



2016 Legislative Agenda

The Virginia Catholic Conference – the public policy agency of the Commonwealth’s Catholic bishops and their two dioceses – will pursue the initiatives described below during the 2016 Virginia General Assembly session, which convenes for 60 days beginning on January 13. The Conference’s agenda was formulated in consultation with its Education and Respect Life, Health and Social Concerns policy committees, and was approved on November 13, 2015, by its Management Committee, headed by Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde and Richmond Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo. [NOTE: *Other items may be added to the Conference’s agenda as legislation is filed and reviewed.*]

Respect Life:

- Restricting state funding of abortion and abortion providers to the greatest extent possible.
- Preserving pro-life gains made in prior years.
- Supporting the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.¹
- Opposing legislation to include within the state’s definition of birth control anything deemed by the FDA to be a “contraceptive method.”²
- Prohibiting state investment in research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses and in entities that conduct such research.

¹ This bill, if enacted, would add to Virginia law constitutionally permitted protections for unborn children from the stage at which substantial medical evidence indicates they are capable of feeling pain.

² The FDA’s list of currently approved “contraceptives” includes abortifacients and sterilization procedures.

- Closing Virginia's "gun-show loophole" by requiring unlicensed gun sellers at gun shows to conduct background checks on potential purchasers.³

Capital Cases/ Criminal & Juvenile Justice:

- Exempting individuals with serious mental illness from execution.
- Opposing legislation to give special secret status to pharmacies to compound execution drugs using undisclosed materials.
- Investing in community-based alternatives for juvenile offenders.
- Opposing disproportionate cuts to community-based juvenile justice programs.
- Increasing the minimum threshold for the crime of "grand larceny" from \$200 to \$500.
- Making juveniles convicted of non-homicide felonies eligible for sentence modification after 20 years.
- Eliminating the lifetime ban on Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) benefits for people with drug-related felony convictions who are reentering their communities after incarceration.
- Restoring voting rights to individuals convicted of non-violent felonies who have completed their sentences.
- Limiting inmate phone services commission.

Family Life/ Freedom of Conscience/ Institutional Concerns:

- Supporting measures to connect victims of human trafficking to appropriate services and treatment.
- Protecting the ability of religious institutions to make personnel, housing, benefits and other decisions that reflect their beliefs (e.g., regarding the sanctity of life and marriage).

³ Background checks would determine if the potential buyer has a criminal record or a mental health history making him or her ineligible to own a firearm. The requirement that background checks be conducted currently applies to licensed gun dealers.

- Preventing discriminatory action by state government officials due to sincerely held religious beliefs or moral convictions that marriage is the union of one man and one woman.
- Preserving freedom of conscience for health-care providers and families that choose to engage in sexual orientation change counseling.
- Supporting increased funding for post-adoptive services.
- Support changing the foster-care “age out” from 18 to 21.
- Opposing second-parent adoption by non-marital partners.
- Preserving the historic rehabilitation tax credit.

Health/ Social & Economic Concerns/ Environmental Justice:

- Supporting efforts to expand access to health insurance coverage to people up to 133% of the Federal Poverty Level.⁴
- Opposing budget reductions to programs that provide shelter, health care and other basic necessities to low-income Virginia residents.
- Raising Virginia’s minimum wage beyond the federal requirements.
- Making the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) refundable – allowing low-income taxpayers to receive a share of their state EITC in the form of a refund when their income is so low that the credit exceeds their state tax liability.
- Closing the open-end line of credit loophole, and regulating lines of credit as other lenders are regulated.⁵
- 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.

⁴ This means that an individual makes \$15,654 or less a year.

⁵ Many open-end line of credit lenders charge interest rates between 260% and 400% APR.

- Supporting proposals to increase state contributions to the Housing Trust Fund, and identifying other sources of consistent support for the program.
- Providing state-subsidized rental assistance to working families whose wages do not enable them to afford adequate housing.
- Prohibiting discrimination based on veteran status or use of financial assistance in the provision of housing.
- Reducing the waiting list for community-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Implementing a cost-of-living adjustment for payments to low-income families under the TANF program.
- Opposing the diversion of TANF funding toward non-TANF purposes.
- Supporting a Back to School Supplies and Clothing Allowance for TANF-eligible, school-aged children.
- Opposing legislation to require local departments of social services to drug test Virginia Initiative for Employment Not Welfare (VIEW) recipients, and to make recipients ineligible for TANF benefits for one year if they test positive.
- Protecting Medicaid reimbursement rates.
- Maintaining Virginia's moratorium on uranium mining.

Education:

- Improving and expanding the Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits program.
- Advocating that preschools accredited by the Virginia Council for Private Education be recognized as quality early childhood education programs.
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- Supporting the creation of a statewide virtual school.
- Prohibiting the expansion of allowed weapons on school property.

- Preserving eligibility for in-state tuition for immigrant children who have been granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status by the federal government and who meet Virginia's residency requirements.

You can make a difference!

- Sign up for the Virginia Catholic Conference's **Email Advocacy Network** to receive regular alerts and updates on legislative issues. To join, visit www.vacatholic.org, click "Join the Network," and complete the short form that is provided. 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!
- "Like" the Conference on **Facebook**, follow the Conference on **Twitter** (@[VaCatholicConf](https://twitter.com/VaCatholicConf)) and sign up for the Conference's **blog** (at www.fromthetibertothejames.wordpress.com) for the latest news on legislative issues.