

## Testimony Before the House Tax Policy Committee

The Rev. Nicolette Siragusa

March 23, 2011

Thank you Mr. Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak in support of the EITC. My name is Rev. Nicolette Siragusa and I am the pastor of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Grand Ledge.

As a Christian minister, the people you call voters and constituents, I call the body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12:26 teaches that when one part of the body suffers, all suffer with it. And so in these hard economic times when so many of our Michigan families are suffering, our state feels it collectively.

It is in this climate that you have been entrusted to make difficult decisions, to make choices, on behalf of the people you serve. I am called to remind you of the values of a just society, values that include educating our children, protecting vulnerable populations, and encouraging workers to continue in their labors, values that I expect you, our elected officials, to uphold.

The Earned Income Tax Credit is uniquely designed to help the working poor, those who struggle to make ends meet. Those who see the value of working, and who labor on even when they are paid little.

The average \$432 Earned Income Tax Credit enables families to pay off their high winter heating bills. It helps them replace old and unusable appliances with more energy efficient ones. It assists them in paying for car repairs that make commuting to work possible. It supplements the income of those who do not make a living wage, protecting families who are on the brink of poverty.

As a local church pastor, I am familiar with the difficult task of budgeting when there doesn't seem to be enough money to fund everything, though admittedly you have the opportunity to increase revenue. The task in such a moment is to look at our values, and use those values to evaluate the ways we take in money and prioritize how we spend it. It is a time to spend smarter, investing in those areas that enrich people's lives and reflect our ethical standards.

While I'm not an economist, even I know that funding the Earned Income Tax Credit is money well spent, helping families and supporting local economies. You have choices about whether you will continue to cut spending beyond what keeps us comfortable, beyond what keeps us strong, straight into the bone of this budget where our most vulnerable bear the brunt of the pain.

You can choose to hurt families that are already struggling. You can choose to thrust an estimated 14,000 children into poverty. You can choose to increase suffering in our state. Or you can choose to find a more humane solution, one that protects families, one that insures the well-being of our children. May you choose wisely. Thank you.

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