

February 8, 2023

To: Montana House Human Services Committee

From: Matthew Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 380

Madam Chair and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower and I currently serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference. I speak on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our support for House Bill 380.

Catholic teaching calls us to live out a preferential option for the poor and we believe that a basic moral test for society is how our most vulnerable members are faring. In a society marred by deepening divisions between rich and poor, our tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. Seeking to stand in solidarity with those on the margins of society, we recall what Jesus said in Matthew's gospel, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me."

In the Catholic tradition, sheltering the homeless is considered a basic act of love and a core work of mercy. This past weekend, in Catholic churches across the globe we heard the following from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

*Thus says the LORD:
Share your bread with the hungry,
shelter the oppressed and the homeless;
clothe the naked when you see them,
and do not turn your back on your own.*

The state matching grants provided for by HB 380 will help our shelter providers across the state as they seek to provide essential services while doing so in a manner that helps keep families together. At a time when we see increasing rates of homelessness across Montana, this legislation provides critical support to our shelters and other providers who are on the front lines working with those in need to bring some measure of stability and dignity to their lives.

Madam Chair and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, I urge a "do pass" and thank you for your time.