

Chairman Lake, members of the committee,

Good afternoon! My name is Christine Tiddens. As the Legislative Advocate (intern) for Catholic Charities of Idaho and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise, I bring you greetings from Bishop Michael Driscoll, faith leader of Catholics throughout Idaho and Ms. Rosio Gonzalez, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Idaho. We support House Bill 435 that provides non-profit homeless shelters in Idaho a sales tax relief.

Catholic Charities of Idaho, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise, and several of its parishes in the Treasure Valley are collaborative partners with the Interfaith Sanctuary Housing Services, Inc. shelter, which serves 150 homeless men, women, and families each night. We understand first hand the successes and the struggles experienced by homeless shelters in Idaho.

Idaho is one of the most homeless states in the nation (measured by per capita homelessness). The recession is contributing not only to a surge in homelessness and a growing demand for homeless services (nationwide, homelessness has increased by 12 percent since 2007), but it is also contributing to a dramatic decline in shelter funding. It is not surprising, then, that Idaho shelters are being forced to turn away larger numbers of homeless. By providing financial relief through tax exemptions, House Bill 435 will help alleviate some of the shelters' burdens, and fewer homeless families will be turned away.

Governor Otter stated, "In all that the state government does, there are those things that are necessary and those things that are nice, and necessary must always take priority over the nice things." We believe that the temporary relief provided by shelters is necessary and crucial to the well-being of the needy in Idaho. We understand that the budget outlook is bleak. However, we are very focused on private market solutions, such as the non-profit homeless shelters in Idaho that provide families with a buffer against living on the street.

Every individual and every family has a right to necessary life resources including adequate shelter. Catholic Charities of Idaho and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Boise support tax relief for homeless shelters and encourage you to not forget the most vulnerable during these hard economic times. Bishop Driscoll and Ms. Gonzalez thank you for your leadership in the legislature and your dedication to the state.

Thank you Chairman Lake, I stand for questions.