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COMMENTS BY
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ON THE PROPOSED
CONNECTICUT EARNED INCOME TAX CREDIT
MARCH 7, 2007

The goal of empowering people, especially families, to raise themselves out of the cycle of poverty is one that has long been supported by the Catholic Bishops of the United States and is shared by many other faith communities. All people have a right to live a life of dignity and self-sufficiency. This is especially true for low-wage working families struggling to acquire the basic necessities of life. It is a responsibility of government, with the support of its citizens, to see that this goal can be achieved. The endorsement of a State Earned Income Tax Credit, on March 1st, by the Human Services Committee, is a step in the right direction to meeting this goal. I hope the full General Assembly and the Governor will support this initiative to assist low-wage working families and eventually pass it into law.

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The Earned Income Tax Credit has existed on the federal level for decades and has proved to be successful in assisting those who walk the line between self-sufficiency and poverty. The federal tax credit, which can be several thousand dollars, would be supplemented by a State earned income tax credit of several hundred dollars. This would provide Connecticut's poor working families a larger stepping stone to use for their journey out of poverty. Several hundred dollars may not seem a significant amount to many people, but I assure you it is a very significant amount of money to a low-income wage earner with children. Studies of the federal earned income tax credit show that it has a meaningful effect on reducing child poverty in our nation.

Critics of the state earned income tax credit say that many of those who receive its benefits do not pay any state income tax due to their income level. However, these people do pay taxes in the form of sales and property taxes. This means that a low-wage worker spends a greater percentage of his or her income on these taxes then a higher wage earner. The earned income tax credit would help reduce the negative impact of these taxes on our poorer citizens. It would put money back into the pockets of those that need it most. It would also put money back into our state economy. Most of those citizens receiving the tax credit will end up spending it on goods and services within our own State.

We join with representatives of various faith communities in supporting the enactment of a State earned income tax credit. As Christians we are called by the Gospel imperative to assist and give special attention to the poor. Our society and government face many conflicting demands, but the Lord makes it clear that the needs of the poor among us require our utmost attention. We must assist those most in need in a way that builds up and respects their human dignity. It is easy to find reasons why this cannot be done, but our faith challenges us to find a way to make it happen. The earned income tax credit is clearly a way to answer the Gospel imperative. It is also a way that respects the human dignity of the less fortunate.

A State earned income tax credit is a step in the right direction to assist Connecticut's low-income working families. It is also a way for all of us to respond positively to the call of our faith to assist those most in need.