

TO: Business & Labor Committee
FROM: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: March 13, 2023
RE: LB618 (Unemployment Insurance Benefits for Certain Migrants) (Support)

The Nebraska Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of the Catholic Church and advances the Gospel of Life through engaging, educating, and empowering public officials, Catholic laity, and the general public.

The Catholic Church has a long history of caring for the immigrant. This is because the Church is fundamentally impelled by the witness of Jesus Christ who, as we hear toward the end of the Gospel of St. Matthew, urged His believers to “welcome the stranger.” At the beginning of that same Gospel, we read that Jesus Himself experienced the need to migrate and flee persecution. To use modern immigration law terms, we would say that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were like refugees and asylum seekers in their flight to Egypt as they escaped the wrath of Herod.

In addition to the life of Christ, the Church is impelled by the long-held experience, teachings, and practices of God’s chosen people, the Israelites, who themselves experienced the plight of the migrant. Through this experience of being strangers in a strange land they learned about God’s fidelity and love for them, as well as the moral obligation to meet the needs of the migrants they encountered.

These biblical and ethical principles have led the Catholic Church in Nebraska—and indeed throughout the world—to involve itself in the development of public policy and work toward justice for immigrants. When thinking about immigration policy, the Church is guided by and proposes for consideration three basic principles: first, people have the right to migrate to sustain their lives and the lives of their families; second, a country has the right to regulate its borders and to control immigration; third, a country must regulate its borders with justice and mercy.

Currently, Nebraska unemployment insurance (“UI”) benefits law contains a basic injustice that can be resolved by this legislature. “Work authorized” migrants are unable to access UI benefits which their employers have already paid into on their behalf. Our state laws governing public benefits are only available to “qualifying aliens,” which is a term that does not adequately accommodate those who have been provided “work authorization” by the federal government.

This legal structure places a hardship on asylum seekers, DACA recipients, and persons with temporary protected status. Unlike their fellow Nebraskans with whom they legally work alongside of, asylum seekers, DACA recipients, and persons with temporary protected status cannot otherwise obtain UI benefits that their employers contribute to. This creates a basic unfairness and injustice for those who work hard to support their families, contribute to our local communities, and grow our state economy.

We have an opportunity to adjust our state's public policy and help those who end up in the unfortunate situation of becoming unemployed. While such an action should make clear economic sense, it also makes sense from a moral perspective: closing the unemployment insurance gap for our work-authorized migrants is the right thing to do.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference respectfully requests that you advance LB618 to General File.

Thank you for your time and consideration.