

March 18, 2021

To: Montana House Taxation Committee

From: Matthew Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 631

Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. I speak on behalf of the two Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our support for House Bill 631.

Catholic teaching calls us to live out a preferential option for the poor and we believe that a basic moral test for society is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Seeking to stand in solidarity with those on the margins of society, we recall what Jesus said in Matthew's gospel, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

House Bill 631 enhances a proven public policy that assists families, specifically those we sometimes refer to as the "working poor." As stated by the Internal Revenue Service, the earned income tax credit, "helps low- to moderate-income workers and families get a tax break."

This legislation assists the working poor, delivering critical income support for workers in low-wage jobs; it supports the stability of their families, helping to lift their children out of poverty; it promotes self-sufficiency; and it can help to reduce long-term welfare dependence.

Our support of House Bill 631 is an extension of the support that the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has consistently acted upon at the federal level for enactment, implementation, and promotion of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. We believe authorizing an increase in Montana's Earned Income Tax Credit at a realistic and meaningful level is a manifestation of our state's commitment to addressing the needs of those who are working but struggling to make ends meet and would be an important step forward for Montana families experiencing poverty.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, I urge a "do pass" and thank you for your time.