



2011 Legislative Agenda

The Virginia Catholic Conference is the legislative advocacy agency of the Commonwealth's Catholic bishops and their two dioceses. During the 2011 Virginia General Assembly Session, the Conference will pursue the initiatives described herein.

This agenda – guided by Catholic moral and social teaching – was formulated in consultation with its Education and Respect Life, Health and Social Concerns Policy Committees. It was subsequently approved by the Conference's 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 and for research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses.
- Excluding health plans that cover abortion from any health care exchanges established in Virginia based on the new federal health-care law.

Protections for Unborn Children & Women's Health:

- Supporting recognition by the Virginia General Assembly that the right to life begins at conception.
- Requiring abortion clinics to be licensed by the state and subject to regulations applicable to outpatient surgery centers.
- 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 the effects an abortion may have on future pregnancies.
- Opposing legislation that would impose regulations on pro-life pregnancy resource centers based solely on their refusal to provide abortion or contraception.

- Protecting pregnant women against threats of physical, emotional or psychological harm for deciding not to have an abortion.

Death Penalty Opposition:

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

Public Safety:

- Closing Virginia’s “gun-show loophole” by requiring unlicensed gun sellers at gun shows to conduct background checks on potential purchasers (to determine if the potential buyer has a criminal record or a mental health history making him or her ineligible to own a firearm).¹

Health and Social Concerns Issues

Government Safety-Net Services:

- Protecting Medicaid reimbursement rates against projected continuing declines.
- Opposing budget reductions to programs that provide 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.
- Restoring Virginia’s Earned Income Tax Credit to its previous level.²

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.
- Establishing a Virginia Housing Trust Fund for the development of affordable housing for low-income households.

¹ This requirement currently applies to licensed gun dealers.

² A harmful change made in 2010 will impact married persons with three or more children who earn less than \$49,000. Unless corrected, the change will affect 114,000 low-income working families in Virginia.

- Enabling Virginia localities to establish Housing Trust Funds.
- Reducing stream pollution (caused by mountaintop removal coal mining) through legislation to ban the dumping of mining waste in intermittent, perennial or ephemeral streams or other waters of the Commonwealth.

Health Care and Assistance for Immigrants:

- Providing access to prenatal care for low-income immigrant women.
- Enabling Medicaid eligibility for immigrants who have legally resided in Virginia for five years and who meet the income criteria.³
- Restoring “worker permits” to the list of documents accepted by the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles to prove legal presence to obtain a driver’s license.
- Prohibiting officers from inquiring about the immigration status of those who report being victims of a crime or witnesses to a crime.
- Opposing harmful aspects of potential measures aimed at immigrants (*e.g.*, provisions impacting services that charities provide).

Criminal/Juvenile Justice and Community Reentry:

- Eliminating the lifetime ban on family TANF benefits for people with drug-related felony convictions who are reentering their communities after incarceration.
- Restoring voting rights to individuals with nonviolent felony convictions who have completed their sentences.
- Establishing a youth’s right to appeal a Commonwealth’s Attorney’s decision that he or she be tried as an adult under a law that applies to a wide range of offenses.

Education and Family Life Issues

Marriage, Family Life and Protecting Children:

- Opposing attempts to repeal the marriage-protection provision in Virginia’s constitution.
- Protecting the ability of religious institutions to make personnel, housing and other decisions that reflect their beliefs regarding marriage.

³ 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, or unless they have worked for 40 quarters. The federal government, however, gives states permission to grant eligibility to those arriving on or after August 22, 1996, as long as they have legally resided in the U.S. for five years.

- Opposing attempts to require public schools to include teaching on contraceptive methods within their curriculum guidelines.
- Preventing minors' access to pornography.

Education Opportunities and Services:

- Establishing an income-tax credit for businesses whose donations provide scholarships to low-income students to attend nonpublic K-12 schools.
- Securing access in all Virginia localities to federally funded services for which nonpublic-school students and teachers qualify.

You can make a difference!

- Sign up for the Virginia Catholic Conference's Email Advocacy Network, so that you can receive regular alerts and updates on issues considered during the 2011 Session. To join, visit www.vacatholic.org, click 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 27, 2011 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 (in English and Spanish), visit www.vacatholic.org. 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!
- Join the Virginia Catholic Conference on Facebook to learn more about opportunities for involvement. Follow the Conference on Twitter (www.twitter.com/VaCatholicConf) for the latest news on legislative issues.