

Diocese of Superior's Catholic Charities Bureau: Catholic ministry asks court to recognize that serving the poor is religious

Posted on Monday, Sep 11, 2023

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

WASHINGTON – The Diocese of Superior's Catholic Charities Bureau was in the Wisconsin Supreme Court today to explain that its care for the poor, the elderly, and the disabled is part of its religious mission. In [Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industrial Review Commission](#), the Wisconsin Supreme Court agreed earlier this year to review a lower court decision that said that Catholic Charities Bureau's charitable activities were not religious. This decision meant that Catholic Charities Bureau was barred from leaving the state's unemployment compensation program and joining the Wisconsin Catholic Church's more efficient unemployment program.

Most Catholic Dioceses have a social ministry arm that serves those in need. Catholic Charities Bureau carries out this important work for the Diocese of Superior, Wisconsin, by helping the disabled, the elderly, and those living in poverty—regardless of their faith. This requirement to serve everyone in need comes directly from Catholic Church teaching and advances the Church's religious mission by carrying out the corporal works of mercy.

“Catholic Charities Bureau is the social ministry arm of our Diocese. It fulfills the essential work of bringing love, healing, and hope to those our society has left behind,” **said Bishop James Powers, Bishop of the Diocese of Superior.** “We pray the Court will recognize what we firmly believe: that this work of improving the human condition is rooted in Christ's call to care for all our brothers and sisters.”

Religious non-profits are generally exempt under Wisconsin law from the state's

unemployment program, allowing them to join other unemployment compensation programs. A lower court in the state, however, found that Catholic Charities Bureau did not qualify for this exemption because it serves everyone, not just Catholics. In fact, the court thought that Catholic Charities Bureau could only qualify if it preached the faith and tried to convert those it served—even though the Catholic Church teaches that care for the poor should never be conditioned on acceptance of the Church's teachings.

“It is patently absurd to say that a Catholic ministry’s care for the disabled, the poor, and the hungry is not religious,” **said Eric Rassbach, vice president and senior counsel at Becket.** “But Wisconsin has done just that, mainly because Catholic Charities Bureau serves non-Catholics, too. We are hopeful the Court will correct Wisconsin’s misguided attempt to tell the Catholic Church what is and is not religious.”

For more information or to arrange an interview with a Becket attorney, contact Ryan Colby at media@becketlaw.org or 202-349-7219. Interviews can be arranged in English, Mandarin, French, German, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish.

Additional Information:

- [Catholic Charities Bureau’s opening brief in the Supreme Court of Wisconsin in *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industry Review Commission* \(May 18, 2023\)](#)
- [Order Granting Petition in *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industry Review Commission* \(April 18, 2023\)](#)
- [Catholic Charities Bureau’s petition to the Supreme Court of Wisconsin in *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industry Review Commission* \(January 12, 2023\)](#)
- [Case page for *Catholic Charities Bureau v. Wisconsin Labor & Industry Review Commission* \(Images, legal documents\)](#)