

# Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | May 2021

## Staving Off Evictions



In a typical year, eviction can be emotionally traumatizing for children, contribute to job loss for adults, and make it difficult to find future housing, leading individuals to seek emergency shelter. In a pandemic, it can lead to the aforementioned consequences, as well as increased risk of disease spread, and illness. A critical decision made at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic was to halt eviction proceedings. The eviction moratorium, which was enacted in March 2020, kept people in their homes at a time when pandemic-related job loss was rampant. This moratorium also compensated for the fact that most states, including Ohio, provided limited protection to renters, which left eviction-related decisions to local courts.

The moratorium's effectiveness at preventing large scale evictions has led to it be continually extended over the past year, most recently through a federal order by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, the moratorium is expected to expire on June 30, leaving many asking, "what's next?"

An obvious answer is for elected officials to continue to extend the eviction moratorium. This may happen in the short term, but it is an unlikely long-term solution. The moratorium was not meant to be in perpetuity, and the political will to extend the moratorium is likely to wane. In addition, there is increased attention by the federal courts who are debating whether the protection is legal. Finally, while the moratorium was effective in limiting eviction filings, it was only because of corresponding federal supports like rental assistance.

As our elected leaders are considering next steps, LMM would recommend they look comprehensively at programs and policies to help those remain stable in their homes now and in the future. There are nearly 500,000 renters in Ohio who are currently behind on rent. There are understandable concerns that there may be "K-shaped" recovery, with lower-income members of our community having a much slower "return to normal" than those in higher socio-economic status. Without clear interventions, the loss of federal eviction protections could leave individuals who are struggling financially because of the pandemic without many options. And as evictions are most likely to impact low-income, minority, female head of households with children, it could contribute to a surge in family homelessness.

Specifically, LMM recommends the advancement of policies that expand the availability of affordable housing and protections that help renters find and keep homes. This includes using innovative practices (i.e. 3D printing) to develop low-cost and compact homes. It also means continuing to provide direct assistance to people experiencing housing instability and homelessness through rental assistance and in more flexible ways like direct cash assistance and shallow rent subsidies. Thirdly, it means expanding programs that work like Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Right to Counsel (RTC) program. RTC ensures renters have access to the legal counsel needed to avoid eviction.

These investments coupled with the expansion of renters protections through Pay to Stay, ending source of income discrimination and the advancement of fair chance housing ordinances, will help support a smoother transition out of the pandemic, stabilize the housing market, and promote stronger and healthier communities in the future.

## From the Desk of the President & CEO



*"Many are saying, 'Oh, that we might see better times...'" Psalm 4:6*

May marks the one-year anniversary of George Floyd's murder and a watershed moment for activism that calls for a national reckoning with our history of racism. May is also Mental Health Awareness Month- perhaps a more poignant observation this year as that tragic incident was echoed by other encounters between police and BIPOC, marked by brutal indifference, reactionary responses and death. These traumatic staples have become part of our regular media diet.

Along with many of you, I feel the anguish and also the universal yearning in the lament from Psalm 4 and I apply it regularly to our currently disease-burdened and violence-laden lives. There is much to say about structural and systemic racism and many are saying it. I'd like to reflect on our staff partners' mental and emotional health at this time, recognizing their experience, and effective advocacy.

Staff partners afraid for their children; a board member receiving an insulting message; everyday racism takes a mental and emotional toll on the people responsible for making LMM what it is. Too often, the principles reached for in demonstrations eclipse the reality that racism is about people: neighbors and co-workers now being seen for their courage and energy in just living every day in their skins; commutes to work and school, driving, shopping, walking down a street or in a park, even bird-watching.

As news headlines assail us until we are numb to them, this short column is a plea to recall the power of relationship with real people. At the heart of the principle of justice (a relational and communal word at its origin) is acknowledgment of someone's real-life emotional experience- anger, fear, love, loss of someone's three-year old, someone's son, someone's favorite cousin, someone's elderly mother. These "some-ones" work at LMM and the larger issue of structural racism profoundly effects how we live together.

LMM is combining the people-centered practice of "right relationship"- constructive dialog and seeing "the other"- with the recognition that larger issues of systemic and structural racism are real. We believe our advocacy for principles of justice and equity, and opposed to historical racism, is most effective when it begins with the daily impact of social norms and laws on people and their lives and stories. In their plural strength, the stories of life and death under racism create an authentic and undeniable voice that breaks through media fatigue, creates hope out of despair, and actually foments constructive change- the better times- we want to see.

Take a look at what our board and staff are [doing](#) and [reading](#) and join us!

Drew Genszler  
President & CEO

## Compassion Over Cages



Dionne Dowdy

LMM is thrilled to be partnering with the [Ohio Transformation Fund](#) to host the Compassion Over Cages (COC) Campaign Coordinator Dionne Dowdy. This campaign is part of a national effort by [JustLeadershipUSA's #JUSTUS Campaign](#) to ensure incarcerated people are safe in future man-made or natural disasters. According to a recent report from the [New York Times](#), 34 out of 100 individuals incarcerated were infected with COVID-19. In Ohio, prisons were the location of several of the deadliest COVID outbreaks. Last April, 73% of inmates at [Marion Correctional Institution](#) tested positive for COVID. Through the development of clear emergency management plans, the COC Campaign will help avoid a future disaster in Ohio's prisons and jails, and ensure that a prison sentence does not become a death sentence.

## POLICY CORNER

# The American Rescue Plan



In March 2021, President Joe Biden signed into law the [American Rescue Plan](#), a \$1.9 trillion package aimed at providing direct relief to families and communities negatively impacted by COVID-19. The package included \$350 billion in emergency funding for state, local, territorial and Tribal governments. Funds are intended to support ongoing public health responses (i.e. vaccination site, emergency clinics) and supplement reductions in state and local revenues, which declined over the past year.

This month, the U.S. Treasury will provide Ohio with \$11 billion in these state and local funds. Ohio's state government will receive \$5.6 billion and local governments, \$5.4 billion. Locally, Cuyahoga County will receive \$249.5 million and Cleveland will receive a whopping \$541 million, the largest allocation in the state. Half of the federal allocations will be given in mid-May, with the second tranche being allocated in 2022; funds will need to be spent by the end of 2024.

The use of these funds is being actively discussed. Initially, few parameters were given to local governments as they debated the best way to use these resources. [Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish](#) said the county would use federal funding to support pandemic efforts such as mortgage and rental assistance, buying public-transportation vouchers to help those without cars travel for vaccines and covering larger jail expenses. [Mayor Frank Jackson](#) has generally focused on supporting the hospitality and entertainment industry, as well as promoting economic growth to address wealth inequality and racism. In early April, [Cleveland's City Council](#) had a conversation on the best way to use these funds, with each council person outlining their priorities for their district. While there were disparate viewpoints, increased broadband access, affordable housing and infrastructure were common themes. City Council hoped to use these funds to make innovative change, not just back-fill existing gaps.

LMM has shared how we think these funds should be spent in conversations with local leaders and coalitions, including a proposal to rehab the Men's Shelter at 2100 and investing in more transition in place housing options, which would allow individuals experiencing homelessness to transition from homelessness into their own units. LMM will continue to work with our partners to ensure access to safe and affordable housing continues to be a priority in the transition to post-pandemic life.

## Featured Advocacy Partner:



**Fair Housing Center  
for Rights & Research**

The Fair Housing Center for Rights & Research is a not-for-profit fair housing agency that promotes equal housing opportunities and positive race relations in Northeast Ohio. Our mission is to protect and expand fair housing rights, eliminate housing discrimination, and promote integrated communities. We advance our mission through advocacy, enforcement, education and research. This past April, we celebrated 53 years since the federal Fair Housing Act was passed on April 11, 1968.

There have been significant strides in the road to equitable housing since its passage. Take the recent Executive Order signed by President Biden, affirming that discrimination against people based upon their sexual orientation or gender identity is sex discrimination. The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to discriminate in the sale or rental of housing related transactions on the bases of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status and disability. Yet even with the housing equality victories over the years, housing discrimination persists throughout the country and in Northeast Ohio.

The Fair Housing Center regularly receives complaints of housing discrimination and estimates that there are over 30,000 instances of housing discrimination annually in the region. Housing discrimination results in barriers to living in the home of your choice. Where you live matters. Where you live is a direct determinant of your access to quality schools, healthcare, jobs and even your exposure to environmental health hazards. As housing discrimination continues, there is more work to be done to advance housing equality for all.

Join us in advocating for the expansion of fair housing rights and equal housing opportunities. Start by learning more about the barriers to fair housing in our region, in our recent [State of Fair Housing in Northeast Ohio report](#). To stay up-to-date with emerging issues, news, and fair housing advocacy initiatives [sign up](#) for our e-newsletter.





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## Our Mission:

To promote shalom (peace, well-being) and justice (right relationships) through a Christian ministry of service and advocacy with those who are oppressed, forgotten and hurting.

## Link with LMM



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[www.lutheranmetro.org](http://www.lutheranmetro.org)



Latest news at  
[www.lutheranmetro.org](http://www.lutheranmetro.org)

## 5 Numbers to Know: Pandemic Recovery

*The pandemic has been hard on many but those without a financial safety net, or employment, will have the most difficult time recovering.*

**\$134,230**

Median Wealth Held by White Americans

**\$11,030**

Median Wealth Held by Black Americans

**30.1%**

Gap between the percent of White and Black Homeowners (2017)

**7.5%**

Unemployment rate among White Ohioans (2020)

**14.2%**

Unemployment rate among Black Ohioans (2020)

## In The News: Redistricting Begins



In 2020, LMM worked to ensure all staff, program participants, and community members were aware of the decennial Census and understood how to complete the form. The decennial Census is important, as it determines Congressional representation, influences the redistricting of our state general assembly and contributes to the allocation of 16 federal financial assistance programs pertaining to housing, healthcare and education. Preliminary results of the 2020 Census

show that Ohio is likely to lose a Congressional seat, bringing Ohio's representation from 16 to 15. The next step of the process is for Ohio leaders to review the complete data, which will be available later this summer, before they begin to redraw the lines for both federal and state districts. LMM plans to follow the process and advocate for equity in redistricting, but consider following Common Cause for the latest on what's happening with redistricting statewide.

## Save the Date

### Charles R. See Forum on Re-Entry

June 18, 2021

12:30PM - 1:30PM

Featuring DeAnna Hoskins, President & CEO of JustLeadershipUSA

