



## 2010 session featured highs and lows, ended with hard-fought pro-life victory.

With the Virginia General Assembly's regular session (January 13 - March 14) and one-day reconvened session (April 21) now in the rear view mirror, the Virginia Catholic Conference (VCC) wishes to provide the following summary of measures that were key focal points of advocacy for the Virginia bishops, the VCC staff, and those who participated in the VCC network and/or in Catholic Advocacy Day. The VCC staff thanks all those who participated in a variety of ways in these advocacy efforts, and who made a critical difference in the outcomes on some very close votes.

**New Restrictions on Abortion Funding.** On April 21, the state Senate cast a landmark [20-19](#) vote in favor of a VCC-endorsed budget amendment to dramatically limit state abortion funding. Earlier that afternoon, the House also agreed to the amendment by a [64-30](#) vote. Proposed by Governor McDonnell, the amendment ensures that no abortions will be paid for by state taxpayers except as required by federal law or state statute. With the approval by both chambers, the Governor's proposal is now part of the budget that will govern state spending for the next two fiscal years. Its effect is to eliminate the vast majority of Virginia's publicly subsidized abortions (that is, those done under a general health rationale which has never received General Assembly approval). Over the last four years, these state-funded, health-related abortions have been performed at an alarming rate of one every three days.

**Abortion-related bills.** The VCC voiced strong opposition to legislation that would have placed unnecessary, overly-burdensome regulations on pro-life pregnancy resource centers. This bill - championed by NARAL/Pro-Choice Virginia and Planned Parenthood - would have subjected pregnancy resource centers (PRCs) that do not provide abortions or contraceptives to intrusive regulations and threatened the funding they receive from the sale of "Choose Life"

license plates. After compelling testimony from individuals who run PRCs and from individuals who have turned to PRCs for support, the legislation stalled in both chambers (defeated 4-3 in a House of Delegates subcommittee, and not voted on in a Senate subcommittee after the patron requested that his own bill not move forward after hearing the testimony). Unfortunately, the Senate Education and Health Committee ("Senate E & H") also defeated a VCC-endorsed Senate bill to ensure that no one of any age is forced to have an abortion against her will. This legislation would have addressed many critical situations, including those in which an adult (18 or older) father of an unborn child threatens the mother - who is a minor - with physical, emotional, or psychological harm. Senate E & H also rejected House-passed, VCC-supported bills (1) to require abortion clinics to be licensed and regulated by the state, inspected at least once every two years, and have emergency equipment on hand; and (2) to require that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given information about the effects an abortion may have on future pregnancies. In addition, a VCC-supported bill requiring that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given an opportunity to view an ultrasound image of her unborn child passed the House but did not receive committee action in the Senate.

**Embryonic stem-cell research.** Through the VCC's efforts, economic development legislation designed to stimulate investment in biotechnology companies included a VCC-endorsed provision to ensure that the bill's tax benefits would not apply to investments in companies that perform research in Virginia on embryonic stem cells or aborted fetuses. The measure passed the General Assembly and was signed by the Governor.

**Death-penalty expansion proposals.** For the fourth straight year, the General Assembly considered VCC-opposed legislation that would have permitted, under a wide range of circumstances, murder accomplices to receive death sentences (which under current law are reserved for the actual perpetrators with few exceptions). This legislation passed the House but was thwarted 9-6 in the Senate Courts of Justice Committee (unlike in prior years, when the legislation passed both House and Senate before being vetoed). Measures allowing the death penalty for the murder an auxiliary police officer, an auxiliary deputy sheriff, a fire marshal, or an assistant fire marshal did, however, pass the General Assembly this year, and were signed by the Governor.

**Scholarship Tax Credits.** Legislation introduced in the House and advocated by the VCC would have established income tax credits for businesses and individuals for their donations to K-12 scholarship programs that help lower-income families afford tuitions at nonpublic schools. This proposal passed the House (55-44) before being defeated 9-6 in the Senate Finance Committee. A similar Senate bill was also rejected by Senate Finance with an identical 9-6 vote. These House and Senate committee vote margins were both more favorable than in prior years and demonstrate momentum building in favor of school choice, as evidenced by polling data showing that 65% of Virginia residents support the tax credit that was considered.

**Economic issues affecting low-income families.** VCC-supported legislation to aid the establishment of housing trust funds in Virginia localities - and to thereby encourage ground-level, community commitment to addressing housing issues - passed the House but failed to receive Senate committee approval. Meanwhile, a VCC-endorsed bill to require the Department of Housing and Community Development to establish a three-year rental assistance pilot project passed the Senate but failed in a House committee. Legislation to regulate car-title lending was, however, enacted by the legislature. A car-title loan is a secured personal loan in which the borrower's car is used as the collateral. In Virginia, car-title lenders are allowed to operate open-end programs (i.e., that have no specified pay-off date) and thereby circumvent certain consumer protections. For example, despite the fact that a car-title loan is a secure loan with little risk involved, some car-title lenders still charge interest rates of 25-30% per month (an annual rate of 300-360%). [Most small loans in Virginia are regulated by the Consumer Finance Act, which caps their annual percentage rates (APRs) at 36%.] VCC-supported bills requiring the Commonwealth's car-title industry to operate under the same 36% annual interest cap as most other types of small-loan lenders operating in Virginia did not move forward. However, legislation that did pass adds some meaningful consumer protections for car-title loans, such as requiring payment of the loan within one year, barring lenders from continuing to charge interest after the vehicle has been repossessed, and requiring lenders to be licensed.

**Immigrants.** The VCC supported a bill to prohibit law enforcement officers from inquiring about the immigration status of individuals who approach them to report that they have been victims of a crime or were witnesses to a crime. [The bill did not apply to any perpetrators of crimes.] The VCC noted that charitable and service agencies often deal with victims of violence and abuse who decline to approach law

enforcement due to concerns over their immigration status or the status of their immediate family. Though it passed the Senate 40-0, the measure was then defeated in a 10-10 deadlock in the House Courts of Justice Committee. The VCC also advocated for budget items (which did not receive funding this year) that would have provided health care access to some lawfully residing immigrants (namely, children and pregnant women) who meet income criteria for state low-income health programs but who are not yet U.S. citizens.

**To see how your legislators voted on many of these initiatives, [click here](#) if you reside in the Diocese of Arlington, and [click here](#) if you reside in the Diocese of Richmond.**

**Because the April 21 votes to limit abortion funding occurred after the VCC's vote charts were already prepared, those votes are linked in the first section of this summary.**