

# 2019 Final Legislative Report

First, congratulations to MAC for another excellent session. We started with a fantastic showing for MAC Day in the Capitol over Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and took active positions on over 50 bills, while monitoring nearly 80 total bills by the end of the session, all working to bring the words of Matthew 25 to life in Helena being the voice of a loving, accepting, and welcoming God in Montana. It was once again an honor and a pleasure to serve as your eyes and ears at the Montana Legislature as MAC advocated for humane incarceration and immigration policy, care for children and families, and abolition of the death penalty.

MAC's primary work this session was an initial effort to set standards of treatment for pregnant inmates, HB 375. While we were not ultimately successful this session in passing HB 375, we made great head-way with the Department of Corrections and the Montana Association of Counties and are well-poised to bring some truly life-changing legislation in 2021 by building an unlikely coalition to speak up for some of the most forgotten members of society—pregnant incarcerated women and their babies. MAC was able to work with our allies to pass HB 763 limiting the use of solitary confinement for juveniles, pregnant women, and the mentally ill. As the faith community knows, significant change often comes incrementally. Small steps add up to major policy improvements.

MAC was once again a valued and sought-after partner on other major policy initiatives such as abolition of the death penalty, defeating anti-immigrant legislation, advocating for child hunger solutions, starting on the path to addressing the crisis of murdered and missing indigenous women, and child abuse and youth suicide prevention. MAC clergy spoke up through letters and live testimony, because sometimes there is simply no substitute for having the message come from a member of the cloth. MAC congregants spoke up to their legislators in person, via email, and via calls all to give voice to the voiceless.

MAC also learned some valuable lessons this session. First and foremost, MAC learned that we don't always have to be the loudest lead advocate to be successful. Sometimes the best thing MAC can do is stay in the background and keep our collective eyes and ears open. I was proud of MAC for making decisions that were best for the values you represent rather than letting other advocacy groups or even legislators drive the bus.

Second, MAC learned to look for unlikely allies. To the outside observer, politics looks very black and white (or should I say red and blue). But when a group like MAC is actively engaged in the Capitol every day, as MAC was able to be because I was there full time, you come to see that good government has a lot of moving parts and good policy knows no party. MAC has learned to stand up for itself and not be the tool of any particular party or politician, but to find (and accept) support from unlikely sources.

Finally, MAC has learned that to be taken seriously at the Capitol, you have to know and observe the rules of the game. MAC's devotion to a shared set of values, combined with

respect for our fellow Montanans who serve as citizen legislators and a dedication to providing accurate, timely, relevant information has allowed MAC to build relationships across the aisle and become an effective advocacy group for justice in Montana for the least among us. Congratulations again on another successful session, and thank you for the honor of continuing to serve MAC's ministry in Helena.

-Abigail St. Lawrence