

MARYLAND CATHOLIC CONFERENCE STAFF

Please contact the Conference staff at any time regarding these or other issues or to request assistance in preparing testimony or providing witnesses on legislation of mutual interest.

MARY ELLEN RUSSELL

Executive Director
mrussell@mdcatholic.org

MIKE GATHAGAN

Director of Communications
mgathagan@mdcatholic.org

- Media Relations
- Catholic Advocacy Network

GARRETT O'DAY, ESQ.

Associate Director
Education, Children and Families
garrett@mdcatholic.org

- Catholic Schools
- Child Protection
- Family Life
- Justice Reform

DANA DAVENPORT

Associate Director
Social and Economic Justice
ddavenport@mdcatholic.org

- Employment/Dignity of Work
- Health Care
- Immigration



CONTACT INFORMATION

10 Francis Street • Annapolis, MD 21401
410-269-1155 or 301-261-1979
410-269-1790 (fax)
info@mdcatholic.org
www.mdcatholic.org
facebook.com/mdcathcon
twitter.com/mdcathcon

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ANYA NAEGELE

Associate Director
Respect for Life
anaegele@mdcatholic.org

- Abortion
- End of Life
- Pregnancy Support
- Human Trafficking

MARIANN HUGHES

Associate Director
Advocacy and Outreach
mhughes@mdcatholic.org

- Parish Advocacy
- College and Young Adult Outreach

CHRIS SANTO

Office Manager
chris@mdcatholic.org

KATE MONAGAN

Business Manager
kmonagan@mdcatholic.org

MARYLAND CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

2016

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW

MARYLAND CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the mutual public policy interests of the three Catholic (arch)dioceses serving more than one million Catholics in Maryland: the Archdiocese of Baltimore (Western and Central Maryland), the Archdiocese of Washington (Prince George's and Montgomery counties and Southern Maryland), and the Diocese of Wilmington (Eastern Shore). The Conference's Board of Governors includes all of the bishops serving Maryland. The headquarters of the Conference are located at 10 Francis Street in Annapolis, less than a block away from the State Capitol, where the staff oversees year-round legislative, educational, and other activities related to the Church's public policy advocacy.

The Catholic Church brings to the public square a voice that speaks especially for those who have no one to speak for them – the unborn, the poor and those in need, newcomers to our country, prisoners, those with physical and mental disabilities, the elderly and families struggling to provide their children with a safe home, a good education, and adequate healthcare.

Unlike many advocacy groups, the Catholic Church's voice does not fit neatly into typical political distinctions, nor does it follow the dictates of popular opinion. We do not speak as Republicans or Democrats; we are too liberal for conservatives, and too conservative for liberals. We are not a "single issue" advocacy group, but rather speak out on a broad variety of topics considered by our lawmakers in Annapolis.

Throughout Maryland's history, the Catholic Church has consistently spoken out in the public square on behalf of the intrinsic value and dignity of every human person, on behalf of the critical role of the family as the source and foundation of society and our future generations, and on behalf of the sanctity of all life, including embryonic life, infants in the womb, the frail elderly, and the convicted killer on death row. We continue to offer that voice today as the 436th session of the Maryland General Assembly convenes.

2016 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The following pages provide a brief description of specific legislative issues the Church expects to address during the 2016 legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly. Issues are divided broadly into the Maryland Catholic Conference's issue advocacy areas: Respect for Life; Education, Children and Families; and Social and Economic Justice. The issues listed reflect particular priorities, and do not include many others in which the Conference will be involved. Additional information on the Church's policies and programs will be available on the Conference's website at www.mdcatholic.org.

"Our efforts must aim at restoring hope, righting wrongs, maintaining commitments, and thus promoting the well-being of individuals and of peoples. We must move forward together, as one, in a renewed spirit of fraternity and solidarity, cooperating generously for the common good."

– Pope Francis, Address to U.S. Congress, September 24, 2015



RESPECT FOR LIFE

Even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God's creation, made in his own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect.

– Pope Francis

The foundation of Catholic social teaching lies in our recognition of the dignity of every human person. Even our founding fathers dubbed the right to life as “inalienable.”

Public policies should protect human life from conception until natural death, with special protection given to the safety of women, especially those facing crisis pregnancies, and the vulnerable who cannot speak up for their own right to life.

Society suffers when we fail to respect human life at any stage, whether an elderly man in need of medical care he can't afford, a teenager in a coma, an unborn child in his mother's womb, a woman facing an unexpected pregnancy, or a tiny embryo in a test tube. All deserve compassion and respect.

WE SUPPORT:

- Policies that embrace the ability of every person, regardless of their condition or disability, to lead a full and productive life.
- Policies for suicide prevention to address increasing suicide rates.
- Policies that protect the rights of conscience in healthcare decisions.
- Measures that protect the health of pregnant women and their unborn children, and that provide life-affirming assistance to women facing crisis pregnancies.
- Efforts to examine the use of state funds for ethically controversial stem cell research without any demonstrative results.

WE OPPOSE:

- Measures that encourage the terminally ill, elderly and disabled to end their lives through the legalization of physician-assisted suicide.
- The use of tax dollars to pay for abortion.
- The exploitation of women through human trafficking, commercial surrogacy, and other abuses.



EDUCATION, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Catholic educational institutions offer to all an approach to education that has as its aim the full development of the person, which responds to the right of every person to access to knowledge.

– Pope Francis

Access to a high-quality education for all children, especially lower-income and minority students, is integral to the mission of the Church. Catholic schools, educating more than 50,000 students, have a proven legacy of providing a pathway out of poverty for many children. Maryland's Catholic schools also provide a sizeable economic benefit to the state; this year, they will save taxpayers more than \$700 million in education costs.

In tandem with this, the Church recognizes the basic family unit – mother, father, and children – as the foundation given by nature to all human society and future generations. Public policies should give priority to promoting marriage, keeping families intact, and to providing all children with a stable, healthy, and nurturing home. All families raising children, whether they are headed by biological, adoptive, or single parents, grandparents or guardians, must have access to decent jobs and family-friendly work environments, good schools, and the basic necessities of food, clothing, housing and healthcare.

WE SUPPORT:

Education

- A tax credit for business donations made to organizations that provide scholarships to students in nonpublic schools or enrichment programs to students attending public schools.
- Funding for the Maryland Nonpublic Student Textbook Program.
- Funding for the Maryland Nonpublic Aging Schools Program.
- Statewide education policy that enhances the ability of low-income, disabled, incarcerated, homeless or otherwise marginalized persons to continue their educational advancement.

Families

- Measures that promote stable families and healthy and lifelong marriages.

- Employment policies that grant adequate maternity leave and sufficient sick and personal leave to attend school and other child-related appointments.
- Measures promoting adoption and assisting adoptive families.
- Measures to protect children from abuse by raising awareness and increasing prevention training in schools and other institutions primarily serving children.
- Measures that protect the rights of juveniles involved with the criminal justice system.
- Legislation which shifts policies from lengthy, non-rehabilitative periods of incarceration and reinvests prison expenditures, placing an emphasis on restoration and reintegration of offenders and families and communities negatively affected by incarceration.



SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE

The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all economic policies.

– Pope Francis

The Church advocates for social and economic justice through public policies on behalf of the most vulnerable members of our society: the working poor, the unemployed, persons experiencing homelessness, immigrants, persons with disabilities, single mothers, and the elderly.

Our understanding of social and economic justice is founded upon the principle of the inherent human dignity of all persons. From this principle flows the Church's support for public policies that uphold human rights and the common good. The Church believes this allows all persons to meet their own and their family's basic needs, to have equal access to affordable and adequate housing and medical care, and to have the equal opportunity to secure employment at a just wage under fair working conditions.

WE SUPPORT:

Economic Justice

- Preservation of state funding for essential safety net programs.
- Improvement of efficiency, communication, and accuracy of agencies that provide programming for low-income Marylanders.
- The expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit for young workers without dependents.

Employment

- Policies allowing workers to earn paid sick leave to care for themselves or a family member during an illness.
- Legislation that eliminates barriers to employment for ex-offenders.

Environment

- Balanced measures to protect the environment without imposing undue financial burdens on the poor and nonprofits.

Healthcare

- The human dignity of the elderly, disabled, terminally ill, and other medically vulnerable persons when making decisions on health care cost containment, health care delivery, long term care, and end-of-life care.
- Expanded access to government-supported health care or health insurance programs for lower- and middle-income families.
- Initiatives that allow hospitals to expand charity care and community outreach programs.

Immigration

- Policies that allow immigrants access to employment and education, and affordable and adequate housing and healthcare in order to contribute to society and provide for themselves and their families.