



IEWPOINT

Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference

ON THE HORIZON: A Catholic Outlook for the 2009-2010 Pennsylvania Legislative Session

Change is on the horizon, ready or not. There will be a new occupant in the White House in Washington, DC, and a different Congress. The Capitol in Harrisburg welcomes many new faces and new leaders in the state legislature. Although the names and faces of legislators may be different, the need to advocate on behalf of the common good remains the same.

The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC) is the public affairs arm of Pennsylvania's Catholic bishops. There are 10 Catholic dioceses in the Commonwealth, eight are Latin Rite dioceses and two are Byzantine Rite dioceses. Nearly 3.9 Pennsylvanians are Catholic.

The PCC reviews and tracks hundreds of legislative bills in each session and speaks about issues to legislators and other public policy leaders. Sometimes the goal is to change the status quo, for example, school choice or improving access to health care. The PCC is a long-time proponent of implementing a school voucher program and reform that makes health care available especially to the poor and most vulnerable. Sometimes the PCC tries to preserve the status quo, such as proposing a marriage amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution. This action is intended to protect the institution of marriage.

The PCC has a comprehensive list of legislative priorities (*see inside*). Our issues cover a wide range

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Through the PCC, the Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania formulate positions on government programs, legislation, and policies that affect the common good and the interests of the Church.

The PCC represents and speaks officially for the Church before all branches of state government and other groups. It helps to identify and advocate for the needs of Pennsylvania citizens concerning morality, health, welfare, education, and human and civil rights. The PCC advocates for public funding and seeks ways to prevent and eliminate conditions that cause moral, social, educational, and health problems. Through this work, the PCC aims to foster public understanding about the Church's teaching and concern about Pennsylvania's citizens.

of categories: Catholic Education, Religious Liberty, Life and the Dignity of the Human Person, Marriage and Family, Social Justice, Health Care, and more. PCC has an ambitious agenda, but it cannot achieve any of it alone. Citizens must voice their concern about issues to influence legislators.

The PCC encourages you to contact your state representative and state senator. Call, write or e-mail and tell them you care about your community and about these issues.

Contact information for legislators in the local telephone directory, or concerned Catholics can send an e-mail directly to legislators by logging on to:

www.pacatholic.org

Priorities for Pennsylvania's Catholic Schools

Currently, there are more than 160,000 children in Pennsylvania's diocesan Catholic schools. The PCC Education Department represents the Church on behalf of students in Catholic schools and in public schools regarding issues of justice and morality. Here are a few of the issues the department will advocate, in no particular order:

- Monitor and promote passage of a state budget that includes existing programs for nonpublic schools (transportation, technology, textbooks, etc., and auxiliary services) and appropriate increases.
- Monitor legislation regarding funding for pre-school education and support efforts to include nonpublic school students in such funding.
- Support and promote increase in funding for Educational Improvement Tax Credits (EITC).
- Support and promote religious childcare legislation.
- Monitor legislation that would be harmful to Catholic schools and Catholic school students.

- Oppose legislation that would grant oversight of employee relations in Catholic schools to the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board.
- Support and promote school voucher legislation.
- Support and promote special education funding legislation.
- Oppose any legislation that blurs the distinction between for-profit and non-profit religious childcare facilities under the Public Welfare Code.
- Monitor and oppose any legislation or executive branch actions that would unfairly or excessively regulate Catholic preschools and childcare centers.
- Assist the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in developing and promoting federal tax credit legislation for individuals and businesses to promote parental choice in education.
- Monitor and oppose legislative or organizational activity harmful to Catholic Schools regarding the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association.

Social Concerns and Public Policy

The PCC Social Concerns Department monitors pro-life, social justice, and family-life issues and helps diocesan Catholic Charities agencies by monitoring legislation and regulations that affect them and the services they offer. It advocates on behalf of low-income and other needy populations groups. The department expects to track these and other issues:

- Oppose attempts to weaken Pennsylvania's Abortion Control Act
- Support positive pro-life initiatives intended to provide additional protections for unborn children
- Continue to oppose embryonic stem cell research while advocating in support of using adult stem cells for treatment purposes
- Support state/federal funding for Real Alternatives, Inc.
- Support appropriate capital punishment legislation
- Support a moratorium on the death penalty in Pennsylvania

- Oppose efforts to weaken or eliminate access to confidential birth records in adoption proceedings
- Monitor legislation and regulations governing adoption services
- Monitor legislation, regulations and policies affecting Catholic social service agencies
- Continue to review and support as needed legislation intended to help low-income Pennsylvanians, those in need, and the disabled
- Support an amendment to the Pennsylvania Constitution banning same-sex marriage and functionally equivalent relationships
- Review legislation providing protections under law based upon one's sexual orientation
- Continue to work with the statewide Welfare Coalition
- Review legislation dealing with immigration reform

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Priorities in Catholic Health Care

The Pennsylvania Catholic Health Association (PCHA), an associate of the PCC, comprises 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 witness to Gospel values, advocacy, communication, networking, education and united action. The PCHA monitors legislation and regulatory matters and participates in public policy development affecting the Catholic health ministry.

- Expand access to health care by seeking legislative remedies to reduce the number of uninsured, particularly children, the poor and working poor, and remove barriers to coverage in private health insurance products.
- Advocate for access to behavioral health and substance abuse services and health care for immigrants.
- Monitor health care reform that may affect Catholic identity and threaten religious freedom, and seek legislative, regulatory or policy remedies if appropriate.
- Monitor developments in managed care public policy, and seek protection for consumers and providers that address: ability of Catholic organizations to participate in health service and insurance offerings; standards/principles for accountable managed care; ethical issues for Catholic organizations; allowing provider-sponsored organizations to coordinate care.
- Continue to advocate for ethical oversight in use of public funding for research and development initiatives.

- Monitor effects of welfare reform especially as changes relate to access, availability, and provision of health care services, and seek remedial action as appropriate.
- Advocate for reform across the entire continuum of long-term care services.
- Monitor regulations for assisted living services.
- Take action as appropriate upon general issues with a moral, ethical or ministerial dimension, in particular, tax exemption and charitable accountability.
- Monitor the development of health information networks for retention of privacy and confidentiality of information.
- Monitor developments to improve end-of-life care.
- Monitor developments which relate to ethical challenges of bioterrorism and pandemics.
- Address the malpractice liability crisis as it relates to access to health care services.
- Oppose legislation and regulations that would mandate Catholic hospitals to provide emergency contraception in treating victims of sexual assault and thus violate Church teaching, and act to protect provider and institutional exercise of religious, ethical and moral conscience.

Social Concerns continued

- Oppose attempts to weaken Pennsylvania's Seasonal Farm Labor Act (ACT 93-1978)
- Continue to support the Homeowner's Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program (HEMAP)
- Support state funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)
- Work with others in support of increasing federal funding for programs that assist victims of violence and their families
- Monitor threats to the exercise of religious liberty in our Commonwealth
- Support efforts to strengthen Pennsylvania's existing laws regulating obscenity
- Review criminal justice issues as needed

PENNSYLVANIA Catholic Advocacy Network

Log on and sign up today!

As Catholics, we are called to be conscientious citizens. We must take an active role in the public policy debate by speaking out to defend the dignity and rights of all.

The Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC), the public affairs agency of Pennsylvania's Bishops, invites you to become part of a grassroots advocacy network that will provide information and education about key issues and will present a collective voice of concerned citizens to state lawmakers.

Log on, sign up and speak out for your Catholic faith.

www.pacatholic.org



Viewpoint is published at least four times a year 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 email at abhill@pacatholic.org. Visit our website at www.pacatholic.org.

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