

Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | August 2020

All Things Election

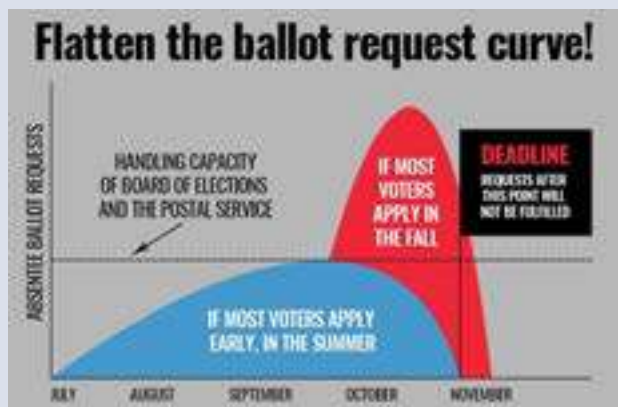
The 2020 general election is less than three months away, making now the perfect time to make sure you are prepared to vote. This includes registering to vote and/or updating your address should you have moved since the last time you voted; requesting an absentee ballot (if you request now, it will be mailed to you in early October); and making sure that if you decide to vote in-person that you create a plan to do so during your county's Board of Election early in-person voting hours or on election day. If 2020 has taught us anything, it is to expect the unexpected. That means the more you can do to plan for what may come, the better.

At LMM, we've been talking about voting and the importance of civic engagement for several months. In addition to these internal conversations, on Wednesday, August 19th, LMM hosted an election education forum on Facebook Live titled, *Getting Into "Good Trouble" through Civic Engagement: A Forum for Restored Citizens on Holding Elected Officials Accountable After the Ballot*. The forum featured Judge Ronald Adrine, Cleveland Municipal Court (retired), Jennifer Lumpkin, Civic Engagement Strategy Manager, ClevelandVotes, Lana Mendis, Employment Specialist and Chopping for Change graduate, Robin Turner, Ohio Organizing Collaborative and Joe Gaston, a board member with NEOCH, and was moderated by Margie Glick, Director of Advocacy, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry. The conversation focused on what inspires the panelists to vote, and why it is important to stay engaged in the political process throughout the year. Lana, Robin and Joe have all had past involvement with the criminal justice system, which has motivated them to be more engaged citizens and regularly vote.

Also shared in this forum were the myths that most commonly keep restored citizens from voting. Specifically, you can vote even if you've spent time in prison – you just need to re-register. Individuals who are currently incarcerated for non-felony crimes are allowed to vote while in prison and jail. Convicted felons – upon release from prison – are allowed to vote. Information was also shared for individuals who are currently homeless, who may not have a permanent address to use when registering to vote. It is recommended that individuals who are homeless, even those who are unsheltered, use the address of LMM's Men's Shelter at 2100 Lakeside as their residency. If they then decide to vote absentee, they can visit the shelter to pick up their ballot.

LMM will continue to share pertinent information about the upcoming election with staff partners and program participants. To ensure fair representation, we all must vote to have our voices heard.

Watch a recording of the forum [here](#)!



VOTING WITH A CRIMINAL CONVICTION ACLU OHIO

IF YOU HAVE BEEN CONVICTED OF A CRIME, YOU STILL HAVE THE RIGHT TO VOTE.

- If you have been convicted of a misdemeanor, **you have the right to vote**, even if you are incarcerated.
- If you have been arrested for a felony but have not been convicted, **you still have the right to vote**.
- The only time you may not vote is if you are currently incarcerated on a felony conviction. But once you are out of prison or jail, you must re-register to vote, even if you were previously registered. **You re-gain the right to vote.**
- If you are on parole or probation, live in a halfway house, or are on house arrest, **you have the right to vote.**



Margie Glick

From the Desk of the **Advocacy Director**

Dear LMM Community,

When the nation responded earlier this summer to the tragic murder of George Floyd by asking for justice and marching in the streets, it brought back many memories and stories of LMM's founding. It was truly hard to ignore the clear parallels between the protests responding to the death of George Floyd at the arms of the police and the events that led to the Hough rebellion in the 1960s. Specifically, two common threads between both situations include the deep-seated anger at our nation's legacy of racism, and the lack of substantial progress towards racial equity.

This tragic incident led many of us at LMM to ask ourselves: As an organization rooted in the desire to end racism and discrimination, how can we respond thoughtfully and with intention to the modern conversation around race and racism? And critically, how can we demonstrate support for our staff partners and program participants and also advocate for sustained systematic change? There is no simple answer, but rather a collection of actions we must all take to end discrimination and systematic racism.

At an organizational level, LMM's Advocacy Department continues to work to identify systems change opportunity that tackles our nation's legacy of racism, and uses the skills and assets of the LMM community to advocate for systems change. LMM's Board of Directors Advocacy Committee has urged LMM to increase program participant-led advocacy; LMM's Staff Advocacy Committee has advanced efforts to promote voter registration and Census completion.

LMM also continues to endorse policy change that addresses our nation's history of racism. This includes supporting efforts to declare racism a public health crisis, ending source of income discrimination, promoting fair chance housing ordinances and ending a cash bail system, all policies that disproportionately impact African Americans. Moving forward, LMM will review its advocacy priorities to ensure race disparities are acknowledged, and policies that directly address systematic racism are included.

The change that results from these actions may be slow, but we are committed to continuing to move forward until racism is no longer an evil that faces our friends, family, and program participants.

Sincerely,

Margie Glick
Director of Advocacy

Launching LMM's Staff Advocacy Committee

LMM is excited to officially announce the launch of a Staff Advocacy Committee! The committee aims to provide the Director of Advocacy with a better understanding of the policy and advocacy needs of LMM's program participants and the frontline staff. The committee also helps to provide increased capacity on advocacy topics that require a more grassroots approach, like promoting Census completion rates and voter education. The committee meets every other month to learn about the activities of the advocacy department, share insights from the front lines, and identify opportunities to collectively advance LMM's advocacy priorities. This month, the committee sent a letter to all LMM staff asking that they pledge to complete the Census and vote. To learn more about the LMM Staff Advocacy committee, email Margie Glick at mglick@lutheranmetro.org.

POLICY CORNER

COVID and the Expansion of Telehealth

Between the novelty of this highly contagious disease, a lack of adequate PPE and a feared surge of patients, COVID-19 has pushed many health providers to the brink. One notable 'silver lining' to the pandemic, aimed at combating the pressure facing providers, has been the advancement of the use of telehealth. Before COVID, telehealth was not commonly used as it was rarely fully reimbursed by private insurance providers and Medicare or Medicaid. This changed rapidly in response to the pandemic and the urgent need to reduce disease transmission while continuing to provide access to health care.

In Ohio, the first major change in the use of telehealth occurred on March 20, 2020, when the Ohio Department of Medicaid and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, in partnership with the Governor's Office, relaxed telehealth regulations. In April, Ohio further expanded telehealth rules and reimbursement guidance through the state's request for a 1135 waiver. The 1135 waiver provides the Secretary of Health and Human Services broad authority to modify or waive rules governing Medicare, Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Plan during a national emergency. In July, these policies were again expanded by the Governor, allowing additional health care providers, including home health and hospice aides to provide select services via telehealth, and allowed additional recovery services to be reimbursed for remote services.

Despite the effectiveness of telehealth, and the clear demand for such services: \$4 billion was billed nationally to Medicare for telehealth in March and April of 2020, compared to \$60 million in those months in 2020, the future of telehealth remains uncertain. Currently, Medicare's expanded coverage will end when the national emergency ends. Similarly, UnitedHealth Care and Anthem – two of the nation's largest insurers -- have yet to say whether they will continue to cover these services past September or October.

There is substantial advocacy needed to ensure continued access to telehealth for all patients. The Mental Health Advocacy Coalition (MHAC) has done a tremendous job advocating on this topic and supporting LMM's efforts to reform select telehealth policies. However, areas for improvement remain, like the continued use of PASRR assessments and the lack of equitable access to electronic devices or broadband internet, and the fact that some appointments can only be safely done in person. Through coordinated reforms, by the government and private insurers, we can work to overcome these barriers and ensure continued access to safe health care for all.

To learn more about LMM's use of Telehealth, [visit here](#).

Featured Advocacy Partner:



*Information provided
by United Way of
Greater Cleveland*

COVID-19 created a crisis upon a crisis for our community. Families who were one missed paycheck away from poverty suddenly found themselves unemployed and unable to afford basic resources. But our neighbors did not face this crisis alone. Our community came together to extend a hand to those who needed help.

United Way's pandemic response officially began through our 2-1-1 HelpLink, a 24/7 free and confidential crisis line for people in need. A majority of callers were using 2-1-1 HelpLink for the first time to get connected with essential resources. In March, call volume doubled to 6,000 calls per week, as our dedicated 2-1-1 team responded to families and individuals affected by the pandemic.

We are so grateful for our many partners, including LMM who advocated for critical rental assistance, as many Cleveland renters face uncertainty now that eviction filings have resumed. As the lead organization for Right to Counsel-Cleveland, we know eviction is a root cause of poverty leading to homelessness and job loss. The timely kick-off of this program on July 1, in partnership with the Legal Aid Society of Greater Cleveland, offers free legal representation for eligible families facing eviction who live at or below the poverty line.

The pandemic has also magnified a pandemic of another kind--the pandemic of racism. Without dramatic policy change, the inequities created by systemic racism will continue to have dire consequences for all African Americans and people of color.

Over the last year, United Way and five other partner organizations collaborated with Cleveland City Council, who unanimously voted to declare racism a public health crisis in Cleveland. While this is a first step, the hard work now begins to work with public, private and philanthropic partners to develop a comprehensive action plan.

To learn more about the UWGC's work, visit UnitedWayCleveland.org



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listening. serving. empowering.

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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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5 Numbers to Know: Youth Homelessness

Through LMM's Youth Services program, LMM serves approximately 205 children and young adults annually. Here are a few statistics that show the extent to which youth homelessness is a problem in our city and nation.

1.5 million

The estimated number of students enrolled in public schools nationwide who faced homelessness during the 2017-18 academic year, a 15% increase over the 2015-16 school year

2,744

is the estimated number of Cleveland Metropolitan School District students who experienced homelessness in 2017

50%

of youth who are homeless have been involved in the juvenile justice system, in jail or detention

33%

of youth who are homeless have been a part of the foster care system

40%

of all youth experiencing homelessness identify as LGBTQ while they are just 7% of the total youth population in the US

In the News: Rental Assistance

According to the Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey nearly one in four adults in Ohio either missed their last rent or mortgage payment or have little to no confidence they can make their next payment on time due to the pandemic. The good news is financial relief is now available to those who are struggling to pay rent because of job loss or lost wages due to COVID. Specifically, the city of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County have allocated \$18 million in emergency rental assistance to prevent residents from losing their homes and facing homelessness.

Residents of Cuyahoga County who are struggling to pay rent due to COVID-related hardships may qualify for three months of rent payments, with longer term assistance for those that qualify. If you think you could benefit from rental assistance, call 1-833-377-RENT (7368) or apply online in English or in Spanish at www.neorenthelp.org.



What we're reading

Freshwater Cleveland: Navigating the challenges in protecting Cleveland's homeless from COVID-19

New York Times: Together You Can Redeem the Soul of the Nation

CNN: The US food system is killing Americans

The Atlantic: This Is Not a Normal Mental-Health Disaster