

MARYLAND CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

LEGISLATIVE OVERVIEW 2012





The Maryland Catholic Conference

The Maryland Catholic Conference represents the mutual public policy interests of the three Catholic (arch)dioceses serving 1.2 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 CHURCH IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE

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.

We do, however, speak from a uniform point of view, one that is accessible not only to Catholics, but to all who recognize that a proper understanding of human nature must determine how we fashion our society and the laws that govern it. From our country's earliest efforts to articulate the principles of our American democracy, the voice of the Church, the voices of other faiths, and of all those who seek the common good, have brought a vital and necessary perspective to the process of deciding together how best to achieve

a free and just society for all persons.

Here in Maryland, the birthplace of Catholicism in the original 13 colonies, we stand on the shoulders of those who fought for the freedom of Catholics and all people of faith to practice their religion openly, and to share their views as active participants in the public square. In exercising that right and duty today, we answer a call expressed by Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *Charity in Truth*, "To desire the common good and strive towards it is a requirement of justice and charity."

Since the founding of our country, the Church has embraced each successive wave of new Americans, from the immigrant Catholics landing in St. Mary's County in 1634, to those arriving today to seek a new life in the United States. The Church has also long fought for racial equality, and the civil rights of African Americans. As far back as 1799, Catholic orders of nuns such as the Visitation and the Oblate Sisters flouted existing prohibitions by educating free and enslaved African Americans. In the



1960s, Baltimore's own Cardinal Shehan, a well-known civil rights leader, faced vocal opposition for advocating for open-housing legislation and equal accommodations for African Americans.

Throughout Maryland's history, the 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 430th session of the Maryland General Assembly convenes.

Faith in Action: Partnering with the State to Serve Those in Need

The Church's concern for the vulnerable in our society involves much more than simply speaking out on their behalf in the public square. After the state government, the Catholic Church in Maryland is the largest social service provider operated by a single entity in the state. Our schools, our hospitals, our nursing homes, social services programs, prison ministries, and numerous parish outreach programs serve Marylanders in countless ways; especially in these difficult economic times, they fill a need that our state government simply cannot meet on its own. This valuable partnership among the state, the Church, and so many other nonprofit social service providers should be an important consideration as our state's

leaders look for solutions to addressing the state's budget deficits, while continuing to help Maryland's families survive their own fiscal crises.

Protecting Our Children

In Maryland, the three Catholic (arch) dioceses have instituted comprehensive and vigorous programs to ensure a safe environment for all children entrusted to our care. These programs far exceed the requirements imposed by law on institutions serving children, and have served as models for other public and private organizations. All three dioceses strictly impose requirements to report immediately any instance of suspected child abuse to appropriate civil authorities. They mandate screening not only for all employees, but also for all volunteers who work with children in our parishes and schools, and require all adults and children to participate in awareness and prevention programs. More information on the Church's child protection policies and programs is available on the Conference's website at www.mdcathcon.org/childprotection.

These requirements cannot mitigate the pain caused by some clergy who violated their ministry by harming a child. While the vast majority of these incidents occurred decades ago, the pain for those harmed and for each of us is not forgotten. As a Church, we continue to reach out pastorally to victims through personal apologies, payment for counseling and other practical and financial assistance. We will continue to do all we can to ensure these crimes never occur again, and to encourage all in our society to eradicate the scourge of child sexual abuse through honest and effective awareness and prevention programs.

2012 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The following pages provide a brief description of specific legislative issues the Church expects to address during the 2012 legislative session of the Maryland General Assembly. Issues are divided broadly into the Maryland Catholic Conference's issue advocacy areas: Social Concerns, Education, Family Life, and Respect for Life. The issues listed reflect particular priorities, and do not include many others in which the Conference will be involved.

Social Concerns

Foundational Principles

The Church advocates for economic and social justice by seeking public policies that are in *solidarity* with the poor and reflect *a love of preference for vulnerable members* of society: the working poor, the unemployed, persons experiencing homelessness, immigrants, persons with disabilities, single mothers, and the elderly. Our understanding of economic and social justice is founded upon the principle of the inherent human dignity of all persons. From this principle of human dignity flows the Church's support for public policies that uphold human rights and the common good. The Church believes that human rights and the common good are upheld by public policies allowing all persons: to meet their own and their family's basic needs, to have equal access to adequate housing and medical care, and to have the equal opportunity to secure employment at a just wage under fair working conditions.

Profile of the Catholic Church in Maryland

Parishes	280
Parishioners	1,219,000
Schools (K-12)	147
Students	52,875
Savings to Taxpayers in Per-Pupil Costs	\$713 Million
Hospitals	6
Patients Served	nearly 1,850,000
Other Charitable Agencies	over 170
Clients Served	over 850,000

Legislative Priorities

Poverty:

- Preserve state funding for essential safety net programs.
- Pass legislation prohibiting landlords and other property owners from discriminating against rental applicants and prospective home owners based on the applicant's lawfully obtained sources of income (e.g. veterans' benefits, rental housing assistance, housing choice vouchers, etc).
- Restore funding and increase training and staff within the Department of Human Resources to meet higher need for services caused by the economic downturn.

Healthcare:

- Maximize access to medical care in Maryland's implementation of federal health care reform by supporting policies that:



(a) ensure new health insurance opportunities prioritize enrollment, eligibility, and affordability for the poor, persons experiencing homelessness, immigrants, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations; and (b) provide medical care to those left uninsured even after the initial phase of Maryland's health care reform implementation.

- Oppose an expansion of direct or indirect government funding of abortion in Maryland's new state health care exchanges and all other new public health insurance programs.
- Maintain and protect conscience protections of hospitals, health care providers, insurance companies, and medical personnel who have moral or religious objections to certain procedures.
- Uphold the human dignity of the

elderly, disabled, terminally ill, and other medically vulnerable when making decisions on health care cost containment, health care delivery, and long term care.

Immigration:

- Preserve Maryland's DREAM Act, a law allowing Maryland's immigrant high school graduates, largely brought here illegally when they were children, to pay in-state tuition rates at Maryland's community colleges first and then at its public universities thereafter if those students or their families file state income taxes and fulfill certain additional requirements.
- Oppose legislation requiring state and local law enforcement officials to be charged with the federal responsibility of investigating, apprehending, and detaining persons in the country illegally.

- Oppose local or state “English only” statutes that make it more difficult for immigrants to integrate into society.
- Support policies that secure medical care for children of migrant workers in Maryland.

Church Teaching

“[T]his love of preference for the poor, and the decisions which it inspires in us, cannot but embrace the immense multitudes of the hungry, the needy, the homeless, those without medical care and, above all, those without hope of a better future ... To ignore them would mean becoming like the ‘rich man’ who pretended not to know the beggar Lazarus lying at his gate.” — *John Paul II, Sollicitudo Rei Socialis, 1987*

Education

Foundational Principles

The Church supports educational policies that uphold the right of all parents – regardless of family income – to choose an educational setting best suited to their children’s needs. Through the service provided by Maryland’s 147 Catholic schools, the Church works in partnership with the state and other school communities to ensure that all families, especially lower and middle income families, have equitable access to a high-quality education for their children.

The service provided by Maryland’s Catholic schools not only contributes to the educational, social, and moral fabric of Maryland’s future generations. Catholic schools also provide a great economic contribution to the state by educating 52,875 students annually (2010-11 school year), saving more than

\$713 million annually in per-pupil costs. Because the state cannot afford to lose the contributions made by these schools, it is imperative for all stakeholders to work in partnership to sustain their service, especially given the fact that 44 Catholic schools have closed over the past eight years, and enrollments have dropped by more than 11,000.

Legislative Priorities

- Support legislation that would provide a tax credit for business donations to nonprofit organizations that provide financial assistance to nonpublic or public school students for qualified education expenses.
- Maintain funding for the Maryland Nonpublic Student Textbook Program.
- Support programs that provide permissible services such as transportation, special education and teacher scholarships for nonpublic school students and teachers.
- Support policies that promote accountability and equity in public schools.

Church Teaching

“Everything possible must be done, in cooperation with the wider community, to ensure that [Catholic schools] are accessible to people of all social and economic strata. No child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation.” — *Pope Benedict XVI, Address to US Catholic Educators, 2008*

“Catholic schools are often the Church’s most effective contribution to those families who are poor and disadvantaged, especially in poor inner

city neighborhoods and rural areas. Catholic schools cultivate healthy interaction among the increasingly diverse populations of our society. In cities and rural areas, Catholic schools are often the only opportunity for economically disadvantaged young people to receive an education of quality that speaks to the development of the whole person.” — *Renewing Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium, US Bishops, 2005*

Family Life

Foundational Principles

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.

Legislative Priorities

- Support Maryland’s law defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman.
- Support expanded access to government-supported healthcare or health insurance programs for lower- and middle-income families.
- Support measures to protect children from abuse by raising awareness and increasing prevention training in schools and

other institutions primarily serving children.

- Support employment policies that grant adequate maternity leave and sufficient sick and personal leave to attend school and other child-related appointments.
- Oppose immigration-related enforcement policies that separate children from parents who have not committed a serious crime.
- Support measures promoting adoption and assisting adoptive families.

Church Teaching

“No country on earth, no political system can think of its own future otherwise than through the image of these new generations that will receive from their parents the manifold heritage of values, duties and aspirations of the nation to which they belong and of the whole human family. Concern for the child ... is the primary and fundamental test of the relationship of one human being to another.” — *Pope John Paul II, Address to the United Nations, 1979*

“The family has vital and organic links with society... [I]t is from the family that citizens come to birth and it is within the family that they find the first school of the social virtues that are the animating principle of the existence and development of society itself.” — *Pope John Paul II, On the Family, 42; 1981*

“To promote and protect marriage as the union of one man and one woman is itself a matter of justice. In fact, it would be a grave injustice if the state ignored the unique and proper place



of husbands and wives, the place of mothers and fathers, and especially the rights of children... Indeed, without this protection the state would, in effect, intentionally deprive children of the right to a mother and father.”

—*Marriage: Love and Life in the Divine Plan*; USCCB, 2009

Respect for Life

Foundational Principles

The most basic human right is the right to life, a right our founding fathers called an inalienable right. Society suffers when we fail to respect human life at any stage, whether an elderly woman in need of medical care she can't afford, a teenager in a coma, an unborn child in her mother's womb, a tiny embryo in a test tube, or a convicted murderer on death row. 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.

Legislative Priorities

- Support legislation to track the number of abortions and their complications in order to promote maternal health and improve teen pregnancy prevention programs.
- Support legislation to repeal the death penalty, since the punishment of life without parole is already available to the state when prosecuting capital cases.
- Support legislation to protect pregnant women from violence by allowing prosecution for the death of the unborn child when a pregnant woman is assaulted or killed.
- Oppose measures that encourage the terminally ill and disabled to end their lives.
- Support policies that promote the use of proven adult stem cells

to treat disease and injury, and policies that fund research using adult stem cells to increase the number of conditions that can be treated with these ethical and effective stem cells.

- Oppose the use of tax dollars for embryonic stem cell research, the first step of which is the destruction of a living human embryo.
- Oppose the use of tax dollars to pay for abortion.

Church Teaching

“It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop.” — *Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, 1995*

“Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves ‘the creative action of God,’ and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end....” — *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation, 1987*

“The deliberate decision to deprive an innocent human being of his life is always morally evil and can never be licit either as an end in itself or as a means to a good end.” — *Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae, 1995*



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.

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