



TO: Business & Labor Committee
FROM: Tom Venzor, Executive Director
Nebraska Catholic Conference
DATE: February 10, 2025
RE: LB299 (Public Employment Benefits Access for Work-Authorized 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.

Currently, Nebraska public employment benefits law contains a basic injustice that can be resolved by this legislature. “Work authorized” migrants are unable to access public employment benefits in a similar manner that other employees can access. 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 legal “work authorization” by the federal government.

This legal structure places a hardship on people like asylum seekers, DACA recipients, and persons with temporary protected status. This legal structure also 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. The injustice is particularly apparent as it pertains to the state’s unemployment insurance program. This is a program that employers pay into on behalf of employees, so that those employees can access the benefit at a time of need. Yet, our state law collects a tax on certain employees without giving them any access to the benefit when they would otherwise qualify. Such an act is not consistent with moral demands of justice.

We have an opportunity through LB299 to adjust our state's public policy and provide work-authorized migrants with the same benefits their co-workers receive. This legislation makes not only economic sense, it also makes moral sense as the just thing to do.

The Nebraska Catholic Conference respectfully requests that you advance LB299 to General File. Thank you for your time and consideration.