



## 2010 Legislative Agenda

The Virginia Catholic Conference is the legislative advocacy agency of the Commonwealth's Catholic bishops and their two dioceses. The Conference's advocacy is guided by the consistent framework of Catholic moral and social teaching. In their November 2007 *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship* statement, the U.S. Catholic bishops explain, **“Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access to those things required for human decency – food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life.”**

The Conference plans to pursue the initiatives described below during the 2010 Virginia General Assembly session, which convenes for 60 days beginning on January 13, 2010. The Conference's agenda was formulated in consultation with its Education and Respect Life, Health, and Social Concerns advisory committees, and was approved on November 6, 2009, by its Management Committee, headed by Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde and Richmond Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo.

### *Respect Life Issues*

#### **Taxpayer Conscience Protections / Ethical Research Standards:**

- Prohibiting the use of state funds for abortions, Planned Parenthood, and research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses.
- Opposing legislation that would promote or provide state funding for research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses, or for entities that conduct such research.

### **Protections for Unborn Children & Women's Health:**

- Requiring that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given an opportunity to view an ultrasound image of her unborn child.
- Requiring that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given information about an unborn child's ability to experience pain by 20 weeks gestation.
- Requiring abortion clinics to be licensed by the state and subject to regulations applicable to outpatient surgery centers.

### **Death Penalty Opposition:**

- Opposing all proposals to expand the circumstances under which death sentences can be imposed under Virginia law.

### **Public Safety:**

- Requiring that background checks be conducted on potential gun purchasers at gun shows (as is currently required for purchases from licensed gun dealers).

## ***Health and Social Concerns Issues***

### **Government Safety-Net Services:**

- Opposing budget reductions to programs that provide shelter, health care, and other basic necessities to low-income Virginia residents.
- Providing state-subsidized rental assistance to working families whose wages do not enable them to afford adequate housing.
- Implementing a cost-of-living adjustment for payments to low-income families under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program.

- Opposing the diversion of TANF funding toward non-TANF purposes.
- Reducing the waiting list for community-based services for individuals with intellectual disabilities under Virginia’s “Mental Retardation Waiver” program.

### **Economic and Environmental Concerns:**

- Requiring Virginia’s payday and car-title lending industries to operate under the same annual-percentage-rate cap on interest (36 percent) as other small-loan lenders operating in Virginia.
- Implementing a Virginia Housing Trust Fund for the development of affordable housing for low-income households.
- Banning the dumping of mountaintop-removal coal-mining waste into nearby streams.

### **Health Care and Assistance for Immigrants:**

- Expanding access to health care for low-income families and individuals.
- Enabling Medicaid eligibility for immigrants who have legally resided in Virginia for five years and who meet the income criteria. [Currently, in most cases Virginia bars Medicaid coverage for legal immigrants who are not U.S. citizens unless they arrived in the U.S. before August 22, 1996. The federal government, however, gives states permission to grant eligibility to those who have legally resided in the U.S. for five years.]
- Supporting access of undocumented immigrant children to state colleges and universities.

### **Restoration of Rights / Community Reentry for Ex-Offenders:**

- Restoring voting rights to individuals with felony convictions who have completed their sentences.
- Eliminating the lifetime ban on family TANF benefits for people with drug-related felony convictions who are reentering their communities after incarceration.

## *Education and Family Life Issues*

### **Marriage, Family Life, and Protecting Children:**

- Opposing attempts to repeal the marriage-protection provision in Virginia's constitution (which specifies that marriage is between one man and one woman).
- Opposing attempts to require public schools to include teaching on contraceptive methods within their curriculum guidelines.
- Preventing minors' access to pornography.

### **Assistance for School Parents:**

- Establishing an income-tax credit for businesses and individuals who contribute to scholarship foundations or public-school foundations.
- Establishing an income-tax credit for purchases of school supplies by parents whose children attend public or nonpublic schools or are home schooled.

## **You can make a difference!**

In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, the U.S. bishops state, "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do." Two important ways to build a culture of life, provide for the poorest and most vulnerable in our midst, and enhance family life and educational opportunities for children during the 2010 Virginia General Assembly session are described in the paragraphs that follow.

- Sign up for the Virginia Catholic Conference's e-mail Advocacy Network, so that you can receive regular alerts on issues considered during the 2010 session. To join, visit [www.vacatholic.org](http://www.vacatholic.org), click on the "Join the Network!" icon, and complete the short form that is provided. Your free membership in this network will enable you to communicate directly with your local legislators without looking up their addresses or composing letters. Alerts include pre-drafted messages that you can send ("as is" or

modified to suit your own style) to your elected representatives with just a few mouse clicks. It's effective advocacy with very little time commitment!

- Participate in **Catholic Advocacy Day** on **Thursday, January 28, 2010**, from 8:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m., at St. Peter's Church (adjacent to Capitol Square in Richmond). The day begins with prayer and issue briefings, followed by constituent visits at legislators' offices, "debriefing," and closing prayer. For registration information, visit [www.vacatholic.org](http://www.vacatholic.org) or call (804) 225-8565. Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde and Richmond Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo will offer welcoming remarks at this important advocacy event. Please register and plan to attend!