



JANUARY 2024 MONTHLY DIGEST

A resource to animate education, prayer, advocacy, and action among the Sisters of Saint Joseph of Philadelphia, our Associates, and Partners in Mission.

Below, you will find policy and advocacy updates, education opportunities, and ways to act on behalf of justice, some with our sponsored ministries and others with trusted collaborators. *We hope you enjoy this tool for learning, connection, and action!*

POLICY UPDATE: Updates on Gun Legislation in Pennsylvania

On December 14, 2023, PA State Rep. Jennifer O'Mara joined Vice President Kamala Harris and ninety-nine other legislators from across the country at the White House to discuss gun violence prevention.

During the convening, which consisted of 100 state lawmakers, White House officials and legislators discussed the [Safer States Agenda](#). This agenda highlights key actions that states can take to end America's gun violence epidemic, including the establishment of state offices focused on gun violence prevention, strengthening support for survivors and victims, and establishing industry accountability and standards.

One intervention method discussed was Extreme Risk Protection Orders, which is a measure O'Mara introduced in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives earlier this legislative session and years prior. **Her H.B. 1018 would allow for temporarily disarming people in crisis to disrupt spontaneous acts of violence against themselves or others.** This legislation passed the PA House on May 22 with bipartisan support and awaits consideration in the Senate.

"It was an honor to not only attend the White House's largest convening of state legislators, but to shed light on such an important topic – how gun violence impacts every community in America," O'Mara said. "Losing my dad to gun suicide at 13 years old fundamentally changed my life. Extreme Risk Protection Orders can be such an effective intervention measure for families who struggle like mine did, and ERPOs are proven to reduce the number of suicides in other states that enacted them. I am thankful to everyone who explored this and dozens of other ideas with me at the convening and urge my colleagues in the Senate to bring House Bill 1018 up for a vote."

O'Mara added that if H.B. 1018 passes the Senate and Gov. Josh Shapiro signs it into law, Pennsylvania would be the 22nd state to enact a "red flag" law.

The Pennsylvania House of Representatives passed two bills this year that are part of The Common Agenda to End Gun Violence package. One was O'Mara's H.B. 1018, which would create ERPOs and the other, H.B. 714, would enact universal background checks.

ADVOCACY & ACTION: Cease Fire PA Vigil for Action

On December 14, 2023, Cease Fire PA Advocates met on the 11th Anniversary of Sandy Hook. The meeting, a Vigil for Action, took place at Senator Tracy Pennycuick's Office in Red Hill, PA. Republican Senator Pennycuick represents the 24th district since 2023. The Cease Fire Campaign, "**Not One Day More,**" was assembled to recognize that as of this date it has been 206 days since the PA House passed legislation on HB 718 and HB 1018 with no movement from the PA Senate Judiciary Committee. HB 714 would establish Universal Background Checks and HB 1018 would create Extreme Risk Protection Orders in PA.

Sister Betty Mc Veigh was invited by Senator Pennycuick's office to lead the December 14th Vigil for Action. Sister Betty is a new member of Cease Fire PA, and is also a representative of the Nuns Against Gun Violence Coalition. Sister Betty began the Vigil by sharing a prayer based on the theme of LIGHT from John 9:5 and from the Jewish celebration of Hanukkah. She ended the prayer with a quote from Amanda Gorman's Inauguration Poem, "The Hill We Climb." Following the poem, Sister Betty led the group in a Litany of Remembrance and Reflection as followed, "We remembered the tragic loss of life due to gun violence throughout Pennsylvania and our country as well as the tremendous pain inflicted on the loved ones of those killed or injured." The Litany's Response summed up why we were gathered: "**We remember in sadness, seek resolutions to violence and will work for peace.**"

The Cease Fire PA organization is demanding action from the PA Senate Judiciary Committee Chair Lisa Baker and PA Senate Majority Leader Joe Pittman. Cease Fire PA is advocating that these representatives hold a hearing and then vote on HB 718 and HB 1018. These bills have strong bipartisan support and are based on the best evidence for preventing gun violence. This legislation would save lives in Pennsylvania.

Following the Vigil for Action, Sister Betty and the other Cease Fire PA Representatives were scheduled to meet in person with Senator Pennycuick. Unfortunately, the Senator was in the Harrisburg Voting Chambers during this scheduled visit. Senator Pennycuick's staff listened and assured the group that she will take their demands to the Senator, and will schedule a sit-down discussion with Senator Pennycuick as soon as possible. In the words of Sister Betty, "Hopefully, the time - and spirit - Cease Fire PA members and volunteer supporters put into today's Vigil and meeting will shed a little more LIGHT and HOPE into our world!"

[To learn more about Gun Laws in Pennsylvania CLICK HERE](#)

To learn more about Gun Law Legislative Advocacy, please contact Sr. Donna Breslin, SBS: dbreslin@ssjphila.org

SPONSORED WORK HIGHLIGHT: SSJ NEWCOMERS HOUSING ALLIANCE

The SSJ Newcomers Housing Alliance is inspired by the call of the Gospel and the mission of the Sisters of Saint Joseph in their response to the critical plight of refugees and immigrants who seek safety and shelter in the Philadelphia area. The mission of the SSJ NHA is, "to offer refugees and immigrants a safe transitional housing opportunity. Rooted in supportive, loving and compassionate care for the 'dear neighbor,' they provide a residential environment with opportunities to have basic needs met in a restorative atmosphere.

In 2017, the Sisters of Saint Joseph began housing refugees and asylum seekers in an unoccupied convent on North Broad Street. Under the name of Refugee Housing Project and Sister Eileen McNally, SSJ's leadership, the building housed up to twelve newcomers at a time and has assisted over sixty men in reaching independence.

In 2022, Sister Eileen held a meeting for other congregations that were committed to offering transitional housing opportunities to newcomers. After the first meeting, a small committee of six congregational leaders and representatives emerged to move forward with forming an Inter-Congregational Coalition of Women Religious to Accompany Newcomers. Sister Eileen provided the committee with the background information and history of the project. In continued meetings, members of the coalition determined that to receive newcomers with dignity and love, services such as transitional housing, employment, healthcare, legal assistance, and education all needed to be included. Together with the laity, the coalition works to provide expertise and resources to support the ministry and assist newcomers as they strive toward independence.

In July 2023, the project became an official sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Saint Joseph and established its current name. Today, The SSJ NHA directly serves over thirty-five newcomers from fourteen different countries. In addition to the 12-bedroom home, the ministry also provides family support services, operates a distribution center, and is renovating another convent to open a 25-bedroom facility for families and children.

[**Additional information can be found on the Newcomers Housing Alliance Webpage here.**](#)

Ways to Get Involved in the SSJ Newcomer Housing Alliance sponsored ministry of the Sisters of Saint Joseph:

- Volunteer -

Work directly with families, serve in our distribution center or join our communication team.

- Give Financially -

Support our ministry financially with gift cards, checks and online donations.

- Donate Items -

Donate furniture and household items for newcomer families. Either donate individual items or donate a kit.

- Learn More -

Contact S. Eileen McNally, Refugee Coordinator
267-285-6769, emcnally@ssjphila.org.

Shayna Landis Bell
Refugee Residence Director
267-780-9292
slandisbell@ssjphila.org

[Newcomers Housing Alliance Wish List.](#)

OTHER FORMS OF ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION

Thursday, January 11, 2024- Upcoming Webinar Catholic Mobilizing Network. The U.S. Death Penalty in 2024: A State of the Union.

What is the status of the death penalty throughout the U.S. as we enter into 2024?

This question will be answered as we hear from experts in this informative, free, one-hour webinar. You will hear about the landscape of the death penalty throughout the nation, and walk away with an increased awareness of what lies ahead in the new year.

[Registration information is available here.](#)

FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

World Day of Peace 2024, "Actions for Peace: Our Commitment to the # Global Goals."

January 1, 2024 In his annual [Message for the World Day of Peace](#), Pope Francis urges world leaders to ensure that progress in developing forms of artificial intelligence "will ultimately serve the cause of human fraternity and peace." **The message, dedicated to the theme 'Artificial Intelligence and Peace,' was released by the Vatican on Thursday ahead of the 57th World Day of Peace, 1 January 2024.**

January 2024 National Slavery & Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

January is National Human Trafficking Prevention Month – an important time to reflect on the resilience of trafficking survivors and recognize the efforts of those who work tirelessly to prevent and eliminate this inhumane and devastating form of abuse and exploitation. For more information on Human Trafficking please see link below from the U.S. Department of State.

[To Learn More About Human Trafficking CLICK HERE.](#)

LOOKING AHEAD...

January 11, 2024. Catholic Mobilizing Network Upcoming Webinar. The U.S. Death Penalty in 2024: A State of the Union. | 2-3 p.m. ET (11 a.m.-12 p.m. PT) . Virtual, hosted on Zoom. Hear from experts in this informative, free, one-hour webinar. You will hear about the landscape of the death penalty throughout the nation, and walk away with an increased awareness of what lies ahead in the new year. To register for this free event, click [here](#).

January 14, 2024. Office of Black Catholics. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Interactive Prayer Service. Saint Katharine Drexel Church 1920 Providence Avenue, Chester PA 19013.