



Institute Leadership Team Supports Climate Change Legal Brief

Backgrounder

The Sisters of Mercy Institute Leadership Team (ILT) and the Northeast Community Leadership Team (CLT) signed onto an amicus curiae (“friend of the court”) brief filed September 5, 2017 with the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals on behalf of 21 youth. The youth, aged 10-21 and from around the country, are suing the United States government to protect their fundamental right to a climate system capable of sustaining human life. The defendants are President Trump and the heads of his executive agencies (Rex Tillerson, Scott Pruitt, Rick Perry, etc.). The case is about whether the U.S. Constitution and the Public Trust Doctrine protect young people’s and future generations’ right to a healthy climate system. The youth are asking the federal government to plan for climate recovery and commit to emissions reductions that would be meaningful to their future.

The case

Lawsuits over climate change brought by American youth with the support of non-profit organizations such as Our Children’s Trust have been making their way through the U.S. court system since 2012. While most of the cases eventually have been dismissed, a federal court in Eugene, Oregon in 2016 allowed this case to proceed despite arguments to dismiss by the federal government and the fossil fuel industry. You may read more [here](#).

Supporters

The ILT, the Northeast CLT and Northeast Justice Council in November 2013 were among only five faith organizations that signed onto an amicus curiae brief in a D.C. circuit case that was dismissed in early 2014. The ILT, the Northeast CLT and Justice Council, the West Midwest CLT and Justice Team and Mercy Ecology Inc., signed onto a similar brief filed November 6, 2014 with the U.S. Supreme Court. Last year, the Leadership Conference for Women Religious (LCWR) and

the Global Catholic Climate Movement were signatories on another brief. Other signatories to briefs in these cases have included climate scientists, legal scholars and prominent economists, mayors and representatives of native communities.

The Urgency of this Case

Various government agencies on the international and national levels have issued increasingly dire reports over the past few years warning about the current and future impacts of climate change. They include the [National Climate Assessment](#) and the [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change \(IPCC\)](#).

President Obama outlined a climate plan in 2013, but with what many experts have said are inadequate targets for carbon emissions based on scientific standards. In June 2014, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued proposed regulations on carbon emissions from existing power plants. It is widely expected that President Trump will eliminate those regulations, after signing an executive order in March 2017 mandating the EPA to review the plan and following his announcement in June 2017 that the U.S. will withdraw from the 2015 Paris climate agreement.

While the House of Representatives has a growing bipartisan Climate Solutions Caucus made up of Democrats and Republicans who acknowledge the urgency of addressing climate change, Congress hasn't taken any significant steps towards proposing mediation efforts.

Why Mercy?

- Our commitment to serving children throughout our history
- Chapter Declaration: "We are led...to act in ways which contribute to a sustainable future for our Institute, Church and Earth"
- Chapter Declaration: "acting in solidarity with impoverished people"
- Critical Concerns: "To reverence Earth and work more effectively toward the sustainability of life"
- Northeast Community's Corporate Stand on Climate Change:
"We, the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas – Northeast Community and Companions believe the impacts of climate change around the world, from floods to droughts to disease, disproportionately affect poor, vulnerable communities, especially women, who regularly do the work of growing food, collecting water and fuel and raising children. Therefore we support actions and policies that educate federal legislators and others on the critical

need for action on comprehensive climate change and energy, including international adaptation and mitigation.”

- Catholic Social Teaching: Life and dignity of the human person, option for the poor and vulnerable, solidarity, care for God’s creation
- Pope Francis: “If present trends continue, this century may well witness extraordinary climate change and an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems, with serious consequences for all of us.” (*Laudato Si*, paragraph #24)
- Pope Francis: “Climate change is a global problem with serious implications, environmental, social, economic, political, and for the distribution of goods; it represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.” (*Laudato Si* #25)
- U.S. Bishops, *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, June 2001-- “In facing climate change, what we already know requires a response; it cannot be easily dismissed. Significant levels of scientific consensus — even in a situation with less than full certainty, where the consequences of not acting are serious — justifies, indeed can obligate, our taking action intended to avert potential dangers. In other words, if enough evidence indicates that the present course of action could jeopardize humankind's well- being, prudence dictates taking mitigating or preventative action.”

Institute Leadership Team Statement of Support for Lawsuit in Legal Brief:

The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas’ Institute Leadership Team represents nearly 2,800 vowed women religious with a commitment to persons who are poor, especially women and children. One of the directives of the Sisters of Mercy is to “reverence Earth and work more effectively toward the sustainability of life.” We advocate for carbon-emission reduction measures and work to reduce the carbon footprint of the congregation’s institutions as we continue to further our efforts to realize sustainability of life.