



DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON · DIOCESE OF RICHMOND
Representing the Virginia Catholic Bishops and their Dioceses in Public Policy Matters

2013 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 2013 Virginia General Assembly session, which convenes for 46 days beginning on January 9, 2013. 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 5, 2012, 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 Issues

Unborn life:

- Preserving pro-life gains made in previous sessions (*e.g.*, the new ultrasound informed-consent law and strong regulations on abortion facilities).
- Banning state funding of all abortions not required to be funded by federal law.¹
- Banning abortions done for reasons of gender selection.
- Prohibiting state investment in research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses and in entities that conduct such research.

¹ Under the Medicaid program, the federal government funds abortions when the life of the eligible woman is at risk and in cases of rape and incest. States are permitted, but not required, to spend their own funds (with no federal match) for abortions that fall outside these three categories. Conference advocacy seeks to prohibit government funding of abortion to the greatest extent possible.

Death-penalty opposition:

- Opposing efforts to expand the circumstances under which death sentences can be imposed under Virginia law.
- Initiating a state study of the costs of imposing the death penalty in Virginia.

Public safety:

- Closing Virginia's "gun-show loophole" by requiring unlicensed gun sellers at gun shows to conduct background checks on potential purchasers.²

Health and Social Concerns Issues**Safety-net services and economic concerns:**

- Opposing budget reductions to programs that provide shelter, health care, and other basic necessities to low-income Virginia residents, and protecting Medicaid reimbursement rates.
- Providing state-subsidized rental assistance to working families whose wages do not enable them to afford adequate housing.
- Reducing the waiting list for community-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- 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.

Immigrants:

- Oppose harmful aspects of potential measures focused on immigrants (*e.g.*, provisions that would impact services that charities provide and provisions that would prohibit any limitation on law-enforcement officers asking about immigration status).

² 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.

Criminal/juvenile justice and community reentry:

- 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 with nonviolent felony convictions who have completed their sentences.
- Compensating victims of Virginia’s prior forced sterilization program.³

Education and Family Life Issues

Marriage and protecting children:

- Opposing attempts to repeal the marriage-protection provision in Virginia’s constitution.
- Preventing minors’ access to pornography.
- Strengthening laws against human trafficking.

Educational opportunities and services:

- Ensuring effective implementation of the newly enacted “Education Improvement Scholarships” tax credit program, designed to help lower-income students and students with disabilities who wish to attend nonpublic K-12 schools.
- Securing access in all Virginia localities to federally funded services for which nonpublic-school students and teachers qualify.

Freedom of Conscience Issues

- Protecting the ability of religious institutions to make personnel, housing, and other decisions that reflect their beliefs regarding marriage.
- Ensuring that employers can provide health coverage that is consistent with their religious beliefs and moral convictions.

³ Between 1927 and 1979, about 8,000 Virginians were sterilized under this former program.

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!
- Participate in the **Virginia Stands for Life** prayer walk and rally in Richmond on Wednesday, January 9, 2013, from 9:00 a.m. until 11:30 a.m. For registration and additional information, visit www.vacatholic.org. Please join the Conference and numerous other state and national pro-life organizations at this important gathering.
- Participate in **Catholic Advocacy Day** in Richmond on Thursday, January 31, 2013, from 9:00 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. (with registration beginning at 8:00 a.m.). The day begins with prayer and issue briefings, followed by constituent visits at legislators' offices, "debriefing," and closing prayer. For registration and additional information, visit www.vacatholic.org. Please join Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde and Richmond Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo at this important advocacy event.
- "Like" the Conference on Facebook and follow the Conference on Twitter (@VaCatholicConf) for the latest news on legislative issues.