

Stay Ready to Respond when the Time Comes

The legislative landscape can change quickly, and calls us to respond on a moment's notice, both on the state and national levels. In our conversations with legislators, we have been told that **10 contacts** from constituents, preferable by phone, will raise an issue up for conversation by the staff to a legislator. To stay informed on pressing issues, and to find contact information for your representatives, please sign up for texts from the Catholic Action Network for New York State issues and the USCCB Action Center for national issues. Links to both alerts are available on the **Advocacy and Education** page of www.LifeRoc.org, the website for the Diocese of Rochester's Office of Life Issues.

The Diocesan Public Policy Committee chose physician assisted suicide as its 2020 Public Policy Advocacy Issue, in response to a bill put forward in New York State. Bill A.4321, called the Medical Aid in Dying Act, did not move out of committee that year largely due to the pandemic. Versions of this Bill were introduced in three previous sessions. Legislators tell us that this issue continues to generate interest even as we find ourselves in an historic pandemic which has brought new attention to end of life care. It is unclear if A.4321 will move forward this year, but the legalization of Physician Assisted Suicide continues to be a threat in New York State.

On the national level, the Dobbs vs Jackson Women's Health Organization case before the Supreme Court has inspired new legislation in the House of Representatives to legalize abortion on demand nationally, through the Women's Health Protection Act. The removal of the Hyde Amendment from the federal budget, which blocks taxpayer money from funding abortions services, threatens a long-standing provision that has protected millions of unborn babies, and mothers in difficult circumstances, from the tragedy of abortion. These are only some of the many legal challenges to life that require us to make known our position to our legislators. Please sign up today!

DIOCESAN PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

Bishop Salvatore Matano appoints the Public Policy Committee to assist him in determining diocesan public policy priorities and to develop an implementation plan.

Chair: Rev. Dan Condon	Chancellor of the Diocese of Rochester
Jack Balinsky	Diocesan Director, Catholic Charities
Carolann Darling	Immaculate Conception, Ithaca
Kathy Dubel*	Catholic Charities/Southern Tier
Marcus Ebenhoe*	Catholic Charities Family and Community Services / Monroe
Edward Giblin	Diocesan Communications Director
Mark Keller	St. Kateri, Irondequoit
Judith Kiehl	Pax Christi
Shannon Kilbridge*	Associate Director, Department of Pastoral Services
Laurie Konwinski*	Catholic Charities Tompkins/Tioga
Janet Korn, RSM	Sisters of Mercy
Ellen Santora	St. Paul, Webster
Jessica Shanahan	Pregnancy Care Program
Leigh Shepard*	Catholic Charities Steuben/Livingston
Mary M. Smith	St. Anne's, Rochester
Phyllis Tierney, SSJ	Sisters of St. Joseph
Dcn. Nick Valvo	Sacred Heart, Auburn
Robert Vona*	Catholic Charities Finger Lakes

* Denotes Justice & Peace Ministry Staff of Catholic Charities



ROMAN CATHOLIC
DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER

2022 PUBLIC POLICY AGENDA

My dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I am writing once again to encourage your participation in the annual public policy weekend that highlights our advocacy in support of particular legislative activity that will be of benefit to vulnerable persons who are served throughout our state. This year we are asking you to support two particular budget initiatives: first, the New York State Child Tax Credit and second, reimbursement rate reform for outpatient behavioral health services.

New York State has been a leader with the provision of the New York State Child Tax Credit. The Child Tax Credit is an effective tool to raise children out of poverty and 250,000 children have begun the journey from. **However, it does not cover children under the age of four.** Won't you please join us as we petition our state legislators to close this loophole? This is a practical benefit for young life in circumstances of the greatest need, the impact will be multigenerational and express our concern for all human life from conception to natural death.

The second issue focuses on the drastic need for behavioral health outpatient rate reform. "Essential Worker" is a new phrase with which we have become familiar during the pandemic. Within that group are those who provide necessary service and care to some of our most vulnerable neighbors and friends whose struggle with mental illness and addiction which has been compounded by isolation. Overdose deaths have increased by 38%, mental health concerns are identified by a similar number, but providers are unable to maintain the critical staff who can provide assistance. We are asking the Governor and New York State to invest in our behavioral health providers by including a long delayed COLA increase and investment in human services workforce development and support in the Executive Budget. We are hoping that this will permit service providers to continue this most vital service.

Life issues and protecting the dignity of every person remains the focus of our public policy agenda. There are many discreet issues that impact human dignity, the environment, and most especially the inviolable gift of life. We do not know if or when some of these will surface as legislative concerns. The most effective way to be informed about them and to be able to respond is through participation in the Catholic Action Network. You can participate in their activity through www.nyscatholic.org. Your support in the past has been very effective and helpful.

I am grateful that all that you have been doing in support of your family members, neighbors and friends during this very difficult time. I pray you continue to care for one another in the many generous and kind ways that you have demonstrated. Please be an informed and active Catholic lending your voice in a prayerful and charitable way to our civic discourse.

With the assurance of my prayers, I remain

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

+ 
The Most Reverend Salvatore R. Matano
Bishop of Rochester

EDUCATION PRIORITIES

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE

Please, I would like to ask all those who have positions of responsibility in economic, political and social life, and all men and women of goodwill: let us be “protectors” of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.

-Pope Francis

Laudato Si Action Platform

In his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, Pope Francis makes clear our moral obligation to care for the Earth. The **Laudato Si’ Action Platform** is the Vatican’s seven-year effort calling all Catholics to this mission. It invites all sectors of the Church, including families, parishes, schools, and businesses, to participate in this crucial work.

Through the Laudato Si’ Action Platform, we are asked to respond to the cry of the Earth and the cry of the poor, and to engage in ecological economics and sustainable lifestyles. We are encouraged to stand with the disempowered and advocate for policies that protect God’s creation. You can learn more at www.laudatosiplatform.org and www.godsplanet.us/.

One specific piece of NYS legislation we’ll be promoting as part of this effort calls for a moratorium on the mining of cryptocurrency created through a procedure called proof of work. This process uses enormous amounts of electricity, more than the amount used by millions of households combined. It also releases heated water into local streams, which is detrimental to aquatic life. A moratorium would allow New York State to study the effects of cryptocurrency mining on air and water quality, public health and climate change.

Faithful Citizenship - Civilize It - 2022 Elections

In their teaching document on the call of Catholics to political responsibility and participation entitled, **Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship**, our U.S. Catholic Bishops remind us that.....*in the Catholic tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue; participation in the political process is a moral obligation. All believers are called to faithful citizenship; to become informed, active and responsible participants in the political process.* Responding to Pope Francis’ call to build a better kind of politics, one truly at the service of the common good, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has initiated **CIVILIZE IT** – an effort to promote charity, clarity, and creativity during the 2022 election year. Learn more at www.civilizeit.org.



DIOCESAN-WIDE ~ PARISH-BASED ADVOCACY ADVOCATE FOR A JUST BUDGET

PUBLIC POLICY WEEKEND FEBRUARY 12&13, 2022

It is said that a budget is a moral document, if this is true, then we must look carefully at how we are supporting those at the margins of our society. Throughout the pandemic we have heard that we are “New York Strong.” If this is the case, then we must also grapple with the fact that we are only as strong as our weakest links. It is due to this realization that the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester is focusing on two aspects of the NYS budget which we believe get overlooked and can create an important impact.

The first issue we would like addressed is the New York State Child Tax Credit. We have seen the positive impact that these tax credits can have on families. Nationwide, since the start of the federal child tax credit it has raised over 4.3 million children out of poverty. An estimated 250,000 of those are in New York State. We are thankful that New York State has their own Child Tax Credit, but there is one glaring problem—**it does not cover children under the age of four** Therefore, we are petitioning our legislators to close this loophole.

It has been shown that financial stability can yield tremendous benefits for children and their families, including improved physical, emotional and behavioral health, higher educational attainment and increased future earnings. The benefits are particularly significant – and most acutely needed – in families with young children. Families with young children face poverty at greater rates than other families. In addition, stress and hunger can impair brain development, which is most rapid when children are very young, and can lead to lifelong deficits. Strengthening family economic security helps not only the current generation of children, but the next, because poor children are much more likely to grow up to be poor adults.

Another important issue is the drastic need for behavioral health outpatient rate reform. The pandemic has been especially hard on those with mental illness and addiction. The increased isolation has been hard on everyone, but especially these people who often get pushed to the margins of society. More than 40% of residents in New York report that COVID resulted in increased mental health issues. Overdose deaths have increased 38%. Amid this significant need, many service providers are finding it extremely difficult to provide the critical services at current rates of reimbursement rates. Mental health and substance use providers do not have the staff they need to provide care - **97% of organizations across the state report that it is difficult to recruit staff. NYS needs to invest in our behavioral health providers, and increase funding for mental health and substance use services.** Therefore, we are also petitioning for a 5.4% COLA and a \$500 million investment in workforce, service, and support in the Executive Budget.