



# IEWPOINT

Newsletter of the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference

## **Opportunities and Challenges in the 2011-2012 Legislative Session**

The new year is ringing in many changes at the State Capitol - a new gubernatorial administration, a new legislature, new leaders and new opportunities and challenges for the Pennsylvania Catholic Conference (PCC).

During the next two years, the Pennsylvania General Assembly will consider as many as 4,500 bills, although typically only 200 will become law. The PCC will track 200-300 of them.

PCC advocates for a wide variety of issues. Most of them fall into one or more of these categories:

**Catholic education** - PCC advocates for education policies that are consistent with Catholic values and uphold parental rights and responsibilities. Issues may affect students in Catholic schools, but also Catholic students in public schools. School vouchers, Educational Improvement Tax Credit scholarships, equity in state funding for textbooks, materials and special ed, sex education mandates, and upholding our right to maintain the Catholic identity of our schools are a few examples. (see *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Schools*, USCCB, 2005)

**Religious liberty** - Each of us has a right to religious freedom, which enables us to live and act in accord with our God-given dignity. The ability of Catholic schools to maintain their identity, Catholic health care facilities to remain true to their religious mission, or the Church to be sovereign over its own affairs is sometimes compromised in regulatory or legislative proposals. The right of individuals to exercise their conscience in their profession or daily lives can also be threatened. The right to exercise religious freedom publicly and privately by individuals and institutions needs to be constantly defended. The PCC keeps a close watch on proposals that potentially pose conflicts. (see *Faithful Citizenship*, 49)

**Life & the dignity of the human person** -

Human life is sacred. Direct attacks on innocent human beings are never morally acceptable. Within our society, life is under attack from abortion, euthanasia and destruction of human embryos for research. These intrinsic evils must always be opposed. As Catholics we are also compelled to oppose genocide, torture, unjust warfare, and the death penalty. (see *Faithful Citizenship*, 44)

**Marriage & family** - The family, based on marriage between a man and a woman, is the fundamental unit of society and the sanctuary for the creation and nurturing of children. It should be defended and strengthened, not redefined or undermined by permitting same-sex unions or other distortions of marriage. Respect for the family is a priority in PCC's social and economic policy positions. (see *Faithful Citizenship*, 46)

**Social justice** - While the common good embraces all, those who are weak, vulnerable, and most in need deserve preferential concern. PCC advocates for issues that address the needs of the poor, vulnerable and marginalized including unborn children, people with disabilities, the elderly, the terminally ill, the unemployed and underemployed, and victims of injustice, oppression and discrimination. (see *Faithful Citizenship*, 50-51)

**Health care** - Every person has a right to adequate health care. A health care system must strive to serve the common good by benefitting each person as well as society at large. The PCC and the Pennsylvania Catholic Health Association (PCHA) advocate for issues that affect Catholic health care and speak out in defense of life and justice in health care, recognizing the particular needs of children, the elderly, the poor, and the underserved. (see *A Vision for Healthcare Reform by the Catholic Church in PA*)



## 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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## Priorities for Catholic Education

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:

- Support and promote school voucher legislation.
- Support and promote increase in funding for the EITC.
- Monitor and promote passage of a state budget that includes existing programs for nonpublic school students (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 religious childcare legislation.
- Monitor legislation that would be harmful to Catholic schools and Catholic school students.
- Support and promote special education funding legislation.
- Oppose any legislation that blurs the distinction between Article IX and Article X 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 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 (PIAA).

## Social Concerns Priorities

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 population 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, especially passage of a bill prohibiting the use of taxpayer dollars to fund abortion.
- 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.

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# Priorities for 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. PCHA supports the Catholic health care ministry in PA through witness to Gospel values, advocacy, communication, networking, education and united action. PCHA monitors legislation and regulatory matters and participates in policy development affecting the Catholic health ministry.

- Support legislation to reduce the number of uninsured, particularly children, and remove barriers to private health insurance coverage.
- Monitor health care reform as it relates to collaboration and partnering (merger, acquisitions, joint ventures and anti-trust) that may affect Catholic identity and threaten religious freedom.
- Monitor developments in managed care public policy and seek protection for consumers and providers.
- Support the use of tobacco settlement monies for health care needs and continue to advocate for ethical oversight in use of funding for research and development initiatives.
- Address issues in the Medical Assistance Program.
- 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 health care including long-term care services.
- Follow developments in the role of licensure, absent the oversight of Certificate of Need, and participate as proposed changes to the health care facility licensure regulations that affect access and quality of health care services move through the regulatory review process.
- Monitor the issue of nonprofit to for-profit hospital conversions.
- Take action as appropriate upon general issues with a moral, ethical or ministerial dimension, in particular, aid in dying, end of life care, tax exemption and charitable accountability.
- Monitor health workforce issues, in particular, the shortage of health care staff.
- Monitor developments which relate to ethical challenges of bioterrorism and pandemics.
- Address the malpractice liability crisis as it relates to access to healthcare services.
- Monitor recommendations of the "Improving End-of-Life Experiences for Pennsylvanians" task force report and address issues as appropriate.

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- 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.
- Review legislation providing protections under law based upon one's sexual orientation.
- Continue to work with the statewide Coalition for Low Income Pennsylvanians (CLIP).
- Review legislation dealing with immigration reform.
- Monitor welfare reform legislation.
- Continue to support the Homeowner's Emergency Mortgage Assistance Program (HEMAP).
- 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.
- Address child welfare issues as needed.



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## Are you a member of the network?

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 PCC 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.

The PCC advocates a wide variety of issues - Catholic education, religious liberty, life & the dignity of the human person, marriage & family, social justice, health care, or faith & politics. You can sign up to receive information on all issues or choose to receive alerts only on what you are most passionate about.

Log on to [www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org) to join the Pennsylvania Catholic Advocacy Network today!

**Join us. Let the Catholic voice 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 [abhil@pacatholic.org](mailto:abhil@pacatholic.org). Visit our website at [www.pacatholic.org](http://www.pacatholic.org).

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**VIEWPOINT**



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