Laws permitting abortion are “profoundly unjust” because they fail to recognize equal rights for every child, born and unborn. The following extreme abortion expansion legislation was considered by the Virginia General Assembly in 2019 and is expected to be considered again in 2020:

- Eliminating most restrictions on second and third trimester abortions.
- Eliminating health and safety standards that protect women seeking abortions.
- Ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the language of which has already been used to challenge and overturn pro-life laws in other states.

A bill to legalize assisted suicide, also introduced in 2019, is expected to resurface in 2020. Government should prevent, not promote suicide. The purpose of the medical profession is to heal, not to kill.
POVERTY

“A basic moral test for any society is how it treats those who are most vulnerable.”

Many struggle to afford basic needs and are trapped in cycles of debt and poverty. The following proposals to help low-income families, previously debated by the General Assembly, are expected to be seen again in 2020:

- Providing low-income children scholarships to attend private schools their families choose through the Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits Program.
- Ending predatory lending practices.
- Helping Virginia’s lowest income working families by improving the state Earned Income Tax Credit.

IMMIGRANTS

“The Gospel mandate to ‘welcome the stranger’ requires Catholics to care for and stand with newcomers.”

At the national level, much-needed comprehensive immigration reform is a matter for Congress. At the state level, the Virginia General Assembly has debated two bills — both expected to be re-introduced in 2020 — to help immigrant families locally with transportation and education:

- Helping immigrants get to work, go to school, access healthcare and attend church by creating a state-issued permit granting driving privileges to those who cannot obtain driver’s licenses because of their immigration status.
- Allowing undocumented immigrant youth who graduate from Virginia high schools to access in-state college tuition if they apply for permanent residency and they or a parent filed Virginia tax returns.

GUN VIOLENCE

On July 9, the Virginia General Assembly convened for a Special Session to consider a wide range of proposed bills relating to guns and public safety. The bills were all referred to the Virginia State Crime Commission, which heard public testimony on them on August 20. The statement issued by Bishop Burbidge and Bishop Knestout on the Special Session and the testimony presented by the Virginia Catholic Conference to the Crime Commission can be found at www.vacatholic.org. The Special Session will reconvene on November 18.