



2014 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 2014 Virginia General Assembly session, which convenes for 60 days beginning on January 8, 2014. 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 18, 2013, 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:

- Preserving pro-life gains made in prior years.
- Supporting the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.¹
- Banning state funding of all abortions not required by federal law.²
- Opposing unwarranted regulations on pro-life pregnancy resource centers proposed by abortion-industry advocates.
- Prohibiting state investment in research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses and in entities that conduct such research.
- Opposing elimination of the current requirement that a second physician attest to a patient’s brain death before life-sustaining support is withdrawn.

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 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.

- 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:

- Requiring that Virginia law enforcement agencies adopt the *Model Policy on Eyewitness Identification* in an effort to decrease wrongful convictions.⁴
- Changing the discovery rules in criminal cases to provide defendants the information necessary to prepare a case.⁵
- 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.
- Opposing disproportionate cuts to community-based juvenile justice programs.



Family Life & Freedom of Conscience:

- Opposing efforts to repeal Virginia's constitutional marriage amendment.
- Strengthening laws against human trafficking.
- Preventing minors' access to pornography.
- Protecting the ability of religious institutions to make personnel, housing, and other decisions that reflect their beliefs regarding 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.

⁴ Between 1989 and 2013, at least 18 people whose convictions were based largely on eyewitness misidentifications have been exonerated of serious violent felonies following DNA testing or newly discovered evidence (including several capital cases).

⁵ The American Bar Association recommends requiring that prosecutors disclose the identity and any prior statements of testifying witnesses and allow the discovery of police reports.



Health/ Social & Economic Concerns/ Environmental Justice:

- Supporting efforts to expand Medicaid coverage to people up to 133% of the Federal Poverty Level.⁶
- Opposing budget reductions to programs that provide shelter, health care, and other basic necessities to low-income Virginia residents.
- Closing the open-end line of credit loophole, and regulate lines of credit as other lenders are regulated.⁷
- 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.
- 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.
- Reducing the waiting list for community-based services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Supporting tax credits for employers who hire individuals with disabilities.
- Supporting affordable and accessible housing for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to facilitate the transition from institutions to community-based living.
- 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.
- Protecting Medicaid reimbursement rates.

⁶ This means that an individual makes \$15,282 or less a year.

⁷ Many open-end line of credit lenders charge interest rates between 260% and 400% APR.

- Maintaining Virginia's moratorium on uranium mining.
- Compensating victims of Virginia's prior forced sterilization program.⁸



Education:

- Supporting the Virginia DREAM Act, which would grant undocumented childhood arrivals to the United States who are graduates of Virginia high schools in-state tuition for higher education.
- Preserving the Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits program, and eliminating the one-year gap between the year of donation to foundations participating in the program and the year the donor may claim the credit.
- Enhancing the Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) so that more low-income people can be served.

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 8, 2014, 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 30, 2014, 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, follow the Conference on Twitter (@VaCatholicConf), and sign up for the Conference's blog (at www.fromthetibertothejames.wordpress.com) for the latest news on legislative issues.

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