



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
God's work. Our hands.

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What images do we have of People in Poverty? Special Session Bills on Public Benefits

The Lutheran Office for Public Policy in Wisconsin, a statewide advocacy ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, is registering against several of the Special Session Senate bills recently proposed. We are concerned that SB/AB 1-4 and SB/AB 8-10 would deepen the hardship of Wisconsinites who are already vulnerable. These pieces of proposed legislation would place barriers in front of FoodShare recipients to receiving benefits, threaten the basics of medical assistance as a means to get justice from those who owe child support, and/or stigmatize individuals and families experiencing poverty.

The bill requiring a photo ID to receive FoodShare, for example, would add a hurdle to those who are temporarily disabled and to households that share a card. For individuals who may qualify for an exemption of securing a photo ID because of being elderly, having permanent disabilities, or being a victim of domestic abuse we are concerned about the many who would slip through the cracks and experience hunger. Among these people would be children.

Adding a photo ID process alone would also be expensive. According to the Urban Institute, photo IDs do not curb fraud. By far, the biggest form of SNAP fraud occurs with the participation of retailers who are authorized to accept SNAP benefits.

The other bills also come with a cost to taxpayers and we believe to people receiving public benefits. We are concerned about problems such as our government not getting at the real issue of the need for jobs that pay an adequate amount to help lift people out of poverty and restricting assets with a formula that will not discern every family's needs.

The vast majority of able bodied people who receive public benefits receive them for a short period of time. We need to ask ourselves what images do we have of people in poverty that would compel us to put up more barriers for people to receiving assistance? Where do these images come from? Do these images help us to love our neighbor with responsibility or unintentionally harm them and perpetuate unhelpful myths?

And what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)