth.