

Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | August 2022

Why Civic Engagement is Core to LMM's Advocacy



Welcome to another election season in Northeast Ohio. By now, you will have been bombarded with information related to August primary election and are likely seeing more and more advertisements regarding the November general election. Living in Northeast Ohio can feel like being on a merry-go-round of voting and politics.

This feeling is partly because the primary earlier this month which only took place because of the ongoing redistricting drama in Ohio. Unfortunately, there is no clear conclusion to this process, which has created a tremendous amount of confusion among residents and even the candidates themselves, some who have had to move to be eligible to run in their district.

Additionally, Ohio has two competitive races that have – and will continue – to draw national interest: an open U.S. Senate seat and a competitive gubernatorial race. Locally, there are numerous competitive statehouse races and an open County Executive seat, the winner of whom, will directly impact the work LMM does in the community.

As a result of these key elections, and the reality that the prolonged redistricting process is leading to confusion and disengagement - only 18% of registered voters in Cuyahoga County voted in the May primary and 10% voted in the August primary - LMM has chosen to focus an additional effort on promoting civic engagement. This is necessary to create a community that understands the power of their voice and their vote, and over time, to affect systems change.

In June, LMM Advocacy applied for, and was awarded, a small but meaningful grant from ClevelandVotes to host three civic engagement events between July 2022 and November 2022. Each of the programs targets different segments of the LMM population. Specifically, LMM Advocacy will lead a workshop at The Men's Shelter at 2100 Lakeside on how to vote without identification, how to apply for identification, and how to register to vote when at an emergency shelter. The Chopping for Change ladies will have the chance to participate in a workshop that teaches them how to write to their elected officials and advocate for legislation. The third and final effort will provide education and awareness to the staff partners who work at the RSC and in Youth Resiliency Services about the upcoming election.

In July, LMM shared a series of social media posts and videos asking staff, program participants, and even Rep. Juanita Brent 'why civic engagement matters.' It is fundamental that we do more than simply ask people to vote, but instead provide an understanding of why they should care about what their government is doing and who is elected to positions of power. If you missed these fun posts created by LMM's Community Engagement Coordinator Gloria Craig and John Carroll University Summer Intern Morgan Edwards, you can [catch them on our Instagram page!](#)

LMM will continue to share key deadlines, and important information about the voting process between now and November. If this information is old news to you, do your part by sharing it with someone who may be less engaged. Through each of us working together, we can begin to change attitudes around civic engagement, and eventually, this can help ensure that those in power truly represent the people they serve.



From the Desk of the Advocacy Director



Dear LMM Community,

When I worked for a U.S. Senator in Washington D.C. we constantly had an ear out for constituent stories or experience that helped emphasize the need for a specific policy change. This was especially impactful when talking about issues like health reform or student loan relief, which affected millions of Americans but were often difficult to understand. The Senator would then share these stories in speeches on the Senate floor, in his newsletter, or other communications tools.

Storytelling is powerful because it can help others understand and relate to someone's unique experiences and perspective, ideally without judgment. At LMM, storytelling is core to advancing our advocacy effort, and also empowering the people we serve to be their own advocates. This is why Gloria Craig will be inviting participants in the Chopping for Change program to practice sharing their personal experiences when writing to their legislators about the need for criminal justice reform in Ohio. It is also why Lydia Bailey's second photo exhibit *Portraits of Staff Resilience*, which will debut in late September, will emphasize individual stories and photos to help change hearts and minds about what it means to work at an emergency shelter. Finally, it is why Malika Kidd continues to share her personal experiences with the criminal justice system in her efforts to create a more equitable criminal justice system.

Sharing one's story takes a tremendous amount of courage, and it can only be done when someone is ready to be open and vulnerable. But having the skill and willingness to share one's past successes and mistakes, ultimately helps supports others in doing the same. As you continue to engage in advocacy – whether on issues related to housing and homelessness, criminal justice reform, or something entirely different, I encourage you to practice going beyond the form letter, and sharing why these issues mean something to you. By doing so, you may change someone's heart and mind.

Sincerely,
Margie Glick
LMM Advocacy Director

Gloria Craig Awarded We Raise Foundation Grant



Earlier this summer LMM's Community Engagement Coordinator Gloria Craig was selected as a recipient of the two-year Emerging Leaders Grant through the [We Raise Foundation](#). The We Raise Foundation partners with Christian organizations to "support and develop sustainable programs that help people thrive."

The grant, geared toward people ages 20 to 35, aims to support both the career development of the grantee as well as new programs that intersect poverty, violence, and inequality in the United States. Addressing this goal, Gloria's project will be centered on the residents at the Men's Shelter at 2100 and will use video to highlight the different barriers faced by people experiencing homelessness. Stay tuned for updates from Gloria throughout the grant lifecycle!

POLICY CORNER

The Role of Child Support in Creating Reentry Barriers

Nationally, half of all prison inmates have had child support cases, and over one-third of prisoners have open cases. While child support debt is not necessarily a barrier to reentry in itself, when combined with many other factors it can create a situation where these costs add up and makes navigating reentry all the more difficult. At every point in the child support process, people who are incarcerated are at a disadvantage. Parents who are incarcerated are usually unable to attend support hearings, so their orders get worked out in their absence. Even if established orders are within their means, changes in employment or health status, or periods of incarceration may call for order modification, which rarely occurs automatically and may be difficult to secure due to lack of information or legal representation. Further, parents who are incarcerated and have child support obligations often are unaware of child support debt accruing while they are locked up, leaving them with significant debt upon release.

There is a real need for children to receive financial support from their previously incarcerated parents. However, a large proportion of the returning prisoner population consists of low-income earners with little probability of securing well-paying employment, so expecting large debt burdens accrued during incarceration to be paid in full upon release is a largely unrealistic solution. As such, it is essential to strike an appropriate balance between providing for dependent offspring and at the same time reducing the likelihood that these orders will negatively affect the returning prisoner.

Reforms and advocacy work should target how child support is administered for prisoners, establish clear judicial limits on default orders, create databases linking the penal and child support systems to more accurately show if a noncustodial parent is incarcerated, implement guarantees of debt modification and access to legal representation, and support reentry services aiding returning citizens with finding stable employment and housing. Reentry program designers should also carefully strategize about how to address needs specifically related to prisoners with debt and child support. All of these reforms would lessen both the debt of imprisonment and the imprisonment of debt, and thus go a long way toward unraveling the policy entanglements of incarcerated fatherhood. Additionally, for those unmarried parents who have not experienced incarceration but are disadvantaged in other ways, such as experiencing homelessness, some sort of mediation is needed between the mother and father in determining child support and visitation.

This summary is part of a larger report completed by Summer Advocacy Intern, Morgan Edwards, as a part of the Summer in the City research project requirement, and was inspired by a recommendation from the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland on the topic of child support debt.

Featured Advocacy Partner :



CHN Housing Partners is a Cleveland-based nonprofit with more than 40 years of experience as an affordable housing developer, housing stability service provider, and residential lender. Their mission is to leverage the power of affordable, stable housing to change lives and improve communities. They serve over 50,000 families every year.

For a family, moving into an affordable home in a good neighborhood can be transformative. It can be monumental for restoring hope, instilling pride—and setting future generations on a path to success. With this in mind, CHN offers several housing solutions, including:

- Affordable homes for families, seniors, individuals with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness in Cuyahoga County.
- Energy-efficient products and services to help make homes safer and more affordable.
- Utility bill and crisis assistance to 50,000+ Cuyahoga County families annually
- Free, instructor-led financial and homeownership classes on a variety of topics.
- Leadership, community building, and employment opportunities for youth living in their Lease Purchase and multi-family housing.
- Home Lending for people who do not meet traditional bank criteria. CHN offers home mortgage loans, down payment assistance and home repair loans to help make homeownership more attainable.
- Through these programs and more CHN supports communities by investing in the *power of a permanent address.*

Learn more at www.chnhousingpartners.org.



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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.

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By the Numbers: Out of Reach

Changes in the housing market are driving housing and rental prices to record highs. Below are statistics from the recently released report, Out of Reach, by COOHIO and the NLIHC.

21.4%

How much median rent has increased in Ohio from June 2020 to June 2022

149%

The percent rent prices have increased from 1985 to 2020 - while income grew just 35%

42%

The percent of households in Cuyahoga County occupied by renters

\$17.17

A full-time worker today needs to earn at least this much per hour to afford a modest 2-bedroom apartment in Cleveland

73 hours

Hours of work needed weekly at minimum wage to afford a modest 2-bedroom rental in Ohio

In The News: County Executive Race



On November 8th, Cuyahoga County will be electing its newest County Executive. The two leading candidates are Lee Weingart (R) and Chris Ronayne (D).

LMM hosted Lee on August 24th, and will host Chris on August 30th, for a series of site visits. Through this engagement, each candidate will be able to gain a deeper understanding of LMM's programs, how we partner with the County to solve the region's most serious challenges, and areas of growth and innovation. LMM is grateful for its close relationship with Cuyahoga County government and looks forward to deepening this partnership in the coming years.

To learn more about the leading candidates watch the September 20th debate at the City Club of Cleveland.

What We're Reading and Watching

- Shelter Force: Tenant Screening Companies Profit from Eviction Records, Driving Housing Insecurity
- Freshwater Cleveland: Completed! First house purchased in LMM's Breaking New Ground project ready for tenants
- New York Times: How Houston Moved 25,000 People From the Streets Into Homes of Their Own
- CBS Morning: Dwayne Betts on his mission: Living a life of second chances
- Frontline: Facing Eviction