

JRLC Policy Priorities for 2026

Summary

The policy priorities in this document reflect the JRLC's focus on where we can be most effective and provide our unique perspective, and where our faith communities can come together on issues that reflect our shared values. The JRLC uses the following Advocacy Pillars to guide our policy work:

JRLC's Advocacy Pillars

1. **Protection of Basic Human Dignity**

- **JRLC Value:** We value the human dignity of each person and insist upon laws and policies that protect the wellbeing of all people, especially those who are impoverished, vulnerable, or whose safety is threatened.

2. **Safeguarding/Promoting Family Economic Security and Wellbeing**

- **JRLC Value:** We recognize the critical role of all families, including those that choose to make the important contribution of raising the next generation, in creating a stable and healthy society.

3. **Fostering Responsible Participation in Public Life**

- **JRLC Value:** We understand the indispensable role of religious communities to speak out effectively when our institutions or policies drift away from justice. We see politics as public service carried out in civic friendship to overcome a style of politics that sees each other as enemies or opponents to be defeated. We uphold the inherent right of individuals and religious communities to believe and practice as they see fit, absent a compelling governmental interest, and work to find common ground regardless of these differences.

The following priorities reflect the pillars listed above, and are responsive to emerging needs our members see in their communities and the direction of our three sponsoring organizations.

Proposed Policy Priorities for 2026:

“Primary” Priorities:

- **We allocate most of our staff hours to these issues as an out-front voice in advocacy efforts.**

Food Security

JRLC Pillars: Human Dignity, Family Economic Security and Wellbeing

The JRLC supports allocating \$4 million in state funding for the Minnesota Local Food Purchase Assistance (LFPA) grant program, which would replace funds previously provided through the federal local food purchasing grant program that were revoked in the Big Beautiful Bill.

Background: The Minnesota LFPA provides funding for direct services providers, like soup kitchens and food shelves, to purchase produce at market rate from locally owned farms to distribute free of cost to their communities. Federal changes in the Big Beautiful Bill to SNAP funding and requirements mean that increasingly Minnesota families will have to find other sources of support to feed their children and themselves. The elimination of federal local food purchasing grant funding that enabled food shelves and soup kitchens to purchase food for distribution means that stopgap resources will become increasingly more scarce, even as need continues to grow. The JRLC believes it is essential to provide food security support for families and children in need. The Minnesota Local Food Purchase Assistance program can support the faith communities and other direct services providers around the state that are meeting the immediate need of their neighbors facing food insecurity while more comprehensive solutions to the federal SNAP changes are being considered.

Affordable Housing and Homelessness

JRLC Pillars: Human Dignity, Family Economic Security and Wellbeing

The JRLC supports an increase in the base appropriation from the Family Homeless Prevention and Assistance Program (FHPAP) to improve housing stability and reduce homelessness. The JRLC also supports an allocation of \$400 million in Housing Infrastructure Bonds (HIBs) to build and maintain affordable housing throughout Minnesota.

Background: The increasing cost of housing is reaching untenable levels for many Minnesota families. More than 1 in 5 children (22%) live in cost-burdened households, where more than 30% of the household's income goes toward housing. Approximately 24% of renters are classified as severely cost-burdened, meaning more than 50% of their income is spent on housing. According to Wilder Research, nearly 1 in 8 Minnesota households are paying at least half their income for housing, constituting the highest rate of severely cost-burdened households in a decade. The JRLC believes it is essential to provide stable, affordable housing, and social supports that prevent our neighbors from falling into homelessness.

Addressing Online Gambling Expansion

JRLC Pillars: Family Economic Security and Wellbeing

The JRLC opposes the expansion of gambling. In the context of sports betting, it emphasizes harm mitigation measures in our advocacy efforts.

Background: In states that have legalized sports betting, we have seen many negative impacts. These impacts include dwindling household financial stability, increases in the likelihood of bankruptcy, and a marked rise in incidents of intimate-partner violence. Studies indicated not merely a correlation but a causation between gambling and these impacts. As advocates for gambling expansion push to create easy access to sports betting, daily fantasy sports and other online gambling, the JRLC opposes online gambling and supports help for those dealing with gambling addiction and their families.

“Secondary” Priorities:

- **We play a supporting role in advocacy efforts alongside organizations better suited to lead on a particular issue.**

Security Funding for Nonprofits in State Budget

JRLC Pillars: Human Dignity

The JRLC supports JCRC's efforts to pass an ongoing allocation in the Minnesota state budget for the Supplemental Nonprofit Security Grant Program.

Background: We have seen an alarming increase in hostility, threats, and violence towards various religious and minority communities in our state. Currently, state funding allocated toward security expenses for synagogues, mosques, historically black churches, and other nonprofits under threat of violence must be reallocated every budget cycle. This proposal would make security funding an ongoing allocation in the state budget.

Gun Violence Prevention

JRLC Pillar: Human Dignity

The JRLC supports a ban on high-capacity magazines being purchased, transferred, or used in our state, joining the 14 other states who have already enacted such bans. The JRLC also supports efforts to improve access and funding for mental health treatment and intervention programs.

Background: In August, Minnesota was shocked by an act of gun violence perpetrated on the teachers and students of Annunciation Catholic School. Unfortunately, many communities in Minnesota have endured gun violence as a regular part of their lives for many years before this shooting. Gun deaths have been the leading cause of death for children ages 1 to 17 since 2020, disproportionately impacting youth of color. High-capacity magazines, defined as having a capacity of greater than ten rounds, are used in assault rifles and other firearms. High-capacity magazines enable these weapons to cause extreme amounts of damage in a limited amount of time. In a study published by the University of Alabama in 2022, research indicated that from 1966 to 2009, the average number of deaths was 13.1 people per shooting. From 2010 to 2019, those numbers rose to an average of 18 deaths per shooting. Current data indicate this average will continue to increase. The JRLC understands that there are communities living under threat of violence who hire private, licensed, and insured security companies to provide protection. Accordingly, the JRLC would support a narrow exemption for highly vetted professional security contractors in the proposed high-capacity magazine ban if introduced.

Data indicates that the relationship between mental illness and mass shootings specifically remains tenuous. A recent study by experts at Columbia University's Dept. of Psychology indicated that while only about 5% of mass shootings were associated with severe mental illness (ie mental illness involving psychosis), increased feelings of social exclusion, anger, and nihilism amongst vulnerable young men may be better indicators of an increased risk of committing mass shootings. While mental illness is not a good statistical predictor of someone committing mass shootings or acts of violence towards others, instances of suicide are commonly correlated with other mental health struggles like depression. CDC data indicates that in 2022, of 48,204 gunshot deaths, 27,032 were the result of suicides. For this reason the JRLC believes increasing access to mental health supports will decrease gun-related deaths in Minnesota.

JRLC will continue to monitor and actively explore options for potential JRLC advocacy in 2026 that will engage our base towards our Policy Pillar goals and will consider:

- If there is a gap in leadership that JRLC could fill.
- The interest of our sponsoring organizations (matches our values).
- The ability for the issue to engage our base.