

# Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | October 2023

## LMM Welcomes HUD Senior Advisor Richard Cho, Attorney Valerie Comenencia Ortiz, and advocate Yusuf Dahl to Cleveland!

On October 12, Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry had the privilege of hosting Senior Advisor for Housing and Service at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Dr. Richard Cho, Attorney Valerie Comenencia Ortiz and advocate Yusuf Dahl as part of the Housing Justice Plan Release event hosted by the Office of Reentry. The Eight Point Plan for Housing Justice aims to break the link between housing instability and incarceration. It includes recommendations to advance fair chance housing, develop new housing units, and assist returning citizens with asset building.



Prior to the afternoon release event, Dr. Cho and Mr. Dahl joined LMM staff for a tour of the Richard Sering Center, a ride past the Breaking New Ground homes, and a walk-through of the Men's Shelter at 2100 Lakeside. This visit was significant as Dr. Cho is a foremost expert on housing policy related to justice-involved individuals and has advised Secretary Marcia Fudge on her continued efforts to lessen the collateral sanctions that returning citizens face when seeking housing. Mr. Dahl is a returning citizen who is now advocates for ending collateral sanctions related to housing with a focus on the Strom Thurmond amendment, which impacts individuals with drug distribution convictions.

Following the visit to the Men's Shelter, both visitors and Ms. Ortiz, an attorney with the D.C. based Relman-Colfax known for its recent legal victory on behalf of the Fortune Society, joined advocates and nonprofit leaders for an off-the-record conversation about their work. Dr. Cho shared that the long-awaited rule from HUD related to criminal background would be released in the next month. The proposal would require public housing agencies (PHAs) and HUD-subsidized housing providers to have a process for providing an individualized assessment to applicants with past-justice involvement. This is a major step, and if done correctly, it would lessen denials based on background in federally subsidized housing. Dr. Cho expects the rulemaking process to take approximately a year and urged attendees to provide feedback throughout the public process.

Following lunch, LMM welcomed more than 90 people to the agency for the release of the County's Housing Justice Plan which included remarks from County Executive Chris Ronayne, LMM President & CEO Maria Foschia, Dr. Cho, Mr. Dahl and Attorney Ortiz. LMM was honored to be a leading partner in this event and be able to continue our efforts to raise awareness on the need to end housing-related collateral sanctions.



*Photo credits: Cuyahoga County*

## From the Desk of the Advocacy Director



Dear LMM Community,

The past few months have been a whirlwind for the Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry Office of Advocacy. It started with an invitation over the summer to U.S. Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Marcia Fudge. We hoped she would come to Cleveland to learn more about our continued housing justice work and implore our locally elected officials to take action to better support this population.

While Marcia Fudge was unable to join us, her senior advisor, Dr. Richard Cho, agreed to make the trip to Northeast Ohio. He was happy to participate in a series of conversations with stakeholders and elected officials on housing justice and speak at the release of Cuyahoga County's 8-Point Plan for Housing Justice. We were thrilled.

But thanks to Congress, and the possibility of a government shutdown, this visit would not be so simple. Dr. Cho informed us that if the government did shut down, all travel busy schedule would be on hold. After several weeks of uncertainty, I was ready to throw in the towel and asked that instead of visiting, Dr. Cho send a video.

Fortunately, Congress did come to a short-term agreement on September 30th and Dr. Cho emailed us on Monday, October 2, that he still wanted to make the trip to Cleveland. Two days later, we learned that his travel was approved, and we would see him the morning on October 12th. Funnily enough, it happened to be the same day Secretary Fudge, his boss, would be in town for a separate event. And while she was unable to fit a visit to LMM into her plans, we know she is very much aware of our work, as the two were actively texting throughout the day, with Dr. Cho even sending selfies of the Secretary's friends from church. (Fun fact: Before her time as Secretary, Marcia Fudge was ceremonially given an honorary red Care Team jacket, which is one of LMM's top honors!)

I share this as every once in a while, Congress pulls through when you need them to, and one's persistence pays off. This time it allowed for a memorable day for LMM staff and Cleveland community, and most importantly, increased attention to the need for more solutions to the crisis of justice housing.

Best, - Margie Glick, LMM Advocacy Director

## A Walk in My Shoes: We Raise Documentary Project

Written by LMM Community Engagement Coordinator, Gloria Craig



After sitting in on a listening session with individuals who were speaking about their experience coming home after incarceration, a man spoke about how no one really knew what it was like to wake up every day and be turned away from housing and employment, and as a result, have to live in a shelter with strangers. In that moment, I asked myself, "how do we show people what this experience is like?" The answer was a documentary. At the time, I had no experience with film, outside being a fan of watching documentaries. When I learned about the We Raise Foundation Emerging Leaders grant, I jumped at the chance to apply to bring the idea to life.

The first year of the grant was filled with pivots and changes as my ideas for the documentary evolved. At one point I was even planning to record and edit the film myself, which in retrospect, was not a great idea. A year later, "A Walk In My Shoes: Documentary Project" has made significant progress. On September 28th, I, with the support of the Enmoment Media, conducted eight interviews at the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless office. The hope is to have the film done by the end of the year, and to screen it widely in 2024. The short film will deconstruct stereotypes about those who experience homelessness, how people become homeless, and highlight the different forms of homelessness. Stay tuned to learn more!

# POLICY CORNER:

## Issue 2, Legalizing Marijuana

This November, there are several significant issues on the ballot, including Issue 2 which, if passed, would legalize recreational marijuana in Ohio.

- Issue 2 would allow people 21 and older to buy, possess and grow a limited amount of marijuana.
- The Division of Cannabis Control would be established to regulate, investigate and penalize adult use testing laboratories, and individuals required to be licensed.
- Sold product would be taxed at 10 percent on top of sales tax, with revenue going to three state funds and municipalities that have dispensaries.
- It is estimated by researchers at the Ohio State University, that by the 5th year of this being law, Ohio could see between \$276 million and \$403 million in revenue.
- If approved, Ohio would be the 24th state to legalize marijuana in addition to the two territories and Washington D.C. Among these states are Illinois and Michigan.

The Coalition to Regulate Marijuana Like Alcohol (CRMLA) supports the initiative. Their core arguments are outlined in their name – regulating marijuana for adult use - like alcohol, would generate several hundred million dollars in annual revenues for state and local government, would increase funding for public safety, drug treatment and prevention, and would ensure those who are need of medical marijuana are able to more easily access it.

The Protect Ohio Workers and Families is the leading campaign against the ballot initiative. Notable members of this opposition coalition are Gov. Michael DeWine, Center for Christian Virtue, Ohio Children's Hospital Association, Ohio Prosecuting Attorneys Association and the Ohio Sheriffs' Association. The core arguments against issue 2 is that the issue puts "profits over people," recklessly exposes kids to mid-altering substances, and heightens workplace injuries and employer liability.

LMM is not taking a stance on Issue 2, but LMM did eliminate drug testing in 2022 due to the disparate racial impact such testing has on applicants.

## Featured Advocacy Partner: Oriana House



Oriana House is a nonprofit behavioral health & community corrections agency with facilities located in Ohio since 1981. In Cuyahoga County, Oriana House operates the McDonnell Center Community Based Correctional Facility (CBCF), the Fannie M. Lewis Community Corrections and Treatment Center (CCTC), Oriana House Hough Center, North Star Neighborhood Reentry Resource Center, and the Cuyahoga County Diversion Center.

North Star assists with navigating the challenges of reentry for those involved in the criminal justice system and their loved ones. Individuals receive free services such as employment services, state ID vouchers, life skills classes, healthcare screenings, Medicaid enrollment, parenting and family reconnection programs, GED classes, recovery meetings, and more.

The Cuyahoga County Diversion Center helps individuals who are exhibiting symptoms of a mental illness and/or addiction crisis receive the care and linkage to resources they need. Services can include assessment, medical evaluation, case management, counseling, medications, Medication Assisted Treatment, withdrawal management (detox), NAMI educational groups, and assistance with referrals to other care they may need.

The CBCF, CCTC, and Hough Center provide services that are court ordered, or referred by the Federal Bureau of Prisons or the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction.

By providing evidence-based programming, reentry services, and behavioral health care certified through the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, we are committed to changing lives by helping returning citizens succeed. To learn more, visit <https://www.orianahouse.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: Cuyahoga County's Eight Point Plan for Housing Justice

**Key numbers from the just released Eight Point Plan for Housing Justice.**

**\$37.6 million**

The amount the Housing Justice Plan would cost to implement

**1,288**

The number of households that would benefit from the Housing Justice Plan

**23,000**

The number of people who would benefit from the passage of Fair Chance Housing each year, as recommended in the plan

**673**

The number of households that would benefit from a home ownership pilot, as proposed in the report

**105**

The number of new homes recommended to be developed for justice-involved individuals

## In The News: Power of the People Issue Forum

On Tuesday, October 24 Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry's Office of Advocacy hosted a lunch, "Power of the People: Understanding Ohio's Initiative and Referendum Process." Attendees, comprised of students and community members, heard from Collin Marozzi, Deputy Policy Director of ACLU, David Liam, retired clinical social worker and advocate and Dr. David Miller, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Case Western Reserve's Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, who served as the panel's moderator.



The panelists spoke about the history of the issue process, how to get an issue on the ballot within state and local elections, and why the issue process is an important avenue for affecting systems change. They also answered audience questions about how elected officials view the issue process, how redistricting fits into the conversation, and whether successful issue campaigns are truly grassroots in nature.

LMM thanks Cleveland Votes for sponsoring this forum!

## What We're Reading



- Cleveland.com: [University of Akron program offers Ohio prisoners chance to earn associate's degree](#)
- Shelterforce: [Rebuilding After Trauma: Public Spaces in Cleveland](#)
- Cleveland.com: [Cuyahoga's HHS levy could be on the March ballot. Where are those dollars going?](#)
- Cleveland.com: [Frank LaRose Purges Thousands of Inactive Voters](#)