

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

BUDGET

PRINCIPLES

"The right to life implies and is linked to other human rights—to the basic goods that every human person needs to live and thrive. All the life issues are connected, for erosion of respect for the life of any individual or group in society necessarily diminishes respect for all life. The moral imperative to respond to the needs of our neighbors—basic needs such as food, shelter, health care, education, and meaningful work—is universally binding on our consciences and may be legitimately fulfilled by a variety of means."

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

Since 2009, Washington has reduced its operating budget by almost \$11 billion. The recession has taken its toll with sharp revenue drops resulting in cuts to social services, health care, education, and other resources people need to remain economically secure. Though the projected revenue is no longer in the negative column, the picture for the 2013-2015 biennium still requires a reduction of almost \$1 billion in order to balance the budget.

The state must also increase funding for K-12 schools under the Supreme Court's basic education funding decision known as McCleary. Legislators are looking at an additional \$1 billion in the 2013-2015 biennium and \$3.6 billion in increased funding for schools over three biennia. To accomplish this in the current political climate, resistant to raising new revenue, all other spending would have to be held to zero percent growth and \$2-3 billion in reductions each biennium would be required. The impact on services would be devastating.

The challenge of providing services for vulnerable people is more than an economic issue; it is also a moral one. Because of the continuing revenue shortfall, advocates will need to work hard to preserve current programs at the present level of funding.

Maintaining funding for essential social services will be the top priority for WSCC and social service advocates.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Retaining programs that provide services for the most vulnerable persons
- Collaborating with policy leaders to improve efficiencies in the provision of services
- Creating a just tax structure
- Providing adequate revenue to support “safety net” programs
- Establishing new revenue sources if the state is not able to address the needs of poor people through existing resources or reprioritizing expenditures.

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

PRINCIPLES

Parents—the first and most important educators—have a fundamental right to choose the education best suited to the needs of their children, including public, private, and religious schools. Government, through such means as tax credits and publicly funded scholarships, should help provide resources for parents, especially those of modest means, to exercise this basic right without discrimination. Students in all educational settings should have opportunities for moral and character formation.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

SAFE ENVIRONMENT: State law requires adults in the education system to report suspected abuse. However, there are no effective mandatory state requirements for teachers to provide instruction to students on the prevention of child abuse. Moreover, there are effective programs that prevent and reduce child abuse, which could be integrated into existing curricula. WSCC is working to gain passage of legislation to require effective, age-appropriate education programs on the prevention of child abuse for all public and private school students.

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE: Catholic schools and Catholic Charities in Washington State provide an array of early learning and care programs, including pre-kindergarten programs, pre-school, and before and after school programs. The Department of Early Learning has proposed legislation that will establish an entitlement program for early learning. The goals include safe, healthy and quality programs for children, reasonable licensing requirements for early learning and care programs, pre-school standards, and support for low-income families. WSCC will monitor the recommendations to ensure that any standards or requirements do not impede Catholic schools or Catholic Charities from serving low-income families.

TEACHER CERTIFICATION: With limited exceptions, Washington State law requires teachers in private schools to have the appropriate state certification. The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) is responsible for the rules and process of certification. The Board has no private school representation. WSCC will work with private school advocates to add a private school representative to the PESB.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Mandating and funding child abuse prevention education programs for all students in K-12 schools
- Monitoring policy proposals relating to early learning programs (child care: pre-school, before and after-school)
- Adding a private school representative to the Professional Educator Standards Board

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PRINCIPLES

Policies on taxes, work, divorce, immigration, and welfare should help families stay together and should reward responsibility and sacrifice for children....Children are to be valued, protected, and nurtured. As a Church, we affirm our commitment to the protection and well-being of children in our own institutions and in all of society.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

CHILD WELFARE: Children's services provided by the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) are designed to protect children and assist families whose children are in danger of entering the child welfare system (foster care). The goals of the system are to ensure that children are placed in safe and stable foster homes or to work with families to create an environment that allows the children to remain safely in their homes. In 2012, system improvements were made requiring family assessments when a report of child abuse or neglect is made, as well as establishing incentives for reducing the number of children in foster homes. The WSCC will work with Catholic Charities staff and other advocates to ensure the goals of stable placements and access to services are met.

PARENT AND CHILD REPRESENTATION: The Office of Public Defense manages the Parent Representation Program providing attorney representation and case support services to indigent parents, custodians and legal guardians involved in child dependency and termination of parental rights proceedings. In March, the Supreme Court ruled that children have due process liberty interests that are at least as great as the parent's and that they have at least the same due process right to counsel. Parents have a right to an attorney under Washington State law, whereas children have no such right. Older children may get an attorney in some cases, but there is no requirement. The WSCC will work with advocates to include representation for children in state law.

TANF: Over 37 million people, including 13 million children, continue to live in poverty in our country. In Washington State 11.7 percent of people live below the federal poverty level. Reducing poverty is a priority. However, there are more families seeking shelter, lining up at local food banks, and requesting assistance to meet other needs, like clothing, medicine, health care and utilities. Persons who rely on public support, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), fear cuts in their grants or losing vital services like child care. Maintaining TANF grants and services will be a high priority for the WSCC.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Improving the child welfare system
- Improving access to representation for children in child dependency and parental rights termination proceedings
- Maintaining grants and access to services for TANF recipients

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

PRINCIPLES

An ethic of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration should be a foundation for the reform of our broken criminal justice system. A remedial, rather than a strictly punitive, approach to offenders should be developed.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

THREE-STRIKES LAW: The state's "Three-Strikes Law" mandates a sentence of 25 years to life for persons convicted of three crimes from a specific list of crimes, including non-violent crimes. The original intent of the law was to stop violent criminals, but the result has been that some criminals with a history of minor offenses, such as petty theft have longer terms than criminals who commit violent acts. The number of those convicted under the three-strikes statute continues to grow, overpopulating a bulging prison system. Advocates support legislation to reform the three-strikes law in order to provide more equitable sentencing.

ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMS TO INCARCERATION: Many persons with drug and alcohol abuse problems or a mental illness end up in jail or prison and do not receive adequate treatment for their underlying problems. Many times these same persons are repeat "visitors" to jails, hospitals, and shelters. Several counties have instituted drug and mental health courts with positive results. These alternative programs prove to be cost effective. Advocates will work to retain the current alternative courts.

DRIVERS LICENSES: Under current law, those wishing to apply for a drivers license must be residents of Washington State. This state is one of only a very few states that does not require proof of a person's legal presence in the United States to apply for a drivers license. In previous legislative sessions, numerous bills have been introduced requiring that the applicant can document that he or she is a U.S. citizen or is lawfully present in the United States. Advocates will oppose legislation that is discriminatory toward immigrants.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Reforming the three-strikes law
- Maintaining and exploring effective alternatives to incarceration for those with underlying conditions that require treatment

WSCC OPPOSES:

- Discriminatory requirements for proof of residency for drivers' licenses.

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

PRINCIPLES

Human dignity is respected and the common good is fostered only if human rights are protected and basic responsibilities are met. Every human being has a right to life, the fundamental right that makes all other rights possible, and a right to access to those things required for human decency—food and shelter, education and employment, health care and housing, freedom of religion and family life.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

HOUSING AND ESSENTIAL NEEDS: In 2011 the Disability Lifeline program, a safety net program for mentally or physically disabled persons who are were unable to work for at least 90 days was eliminated. It was replaced with three separate services: (1) the Housing and Essential Needs program (HEN); (2) the Aged, Blind and Disabled program; and (3) the Pregnant Women program. Though eligibility requirements have been narrowed, some individuals have been able to retain medical benefits. The HEN's program provides grants to assist persons who are receiving Medical Care Services (MCS) through DSHS and are not receiving any cash assistance. These grants may be used for rent assistance and utility assistance for persons at risk of losing their housing or for homeless persons moving into housing. It also provides essential needs such as hygiene items and bus passes. As the state continues to struggle with revenue shortfalls, this program will be a major target as it is funded fully by state dollars. HEN is the only safety net available for many disabled needy adults. Catholic Community Services administers the HEN's program in King County. WSCC will work to protect and expand the HEN program.

HUNGER: Hunger programs such as the Emergency Food Assistance Program and school meal programs provide needed access to food for struggling families. Due to the economic downturn, increasing numbers of people are coming to food banks and free meal programs. Washington State's rate for people who are hungry is almost 5 percent while food insecurity, defined as families who are financially stretched to a point where they cannot be certain all household members will not go hungry, is more than 15 percent. Advocates will work to retain funding for food assistance programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Maintaining “safety net” programs for vulnerable persons
- Maintaining food assistance programs

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

ENVIRONMENT

PRINCIPLES

We show our respect for the creator by our stewardship of God's creation. Care for the earth is a duty of our faith and a sign of our concern for all people. ... We have a moral obligation to protect the planet on which we live – to respect God's creation and to ensure a safe and hospitable environment for human beings, especially children at their most vulnerable stages of development.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

TOXIC-FREE KIDS: Over the past few years, WSCC has supported legislation that bans toxic chemicals from products used by children. Harmful chemicals including lead, Bisphenol A, mercury, etc. have been found in items children use to play, wear, sleep and eat. Many chemicals are linked to cancer, fertility and learning problems. To-date, legislation has been passed banning individual chemicals, like Bisphenol A. In the 2012 legislative session bills that prioritized for reduction and phase out of chemicals known to be harmful to children received hearings but failed to pass. The legislation would have required children's products manufacturers to find and use safer alternatives when they are available. Advocates will work to secure passage of similar legislation in 2013.

LIVEABLE ENVIRONMENT: The goods of the earth are a gift from God, and are for the benefit of everyone. Our stewardship of creation calls us to preserve and protect our environment, maintain clean water sources and protect the air we breathe.

Even though there is a growing movement to eliminate or reduce activities and pollutants that threaten our environment, the dangers still exist. Currently, millions of gallons of petroleum pollute Washington State's lakes, rivers and marine waters through toxic oil runoff from our roads and cities creating a serious threat to health and the environment. Dangerous pesticides linked to cancer, birth defects, and other adverse health effects threaten the health of farm workers. In the last two centuries there has been a 40 percent increase in greenhouse gas emissions significantly affecting the air we breathe. Legislation will be introduced to address these issues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Eliminating harmful chemicals in children's products when safer alternatives are available
- Promoting clean air and clean water and a healthy environment

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

HEALTH CARE

PRINCIPLES

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. ...Reform of the nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

HEALTH CARE REFORM ACT: In Washington State, it is estimated that well over half a million people do not have health insurance, and these numbers are rising. Many working adults who do not have health care benefits through their employment cannot afford to pay the rising cost of insuring themselves and their children. The federal Affordable Care Act (ACA), which fully takes effect in 2014, was enacted to enable all U.S. citizens to have access to health care coverage. State legislators have been working on implementation provisions. Specifically, the state is creating "exchanges" which allow individuals and businesses to purchase health insurance beginning in 2014. In addition, legislators are working on Medicaid expansion, and developing a means for maintaining the state's Basic Health Plan.

The ACA also requires all insurance companies to provide coverage of contraceptives, abortifacients, and sterilization at no cost to the insured person. HHS implemented by rule this portion of the law with a narrow conscience clause exemption. This mandate took effect in August, 2012 with a "safe harbor" exemption for some religious employers which is in effect until August, 2013. The WSCC will work to ensure adequate exemptions for religious liberties in the state's implementation of the ACA.

STATE HEALTH PROGRAMS: The State of Washington has been noteworthy in its efforts to provide health care coverage for uninsured individuals, children and families, including immigrant families. Programs have included the Basic Health Plan, which provides subsidized coverage for low-income working families, Apple Health which subsidizes coverage for children in families up to 250 percent of the federal poverty level, the Children's Health Plan which covers children not eligible for Apple Health, and Maternity Support Services which provides prenatal care for at risk families, including immigrant families. Mental health services are also provided for some uninsured persons. WSCC and other advocates will work to maintain access to subsidized health care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Providing access to health care for all
- Providing health care services, including maternity support services and basic health care for adults, children and immigrant families
- Ensuring exemptions in health care plans based on conscience

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

HOUSING

PRINCIPLES

The lack of safe, affordable housing requires a renewed commitment to increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships, especially with religious groups and community organizations. Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2011

HOUSING TRUST FUND (HTF): The HTF is a part of the state's capital budget. It assists low-income families and individuals acquire housing by providing funds to enable organizations like Catholic Charities agencies to build affordable housing. The 2012 supplemental capital budget included \$69 million for new Housing Trust Fund projects. This funding has been fully appropriated and a large number of low-income housing projects remain in a queue for state support. Nearly half of the capital budget is financed by state-issued bonds while the rest is funded by dedicated accounts, trust revenue, and federal funding sources. There is greater opportunity for HTF funding because the capital budget does not use general revenue funds. Securing funding for the Housing Trust Fund is a top priority for WSCC and housing advocates.

In the HTF, there have been specific funds set aside for farm worker housing and communities of concern. Funding for both these "set asides" has been a priority for Catholic housing. Supporting funding for communities of concern is an investment in underserved communities that allows them to own, develop, and manage low-income housing. Catholic housing is involved as a partner to assist communities of concern. Farm worker housing funds are used to meet the need for decent and affordable housing for farm workers. Catholic housing is the prime developer of farm worker housing across the state.

TRANSITIONAL HOUSING: The state's Transitional Housing Operating and Rent (THOR) program for homeless families and individuals demonstrates that short-term rental vouchers combined with support services can provide a quick exit from homelessness or prevent homelessness altogether. The THOR program was made permanent in 2009 requiring that rental assistance and case management services help clients transition into permanent housing. Despite its success, THOR is in jeopardy of being severely cut or eliminated in this economic downturn. Advocates will work to ensure that the THOR program is not eliminated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Securing funding for the Housing Trust Fund
- Prioritizing funding for communities of concern and farm work housing
- Maintaining the THOR (Transitional Housing Operating and Rent) Program

WSCC 2013 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

LIFE ISSUES

PRINCIPLES

The direct and intentional destruction of innocent human life from the moment of conception until natural death is always wrong and is not just one issue among many. It must always be opposed. ... Racism and other unjust discrimination, the use of the death penalty, resorting to unjust war, the use of torture, war crimes, the failure to respond to those who are suffering from hunger or a lack of health care, or an unjust immigration policy are all serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2011

ABORTION: In 2012 legislation was introduced, but not adopted to mandate that all state-regulated health care plans include coverage for abortions. Though legal, the federal government prohibits funding for abortion; however, Washington State does provide funding for low-income women to procure abortions. It is likely the bill will be re-introduced. WSCC will again oppose the legislation.

ASSISTED SUICIDE: In 2008, voters legalized assisted suicide by passing Initiative 1000. While WSCC opposes assisted suicide, it is unlikely to be overturned by the Legislature. Vulnerable and ill people have requested the lethal drugs in our state and some individuals have used them. Because the law does not provide for ways to protect individuals against abuse, efforts will be made to establish safeguards to protect vulnerable persons at the end of life.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY: State policy makers have not included adequate conscience clauses in state law. Conscience clauses allow individuals and organizations when receiving or providing services to honor their consciences when providing services. In 2012, religious liberty was a significant issue in bills mandating abortion coverage in health care plans and allowing same-sex marriage. WSCC will continue to promote conscience clauses that respect religious liberty.

DEATH PENALTY: The application of the death penalty is deeply flawed and biased by factors such as race, the quality of legal representation, and where the crime was committed. In other states there is serious re-examination of the death penalty—its fairness, effectiveness, and social and moral dimensions. In 2012, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on abolishing the death penalty, but no vote was taken. WSCC and advocates will continue to support legislation that abolishes the death penalty.

CRISIS PREGNANCY CENTERS: Pregnancy Resource Centers and Medical Clinics are facilities that offer free pregnancy tests, counseling and services for women who suspect they are pregnant. Pro-abortion advocates brought legislation forward that could create new restrictive regulations and sanctions for pregnancy centers. In other states there has been legislation passed, but lawsuits have overturned the statutes. It is unlikely the bill will be re-introduced, but the WSCC will be carefully monitoring any legislation which would impact this work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Ensuring safeguards that protect vulnerable persons at the end of life
- Enacting conscience clauses that honor religious liberty
- Abolishing the death penalty
- Maintaining crisis pregnancy centers without harmful restrictions

WSCC OPPOSES:

- Mandating abortion coverage in all health care plans

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LONG TERM CARE

PRINCIPLES

Pope Benedict XVI has taught that “love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to [the Church] as the ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel” (Deus Caritas Est, no. 22). This preferential option for the poor and vulnerable includes all who are marginalized in our nation and beyond—unborn children, persons with disabilities, the elderly and terminally ill, and victims of injustice and oppression. Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2011

HOME CARE: Seniors and people with disabilities need appropriate high quality supportive services in the setting that best meets their needs. It is estimated that in the U.S. there are currently more than 9 million seniors and people with disabilities who need long term care. Most are cared for at home by family and other loved ones. Approximately 30 percent need supportive services provided by others. These services are provided to people who have chronic illnesses and are designed to help meet health and personal needs. All Catholic Charities agencies in Washington State provide a variety of in home care services in partnership with the state.

Affording seniors and people with disabilities the choice of home care and community-based services saves public dollars by avoiding nursing home placement. The state needs high quality community partners, like Catholic Charities agencies who recruit, train and supervise home care workers. WSCC and Catholic Charities have prepared budget proposals to reduce state spending while maintaining services for home care. WSCC will work to retain access to home care services.

VOLUNTEER SERVICES (VS): Previously known as Volunteer Chore Services, the 2010 Legislature changed the program’s name to Volunteer Services and expanded the services volunteers can perform. The primary focus of the program is to help elders and adults with disabilities remain independent in their own homes with the assistance of volunteers. VS collaborate with faith-based congregations, civic groups, schools and businesses to enlist volunteers. The program serves as a safety net for those individuals who do not qualify for state-paid assistance. WSCC will seek to maintain funding for the Volunteer Services program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Maintaining home care programs and services
- Maintaining the Volunteer Services program