



## 2012 Legislative Agenda

When the 2012 Virginia General Assembly session begins January 11, the Virginia Catholic Conference will advocate for a broad range of initiatives designed to advance the common good, including legislation to protect the unborn, the poor, immigrants, parental choice in education, and religious freedom.

The Conference -- the legislative advocacy agency of the Commonwealth's Catholic bishops and their two dioceses -- will pursue the agenda which follows during the 60-day session. The Conference's agenda was approved by its Management Committee, headed by Arlington Bishop Paul S. Loverde and Richmond Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo, and formulated in consultation with its Education and Respect Life, Health, and Social Concerns policy committees.

### ***Respect Life Issues:***

#### **Protections for unborn children:**

- Supporting recognition by the Virginia General Assembly that the right to life begins at conception.
- Banning state funding of all abortions not required to be funded by federal law.<sup>1</sup>
- Requiring that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given an opportunity to view an ultrasound image of her unborn child.
- Supporting the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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.

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

**Ethical research standards:**

- Supporting proposals to ban research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses, and to prohibit state investment in entities that conduct such research.

**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.<sup>3</sup>

***Health and Social Concerns Issues:***

**Government safety-net services:**

- Opposing budget reductions to programs that provide shelter, health care, and other basic necessities to low-income Virginia residents.
- 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.
- 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.
- Preserving improvements to Virginia's Earned Income Tax Credit.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> A recent change in the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) benefited married persons with three or more children who earn less than \$49,000. This federal EITC enhancement was adopted by Virginia for tax years 2009 and 2010. Conference advocacy seeks to maintain this enhancement for tax years 2011 and 2012.

### **Economic concerns:**

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

### **Health care and assistance for immigrants:**

- Protecting Medicaid reimbursement rates.
- Enabling Medicaid eligibility for immigrants who have legally resided in Virginia for five years and who meet the income criteria.<sup>5</sup>
- Providing access to prenatal care for low-income immigrant women.
- Opposing harmful aspects of potential measures aimed at 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).
- 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.

### **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.
- Opposing disproportionate cuts to community-based juvenile justice programs.
- Limiting the use of restraints on pregnant inmates.

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

## ***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.

### **Educational 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.

## ***Institutional & Freedom of Conscience Issues:***

- Protecting the ability of religious institutions to make personnel, housing, and other decisions that reflect their beliefs regarding marriage.
- Codifying conscience protections for faith-based agencies.
- Preserving the ability of nonprofit organizations to participate in the tax-exempt bond issuance and refinancing programs offered through the Virginia Small Business Financing Authority.

### ***You can make a difference!***

- Join the Virginia Catholic Conference's Email Advocacy Network and receive regular alerts and updates on issues considered during the 2012 session. Visit [www.vacatholic.org](http://www.vacatholic.org), click "Join the Network," and complete the short form. Your free membership will enable you to communicate directly with your local legislators. Alerts include pre-drafted (but editable) email messages that you can send 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 26, 2012, from 9:00 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. (registration begins at 8:00 a.m.). The day begins with prayer and issue briefings, followed by constituent visits at legislators' offices, "debriefing," and closing prayer. To register visit [www.vacatholic.org](http://www.vacatholic.org). Bishops Loverde and DiLorenzo will offer welcoming remarks at this important advocacy event. Please register and plan to attend!
- Friend the Virginia Catholic Conference on Facebook and follow the Conference on Twitter (@VaCatholicConf) for the latest news on legislative issues.