



In Defense of the Poor and Vulnerable
A Statement by the Catholic Bishops of Alaska

The first principle of Catholic Social Teaching is to support the Life and Dignity of the Human Person.

The recent budget cuts are having a direct negative impact on the most poor and vulnerable in our State. Our Catholic social services agencies, along with other faith-based denominations and private nonprofits, can barely keep up with the current needs of people who live on the margins. Across Alaska, thousands of low-income families now face new struggles through funding cuts to agencies that operate food pantries, shelter programs, and early childhood education. The millions of dollars cut statewide to homeless services will force the most vulnerable onto the streets. Cuts to senior housing grants and to the senior benefits program adversely affect our elders.

In Anchorage, Brother Francis Shelter will be forced to reduce its capacity from 240 beds to 100. Where will the other 140+ homeless go? The Shelter has now closed during the day to cut costs, forcing more people to wander the streets. Clare House, which provides shelter to 90 at-risk women with children and to expectant mothers, 24/7, will be forced to reduce services to nighttime only. Where will these moms and their children go? Currently the shelter also provides day-care for their children allowing these women to work.

We must not forget the many dedicated employees and volunteers working at all our social service agencies throughout Alaska. They are an important part of the solution in assisting people to move out of poverty. We need to support these dedicated servants of the poor, not penalize them by laying them off from their jobs. After all, they work on our behalf. They assist those who are clinging to the last rung of the ladder in our society, many of whom, without assistance, have only to look forward to destitution and despair.

As the Catholic Bishops of Alaska, we are called to advocate and defend or speak against government policies and programs that directly affect the lives and dignity of the poor and vulnerable. **We call upon all our elected officials to restore funds to agencies and services that provide for the needs of our children, our elders, the poor, the vulnerable, and the homeless.** We ask Alaskans to reach out and contact their elected officials in support of restoring funds for services to the poor and vulnerable in our State. We will continue to do our part to fund our agencies as best we can with our resources, our time and our talent, together with all those willing to support us. We will continue to collaborate with our local and state governments because we realize it is all of us, working together, who contribute to the solution of taking care of the most vulnerable in our State.

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