

Voice For the Poor Committee

Minutes from the Meeting held on October 11, 2025

In Attendance: David Anderson, Randy Bedore, Dave Busch, Jim Erven, Tom Jozwik, Julie Krah, E. Michael McCann, and John Weber.

Call to Order: As the members gathered together online, there was some general discussion on a possible upcoming crisis in SNAP benefits as the federal government shutdown threatens to cancel benefit payments to the states. Many of our members reported that they were already seeing an increase in numbers of people requesting help with food from food pantries, and increases in the number of people coming to SVDP meal sites, before the government shutdown. The meeting officially opened at 9:08 AM with all members praying together, the Opening Prayer for Society meetings.

Approval of the Minutes: The Minutes from our meeting held on September 13th were sent to the Committee members in advance of this meeting. VFP Chairman Dave Busch asked the members if they had any corrections or noticed any omissions to those minutes. No amendments were offered and the chairman asked for approval. The minutes were approved as submitted by verbal consensus.

Subcommittee Updates:

Energy – Dave Busch reported that the Energy Assistance fund began taking applications for assistance starting on October first. This year is will be vitally important to apply for these benefits right away. The entire staff of the federal Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program was fired as part of sweeping cuts to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, coming from the Department Of Government Efficiency ([DOGE](#)).

Due to the cuts in staffing, the funds are likely to disappear quickly this year. Busch advised Vincentians who might be working with people that are trying to avoid utility disconnections to **apply for energy assistance as soon as possible.**

The amount of the benefit varies depending on a number of factors, including household income and size, as well as their heating bills. Residents may also qualify for other benefits as well to reduce their utility costs.

The state Division of Energy and Housing has an interactive map online here:

<https://energyandhousing.wi.gov/Pages/Home.aspx>

You can click on any county on the map to find the help you need in applying for Energy Assistance in your area.

Criminal Justice - E. Michael McCann reported that due to his focus on the bill to expand post-partum healthcare for new mothers from six months to one year ([SB23](#)), he has not been able to give much attention to criminal justice legislation. He believes that if there were any new bills of consequence, he would have heard mention of them.

On that note, VFP chairperson Busch suggested that we should take up the discussion on our Action Alert efforts on this bill now that we were on that subject (item 6 under Old Business on our October agenda).

Busch then updated the VFP members on the results of our second conference call with Barbara Sella the Executive Director of the WCC. During our first discussion with Sella on SB23, she had recommended that we do not move forward. She thinks that our efforts will be wasted and sees Assembly Speaker Voss as a powerful roadblock to this bill.

At our September VFP meeting, this committee thought that because we had a solidly written Action Alert, which did not include a mention of Assembly Speaker Voss, that we should present this to Sella and state our case once again.

Sella agreed that our reasons for supporting passage were solid, but if we continue to try and push through a bill that had no chance of making it out of committee, we would appear to the legislators as “amateurs”, not aware of how the legislature works.

On the spot, we decided as a group, to take down our efforts to advance this bill.

McCann added that a headline story the October Second issue of the Catholic Herald, states that “the Wisconsin Bishops are still in support of AB97” (the Assembly version of SB23).

Julie Krahle added that one thing that became apparent from our phone call was, how much people don’t know about what goes on in our government. And she wondered about how many people in Wisconsin even know that we are virtually the only state that has not extended post-partum care for mothers on public assistance. Randy Bedore commented that the stories about behind the scenes politics “do get around”, speculating that these things may yet come back on Voss.

The VFP will continue to search for another bill that we can publicly promote.

Housing - John Weber opened by mentioning a SVDP Society webinar on housing the homeless. There was a Housing Webinar sponsored by Voice For the Poor and the Homelessness Committee. The webinar gave a good picture of what we are up against currently with the unhoused. A video replay of the webinar can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/1121935879>

Jim Erven added that he attended the webinar live, and Ingrid Delgado, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy in the SVDP Washington DC Office, talked at length about the Road to Housing Act. She stated that there are over 200 Executive Orders from the current administration that have an impact on housing.

Next Weber reported that Republicans introduced affordable housing bills.

Wisconsin Assembly Republicans have introduced a bill package they say is intended to stifle housing costs and make housing more affordable in Wisconsin. Rep. Rob Brooks, R-Saukville said at a September 23rd news conference. There are currently seven draft bills in the package, but Brooks said there could be as many as ten in the end. Here is the breakdown of the proposals:

One of the proposed bills would create a framework to accessory dwelling units, or ADU’s to be built statewide. ADU’s, often called coach houses, are typically built on the same property near a larger single-family home. ([AB449](#))

Another program would support first-time home buyers. This bipartisan bill, would create a Workforce Home Loan Program through the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority. The program would allow first-time home buyers in Wisconsin to access a second mortgage loan up to \$60,000 at 0% interest. The loans could be used to help with down payments and closing costs.

Another proposal ([SB481](#)) would require WHEDA to establish a grant program to help support developers convert multi-family housing into condos. The agency would have to direct \$10 million from the Main Street Housing Rehabilitation revolving loan fund to the program. The grant program would cover up to \$50,000 in attorney fees, state and local permitting fees and other costs associated with such conversions.

Another bill ([AB453](#), passed Assembly and sent to the Senate on 10/07/25) would establish a “pay- as- you-go “ tax incremental finance district.

This bill would incentivize developers to pay for upfront development costs and then be reimbursed by the municipality from the generated tax increments as they become available. Lastly, Weber reported on the [latest housing development to break ground](#) in Milwaukee, at The Union at Rose Park in the Harambee neighborhood. It is among three new developments occurring on King Drive. The developer, Indiana- based Annex Management Group LLC, community leaders, and city officials held a ceremonial ground breaking for the 75- unit mixed-income apartment building on September 24.

The \$25 million project is expected to be completed in the winter of 2026.

70 units will be allocated under the Affordable Housing Program, designed to assist individuals with moderate income. Five units will be market- rate and nine will be targeted to veterans.

Also on North King Drive, the Five Points Lofts development features 55 units and 7,500 square feet of street- level retail.

The city has invested in the King Drive area through bike lanes, traffic calming features and street-scapes making it attractive to developers.

Human Trafficking – The VFP Committee is looking for a Vincentian that may be interested, passionate, or knowledgeable on the subject of Human Trafficking and is willing to report on this topic in future meetings.

Hunger/FoodShare: It was reported on October 1 that, in the face of a government shutdown, two federally funded food assistance programs, WIC serving low-income women and children, and SNAP, serving low-income persons, [will continue as usual for now](#), according to a spokesperson for the Wisconsin DHS.

After 30 years of tracking food insecurity trends across the USA, the Household Food Security Report—an annual national survey—[will no longer be published](#) by the US Department of Agriculture. The Ag Department labeled the Report “redundant, costly, and extraneous”—not to mention “fear mongering.”

Said LaPorchia Collins, Tufts University economist and former USDA Economic Services Research employee, “Having this information is really important because many of these policies that are designed to improve nutrition, and improve food access amongst households, depend on it. It’s really hard to gauge progress if we’re not measuring the outcomes.”

Anti-hunger organizations called the decision “short-sighted.” And Jordan-Marie Smith reported [September 22 on NPR](#), “The Household Food Security Report provides ... data on the lack of access to adequate nutrition for low-income Americans, and helps shape policy on how to combat food insecurity and hunger.” Explained LaPorchia Collins, “We have to be able to measure the current status of food insecurity, and how are we going to create effective policies to address the issue?” The USDA’s announcement comes after Trump signed the One Big Beautiful Bill Act which expands SNAP work requirements. This, in effect, will leave an estimated 2.4 million Americans without food aid.

On the international front; the [2025 Global Hunger Index](#) (GHI) was published on October 9. It reveals that the international community is making minimal progress in overcoming hunger. The

global food situation has hardly improved since 2016, and at the current rate at least 56 countries won't succeed in overcoming hunger by 2030. (You'll recall that a Zero Hunger goal, aimed at ending hunger and ensuring access to safe nutritious food for all by 2030, was previously established.)

At the current sluggish pace, Zero Hunger by 2030 is not a realistic goal. Hunger has worsened in 27 countries since 2016, and hunger is at an alarming level in seven countries: Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Haiti, Madagascar, Somalia, South Sudan and Yemen. Between 2023 and 2024, famine-level food insecurity *more than doubled for 2 million people*, largely because of wars in Gaza and Sudan. Meanwhile, global humanitarian aid budgets have shrunk even as military spending rises, reflecting an alarming inversion of priorities. Still, history shows that course correction is possible. Between 2000 and 2016, global hunger declined significantly even amid natural disasters and global financial downturns. This progress resulted from coordinated action, sustained investment, and political will—tools still available today, if we choose to utilize them.

The 2025 GHI holds that governments have to act now to alleviate hunger. Governments at all levels must commit to building inclusive, resilient, sustainable and peace-oriented food systems. Heads of state and governments need to champion initiatives to eradicate hunger and designate specific offices or individuals to be accountable for overseeing hunger policy and reporting on progress.

The GHI is a peer-reviewed annual report published jointly by the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict, and Welthungerhilfe, a German non-denominational and politically independent non-profit working in the field of humanitarian assistance since 1962.

Immigration - Armand Carriere was unable to attend this meeting. Discussion on this topic was tabled until the next meeting.

Mental Health Care – Sister Julie Krahel opened by telling us that she did not have anything new to report this month.

She did want to remind us about the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) on Friday, October 10 (yesterday), observed [World Mental Health Day](#), as a time for a Nationwide Novena for Mental Health, concluding on the [feast of Saint Luke](#) (October 18). This annual event is part of a year-round National Catholic Mental Health Campaign to raise awareness, combat stigma, and advocate for those impacted by mental health issues within the Church and society. Parishes are encouraged to participate by praying the novena,

Minimum Wage/Labor – Dave Busch reports that the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) and the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) announce the [latest U.S.](#), [State](#), and [local](#) unemployment rates and analysis, for August, the most recent statistical month available.

Wisconsin's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate remained at 3.1%, which is 1.2 percentage points below the national unemployment rate of 4.3%. The state's labor force participation rate ticked down to 64.8% in August while the national rate increased slightly to 62.3%, making Wisconsin's participation rate 2.5 percentage points above the rest of the nation.

The number of persons unemployed in [Southeastern](#) Wisconsin still remains above the rest of the state. Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha counties are hoping for new jobs to become available as construction is completed on two major data farms, [Microsoft in Mount Pleasant](#) and another planned by [Vantage Data Centers in Port Washington](#).

Racine Update: Jim Erven reports that the Racine Council is working on putting together their strategic planning initiative for the next five years. A meeting is planned for November to bring together approximately 30 Vincentians from the Racine District, to discuss the five year plan with an eye on the recommendations coming out of this years "Vision SVDP" survey.

The Council is also at work on a succession plan for replacing Council President Jim Corona when his term ends next year.

Erven then wanted to revisit his earlier discussion on SB252. This bill requires the Department of Health Services to allow an individual to deposit up to \$15,000 of the individual's gross earnings in an independence account over a 12-month period. Further, the bill prohibits DHS from including assets acquired by an individual by when determining the individual's financial eligibility for Medical Assistance benefits under the Medical Assistance purchase plan.

The bill has been amended and now the proposal will cap the amount of inheritance that may be excluded from consideration when determining eligibility for Medical Assistance (Badger Care). The bill does not favor the poor, and is now available for scheduling a floor vote on this.

Waukesha Update - David Anderson reported that his own St. Leonard's parish council voted to award ten thousand dollars for the express purpose of helping victims of the August flooding. The money will be spent in the Muskego area to replace many of the appliances the people lost that are not covered by insurance. The money needs to be spent by the end of the year and if funds are still left, the balance must be returned to the parish.

Next, Anderson told us about their efforts on SVDP Awareness Month. Vincentians sponsored a donut Sunday and had fellowship in the church hall after all masses. He and other Vincentians were available to discuss with fellow parishioners about the services that they provide. Anderson stated that the event was a success and that they recruited several new members to the society. The Waukesha district is sponsoring a Home Visit Training session on Tuesday October 14th, from 6 to 8:30 pm at the Waukesha store on Sunset Drive.

Next Anderson told us about the Waukesha Endowment Grant fund. The Endowment Grant Fund Program provides grants to neighbors in need in four categories: Rehabilitation Treatment, Health Treatment, Job Training, and Education. These 4 areas are defined broadly. Their Vincentians are reminded to keep an eye out when doing home visits for people that may need some help up.

Ask an individual's goal and possible eligibility to participate in the Endowment Grant Program.

As you do your Home Visits, keep your eyes and ears open. Your next visit could be the person with a goal that seems unreachable to them. The Endowment Grant Fund could be the answer to help them along in their journey to improve their situation.

SVDP Awareness Month - since Anderson had already brought up the subject of SVDP Awareness Month, the chairperson decided to continue with this topic (which was on our agenda as item 5 under Old Business). Busch mentioned that his parish kicked off Awareness Month by speaking at all masses on the last Sunday in September. The talks highlighted the work that they are doing in the parish neighborhood. They were able to attract some new recruits, including some younger folks. Busch mentioned a young brother and sister that came up to him after mass a stated they had some interest in helping at our meal program. The young lady mentioned that she and her brother have been helping to feed the homeless for a few years now. Busch asked them what program they had been volunteering with, and she stated they are simply doing this on their own, from home. Very impressive, and obviously very dedicated to their ministry. The collective opinion of our VFP Committee members was, the Awareness Month program is working!

Old Business:

Regional VFP Committee Update: – Jim Erven told us that the Regional Voice For the Poor is citing “strength in numbers” advocacy and is in favor of the local VFP Committees participating in coalition letters to support local issues. The National VFP just participated in another coalition letter addressed to the US House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Dated September 23rd, in support of the Restore Act ([H.R. 5223](#)). This bill would allow individuals with drug offenses to receive benefits under the supplemental nutrition assistance program, and for other purposes. This Act may be cited as the “Re-Entry Support Through Opportunities for Resources and Essentials Act of 2025” or the “RESTORE Act of 2025”. Beside the national VFP, the letter was cosigned by the USCCB, Catholic Prison Ministries, the Jesuit Community, Catholic Charities and others. Erven stated that most of the advocacy that our national Society is doing right now, is found inside a number of these coalition letters which state our Society’s position on current issues.

Erven also expanded a bit more on the Road to Housing Act ([S.2651](#)), A bill offering a number of proposals aimed at increasing the supply of affordable housing in America. The bill is comprehensive, offering a number of proposals, including; an Innovation Fund, a Whole Homes Repairs act, a Home Affordability Act, a Housing Unhoused Disabled Veterans Act, and more. Erven wanted us to be aware of this federal legislation.

Erven also wanted us to be aware of another victim of the government shutdown, HUD Assisted households. HUD-assisted households are low-income households that receive rental assistance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to pay for housing, commonly known as Section 8 housing. As it stands right now, [Section 8 housing is funded](#) through the end of November.

SVDP Awareness Month – Discussed this earlier in this meeting during the Waukesha update. The Awareness Month planning booklet has been published and it is available for download, here: <https://svdpmilw.org/uploads/2025%20Vincentian%20Awareness%20Month%20Booklet.pdf>

VoterVoice Action Alert – Busch reported earlier in the meeting that we are shelving our plans to launch the VoterVoice Action Alert pushing for passage of extending post-partum care for new mothers on Medical Assistance to one full year. We will keep our statement for the Alert close by, and review for any opportunities to get this bill up for a vote, later next year. We will also keep an eye out for any other bills that might need our support.

New Business:

Next Meeting – November 8, 2025

Our next VFP committee meeting will be held on the second Saturday in November, via Zoom, from 9:00 to 11:00 AM.

Please plan to join us online on November 8th. All Vincentians are welcome to attend. The login information can be found at the bottom of the last page of these minutes.

Adjournment: The meeting ended with more discussion regarding the very serious problems that will occur if there are any severe cuts to Section 8 housing funding. Reminding us all that cuts to this housing resource will have a disastrous effect on our society and result in a tsunami of homeless people on our streets. Erven added that there *will* be other huge costs as a result, as the nation will see increased medical care costs, increased costs for feeding the unhoused, etc. Busch asked Erven to keep a close eye on this topic for us and Jim agreed to report back to us as things develop on critical Section 8 funding. The October meeting officially adjourned at 10:55 AM with the VFP members praying together a prayer for the beginning of Autumn ...

*"May the harvest from the fields remind us of the abundance we have been given
and the bounty we are to share with others ..."*

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MILWAUKEE ARCHDIOCESE VOICE FOR THE POOR COMMITTEE

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Here is the information for logging into the VFP ZOOM Meeting:

St. Vincent de Paul Society of the Milwaukee Archdiocese is inviting you to the next scheduled meeting of the Voice For the Poor Committee, online via ZOOM.

Click Here to Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89896784028?pwd=KzZhR0xyWWY0QXlqNUNEYktaEIXZz09>

Or call in (audio only): 312-626-6799

(Dial by your location. 312 626 6799 is Chicago)

Meeting ID: 898 9678 4028
Passcode: 732237