



IEWPOINT

Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference

Picking sides: How does PCC determine positions on legislation?

Thousands of bills are introduced in the Pennsylvania General Assembly during the two-year legislative session. The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC) reviews, tracks and takes positions on a few hundred.

Bills that relate to the interests of the Church are discussed and debated by the laity, religious men and women, and clergy who make up the PCC's departments, the Pennsylvania Catholic Health Association and PCC Administrative Board. Through this deliberative process, the PCC takes official positions and shares them with legislators and the public.

Each proposal is evaluated by asking:

- Does the program or policy affect the common good?
- Does the proposal uphold the life and inherent dignity of the human person from conception to natural death?
- Does the legislation concern morality, human life and dignity, health, welfare, the family, education, civil rights, religious liberty, social justice?
- Does the program or policy offer preferential treatment for the poor and vulnerable?
- Will it affect the Church as an institution?
- Will it affect other Catholic institutions such as schools, hospitals or long-term care facilities, charities or other ministries?
- Will it affect individual Catholics in the practice of their faith in the workplace, school or in the community?
- Is there a potential conflict with religious liberty or the freedom of conscience?

Many voices joined together either for or against an issue can influence the legislative climate and improve the chances for a favorable legislative outcome.

Some issues such as abortion and euthanasia involve "intrinsically evil" actions. They must always be rejected and opposed and must never be supported or condoned. Others such as the tax exempt status of Church properties are still important, but require prudential judgement when taking a position.

PCC weighs the gravity of these moral questions in setting its policies. On other issues, PCC examines the potential impact or benefit to the Church's members to determine its stand. PCC's positions always uphold and promote the teachings of the Church, but there is one other question that is asked to guide lobbying efforts: what are the bill's prospects for passage?

Successful advocacy groups engage in debate and seize the opportunities dictated by the political climate. The PCC is no different. When setting its legislative agenda, the PCC must

make a realistic assessment of what should and what can be accomplished.

For the most important and promising issues, efforts are made to affect and shape public opinion. The PCC uses tools such as the PCC Institute for Public Policy, the Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network and this *Viewpoint* newsletter to educate and activate citizens to join the debate. These resources are available at www.pacatholic.org

Legislators are interested and influenced by their own constituents. Many voices joined together either for or against an issue can influence the legislative climate and improve the chances for a favorable legislative outcome.



What is the PCC?

The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference is the public affairs arm of Pennsylvania's Catholic bishops and the Catholic dioceses of Pennsylvania. There are 10 Catholic dioceses in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Eight are Latin Rite dioceses, fully contained within the Commonwealth. Two are Byzantine Rite dioceses with Apostolic Sees in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

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Legislative Review

The PCC **supports** the following legislation:

Education Department

PCC advocates for education policies that are consistent with Catholic values and uphold parental rights and responsibilities. Issues of importance may affect students in Catholic schools, but also Catholic students in public schools.

Senate Bill 1

Opportunity Scholarship and Educational Improvement Tax Credit Act - This legislation increases the funding for the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program and provides Opportunity Scholarships, or vouchers, to qualified families to send their children to the school of their choice.

House Bill 1708

Students and Schools Rescue Act - This bill offers vouchers and an increase to EITC with a slightly different but very similar approach to school choice as Senate Bill 1.

House Bill 1330

Increase to Educational Improvement Tax Credit - Already passed by the House of Representatives with a vote of 190-7, this bill would increase the EITC program to \$100 million in the first year and even more in subsequent years. It also expands the allowable amount for tax credit that can be obtained by contributing businesses.

Senate Bill 64

Transportation Provisions in Public School Code - This bill expands pupil transportation eligibility for public and nonpublic school students.

Senate Bill 794

Link-To-Learn - This legislation would provide grants to schools for technology equipment and services.

House Bill 991

Retail Food Facility Safety Act - This legislation provides an exemption for volunteer and nonprofit organizations that only occasionally prepare and sell food.

Social Concerns Department

PCC monitors pro-life, social justice, and family life issues and also assists diocesan Catholic Charities agencies by monitoring legislation and regulations that affect them and the services they offer. The PCC advocates on behalf of low-income citizens and others in need.

House Bill 574

Abortion Clinic Regulations - This bill would hold abortion facilities to the same standards, requirements, and procedures as other freestanding ambulatory surgical facilities. This bill passed the House with a vote of 148-43. The bill must now be considered in the Senate.

Senate Bill 732

Abortion Clinic Regulations - SB 732 was amended with language similar to what was passed by the House as HB 574. It was further amended in the House Health Committee and awaits further action in the fall.

Senate Bill 326

Certificate of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth - This legislation, signed into law in June, allows parents of stillborn children to file for a Certificate of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth. It applies retroactively as well as prospectively.

Pennsylvania Catholic Health Association

The Pennsylvania Catholic Health Association (PCHA), an associate of the PCC, is comprised of the Catholic hospitals, nursing homes, health systems and free-standing health care agencies in PA. The PCHA supports the Catholic health care ministry in PA through witnessing to Gospel values, advocacy, communication, networking, education and united action. The PCHA monitors legislation and regulatory matters and participates in public policy development affecting Catholic health care ministry.

- Senate Bill 3 **Opt-out for abortion coverage in health care exchanges** - This legislation assures that the taxpayer supported health insurance exchange established in Pennsylvania pursuant to the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (PPACA) does not include coverage of elective abortions. The bill in no way undermines national health care reform.
- House Bill 1583 **Protective equipment for motorcycle riders** - HB 1583 would require motorcycle riders to wear protective headgear. It would reinstate the helmet law that was repealed in 2006. The bill will save lives, reduce health care costs and contributes to public safety and the common good.
- Senate Bill 136 **Continuing Care Retirement Community Act** - This bill would allow licensed continuing care retirement communities to make a limited number of medical assistance certified beds available to residents whose financial circumstances have deteriorated. It could prevent possible transfer of the resident to another care site and provide some level of reimbursement to the facility.
- House Bill 342 **Community-Based Health Care Provider Access Act** - HB 342 would help reduce unnecessary use of emergency health services and it expands and improves access to preventative care, chronic care and disease management.
- Senate Bill 115
House Bill 58 **Mental Health Procedures Act** - These two similar bills would encourage early treatment of chronic mental illness before more acute problems develop which would lead to inpatient treatment.
- House Bill 223 **Health care coverage for telehealth** - This bill would provide health care coverage of telehealth. Physicians, licensed in another state, could remotely receive medical data for a patient in Pennsylvania for the purpose of consultation, diagnosis or treatment.
- Senate Bill 1099 **Minimum Wage Law (Overtime Pay)** - This bill would allow health care providers to continue using an "8/80 schedule" concerning overtime pay for health care professionals. Employees who work more than eight hours in one day or more than 80 hours in 14 days are to be compensated fairly for their overtime. Health care providers believe the use of 8/80 scheduling has been helpful in staffing appropriately to meet patient needs.

*The PCC and PCHA **oppose** the following legislation:*

- Senate Bill 437 **Compassionate Assistance for Rape Emergencies** - This bill would mandate hospitals and health care facilities that provide services to sexual assault victims to provide emergency contraception (EC) in all cases. Catholic health care providers have a long-standing position of support for compassionate care and appropriate medical treatment for victims of sexual assault; but because emergency contraception could be abortifacient in some instances, the mandate would be problematic. There is no conscience exemption language in the bill.



The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference advocates many different issues - Catholic education, religious liberty, life & dignity of the human person, marriage & family, social justice, health care, and faith & politics. To receive action alerts on active issues, join the Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network at www.pacatholic.org/advocacy

Join the Public Policy Conversation Online



The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC) can now be found on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pacatholic and on Twitter at www.twitter.com/pacatholic. Concerned citizens can log on and "like" or "follow" the PCC to stay informed about public policy issues affecting Pennsylvania's Catholics.



You can receive notification when something new is posted to the PCC Institute for Public Policy website at www.pacatholic.org using the RSS Feed feature. Or get in on the debate through the Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network. By taking action you will be enrolled to receive the latest action alerts on the legislative issues that matter to you most. Sign up today at www.pacatholic.org/advocacy.



There is an important conversation and exchange of information happening online about all issues, including those that relate to the Catholic Church and her teaching and morals. Be a part of it.

Join us. Be heard. Make a difference.



Viewpoint is published by the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference, the public affairs agency of Pennsylvania's Catholic bishops. For more information, contact Amy B. Hill, APR, editor, at (717) 238-9613 or e-mail at abhill@pacatholic.org. Visit our website at www.pacatholic.org.

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