



Washington State Catholic Conference

The Public Policy Voice of the Bishops of Washington State

2023 Bills Featured in the Catholic Advocacy Bulletin

Legislation with an asterisk* was passed into law.

Senate Joint House Resolution/House Joint Resolution

SJR 8202/HJR 4201: Oppose Enshrining Abortion in the State Constitution

[Senate Joint Resolution 8202](#) (SJR 8202) and [House Joint Resolution 4201](#) (HJR 4201) would create a constitutional right to an abortion. Last year, the US Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, giving states the ability to determine their own laws on abortion. Abortion laws in our state did not change. Current law was determined by an initiative approved by the people, allowing for abortion up to the point of a fetus's viability. SJR 8202 and HJR 4201 propose enshrining abortion in the state constitution. The proposed amendment would expand abortion, allowing babies to be aborted up to the point of their birth. The WSCC released this [Action Alert](#), generating about 1,000 messages to legislators.

Bishop Frank Schuster testified against SJR 8202 and his testimony may be viewed [here](#). The initial screen for the clip appears to be for a different bill, but if you press play, the video will be cued for Bishop Schuster's testimony.

In light of increased pro-abortion legislation this session, the WSCC bishops released a statement, "[Supporting Life and Justice for the Common Good in Washington State,](#)" emphasizing the Church's teaching to respect the dignity of every human person, from conception to natural death.

SJR 8202 passed out of the Senate Committee on Health and Long Term Care but did not make it to the floor for a vote.

Below you will find Senate bills listed first, followed by House bills. Bills are listed numerically.

Senate Bills

***SB 5087: Eliminating the Death Penalty**

[Senate Bill 5087](#) (SB 5087) was signed into law on April 20. SB 5087 eliminates the death penalty and removes it from Washington statute. In 2009, the Washington State Supreme Court unanimously determined that Washington's death penalty is imposed in an arbitrary and racially biased manner and therefore violates the state constitution. Additionally, in 2014 Governor Jay Inslee declared a moratorium on the death penalty. However, these actions did not completely

repeal the death penalty statute, leaving open the door that it could be applied in the future. SB 5087 removes language from state laws identified as defects and omissions as reported by the supreme court pursuant to the state constitution. Amongst numerous measures, repealing the death penalty is included in the bill. The WSCC has been advocating for the repeal of the death penalty for several years. In line with the bishops' racial justice and respect life legislative priorities, the WSCC supports SB 5087.

SB 5109/HB1095: Wage Replacement for Immigrant Workers

[Senate Bill 5109](#) (SB 5109) would establish a wage replacement program to help undocumented immigrant workers who are ineligible for unemployment insurance and meet certain qualifications. In line with the bishops' immigration legislative priority, the WSCC supports SB 5109 and its companion bill, [HB 1095](#).

***SB 5114: Support Human Trafficking Survivors**

[Senate Bill 5114](#) (SB 5114) will administer funding for healing, support, and transition services for adults who are survivors of human trafficking. In accordance with the bishops' legislative priority to respect the dignity of every human person and assist survivors of human trafficking, the WSCC supports SB 5114.

SB 5135/HB 1087: The Solitary Confinement Restriction Act

Solitary confinement can have devastating and inhumane effects on incarcerated individuals. Those placed in prolonged solitary confinement have higher rates of medical conditions, shorter life expectancy, and higher recidivism rates. Solitary confinement is also disproportionately imposed on Black, Indigenous, and Hispanic individuals. The United Nations defines solitary confinement of 15 days or more as torture. In Washington, prisoners may be isolated for up to 30 days. [Senate Bill 5135](#) (SB 5135) limits the use of solitary confinement to 15 consecutive days or 45 cumulative days during a fiscal year. In accordance with the bishops' restorative justice legislative priority, the WSCC supports SB 5135 and its companion bill [House Bill 1087](#) (HB 1087).

***SB 5179/HB1281: Expansion of Assisted Suicide**

[Senate Bill 5179](#) (SB 5179) and its companion bill [House Bill 1281](#) (HB 1281) loosen the safeguards currently applied to the assisted suicide laws of Washington state. In 2008 Washington voters approved Initiative 1000, the Physician-Assisted Death Initiative, but only after being assured that certain "safeguards" would be in place. HB 1141 loosens safeguards, increasing access to physician-assisted suicide and accelerating the process. The bill broadens the definition of a "qualified medical provider" who can make a diagnosis and prescribe lethal medication. Two physicians are no longer required to diagnose a patient. HB 1141 also loosens the definition of those who can provide counseling; in lieu of a psychiatrist or psychologist, a social worker, mental health counselor, or psychiatric advanced nurse practitioner may determine if a patient is suffering from a psychiatric or psychological disorder or depression causing impaired judgement. Additionally, this bill shortens the minimum amount of time from 15 days to 7 days that a patient is required to wait between making a request and receiving a prescription to terminate his or her life. The 7-day wait time may even be waived if the "qualified medical provider" deems that a patient has less than 7 days to live. SB 5179 and HB 1281 also permit assisted suicide prescriptions to be delivered via the mail. These bills are opposed by disabilities advocates, such as Disabilities Rights Washington, and the American Medical Association. In accordance with the bishops' legislative priority to respect life, the WSCC opposes SB 5179 and HB 1281.

SB 5180: Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact

[Senate Bill 5180](#) (SB 5180) would support teachers from other states in pathways to licensure in Washington. SB 5180 would also help eligible military spouses in becoming licensed in our state. SB 5180 could be advantageous for teachers seeking employment in Catholic schools. In line with the bishops' Catholic schools and education legislative priority, the WSCC supports SB 5180.

***SB 5225: Working Connections Child Care Program**

[Senate Bill 5225](#) (SB 5225) increases access to the Working Connection Child Care (WCCC) program. The WCCC provides child care subsidies to families in need. SB 5225 improves the WCCC by increasing the eligibility of child care workers who have incomes up to 85% of the state median income. Copayments will be waived to the extent allowable, too. In line with the bishops' legislative priorities of economic justice and supporting children and families, the WSCC supports SB 5225.

***SB 5242: Prohibiting Cost Sharing for Abortion**

[Senate Bill 5242](#) (SB 5242), prohibits health insurance plans from imposing cost sharing for abortion. Health insurers impose cost sharing for many medically necessary and life-saving procedures; abortion procedures need not be exempted from this practice. In line with bishops' legislative priority to respect life, the WSCC opposes SB 5242.

***SB 5256: Housing Assistance to Help Reunite Families**

[Senate Bill 5256](#) (SB 5256) improves the Child Welfare Housing Assistance Program. The Child Welfare Housing Assistance Pilot Program was established in Lewis County in 2020 and provides housing vouchers, rental assistance, navigation, and other support services to eligible families. Families are eligible for this program if they have a child that is in foster care or eligible for foster care and whose lack of appropriate housing is a remaining barrier to reunification. SB 5256 makes the Child Welfare Housing Assistance program permanent and expands it to serve one or more counties on the east and west sides of the Cascade Mountains. In line with the bishops' legislative priorities of affordable housing and supporting children and families, the WSCC supports SB 5256.

SB 5280/HB 1098: Clergy and Mandatory Reporting of Abuse or Neglect

[Senate Bill 5280](#) (SB 5280) would mandate clergy to report child abuse or neglect. In its current, original form, the Senate bill exempts clergy from reporting child abuse or neglect when information is obtained during the sacrament of Reconciliation, as a result of the established clergy-penitent privilege. In its original form, SB 5280 does not attempt to change current practice within the Catholic Church. Clergy are already mandatory reporters when they obtain information outside of the confessional.

SB 5280 has a companion bill, [House Bill 1098](#) (HB 1098), that has been altered and is opposed by the WSCC. HB 1098 has been amended and strikes the confessional exemption; it mandates that clergy report child abuse or neglect, even when information is obtained during the sacrament of Reconciliation. This practice would violate canon law. The WSCC opposes HB 1098. While SB 5280 in its current form is not objectionable, the WSCC would oppose any amendment seeking to negatively impact the sacrament of Reconciliation. The WSCC will be working on this issue during the interim. These bills will carry over to the 2024 legislative session.

SB 5366: Prevent Utility Shutoffs During Extreme Heat

[Senate Bill 5366](#) (SB 5366), would help individuals with low incomes by preventing utilities from shutting off their water or electricity due to nonpayment during periods of extreme heat. In line with the bishops' economic justice legislative priority, the WSCC supports HB 1329.

***SB 5453: Supporting Survivors of Female Genital Mutilation**

[Senate Bill 5453](#) (SB 5453) helps survivors of female genital mutilation (FGM). SB 5453 creates a civil cause of action for survivors of FGM, defines FGM as unprofessional conduct under the Uniform Disciplinary Act for health care providers, creates education programs, and establishes FGM as a crime. In line with the bishops' priority to respect the dignity of every human person, the WSCC supports SB 5453.

***SB 5599: Eliminating Parental Notification for Youth Seeking Abortions or Gender-Affirming Care**

On April 19, the Legislature passed [Senate Bill 5599](#) (SB 5599). Currently, licensed overnight shelters and licensed organizations providing services to homeless or runaway youth must contact a youth's parents if they know that a child is away from home without parental permission. Exceptions may be made if notifying a parent or legal guardian will subject a minor to abuse or neglect. SB 5599 would further expand exceptions to notifying parents or legal guardians. Namely, if a youth is seeking an abortion or gender-affirming care, parents or legal guardians do not need to be notified. According to Catholic Social Teaching, the family is the most central social institution, and it must be supported and strengthened. SB 5599 undermines families and allows persons other than a minor's parents to authorize life-changing medical procedures for underage youth. In line with the bishops' legislative priorities to protect children and families and respect life, the WSCC opposes SB 5599.

***SB 5768: State Sale and Administration of Abortion Medication**

On April 7, a court in Texas invalidated the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval of mifepristone, an abortion drug. The decision is being appealed. On the same day, in a separate case filed by Washington state and 16 other states, a court ruling blocked the FDA from altering the availability of mifepristone in the states filing the case. In response to court cases involving mifepristone, Governor Jay Inslee announced a plan to purchase a three-year supply of mifepristone and authorize the Department of Corrections to administer the stockpile of the abortion medication. [Senate Bill 5768](#) (SB 5768) creates this authorization and allows the department to acquire, receive, possess, sell, resell, deliver, dispense, distribute, and engage in any activity constituting the practice of pharmacy or wholesale distribution of abortion medication. On April 10, WSCC executive director, Mario Villanueva, testified against this bill in a hearing before the Senate Ways and Means Committee. On April 18, WSCC director of policy and communications, Adrienne Corpuz Joyce, testified against this bill before the House Appropriations Committee. In line with the bishops' legislative priority to respect the dignity of life, including the pre-born, the WSCC opposes SB 5768.

Unlike other bills listed in this document, the following bills are pro-life bills that did not receive hearings. Advocates were encouraged ask their senators to support these bills.

[SB 5098](#) Prohibiting abortion on the basis of down syndrome

[SB 5172](#) Ensuring only physicians perform abortions and informing women of the inherent risks associated with abortion.

[SB 5227](#) Prohibiting sex-selection abortions

[SB 5185](#) Applies various limits to abortion

House Bills

***HB 1047: Toxics Free Cosmetics Act**

The [Toxics Free Cosmetics Act](#), House Bill 1047 (HB 1047), addresses the fact that many personal care items and cosmetics contain chemicals that are unregulated, and are linked to cancer and developmental and reproductive harm. In addition to harming individuals, unregulated chemicals also pollute the environment during manufacturing and after disposal. The Toxics Free Cosmetics Act bans certain hazardous chemicals in cosmetics, include hazard assessments of substitute chemicals, and provide incentives for small businesses to make safer cosmetics. In line with the bishops' legislative priority of caring for God's creation, the WSCC supports the Toxics Free Cosmetics Act.

***HB 1048/SB 5047: Enhancing the Voting Rights Act**

[House Bill 1048](#) (HB 1048) and [Senate Bill 5047](#) (SB 5047) enhances the Washington Voting Rights Act (WVRA). The WVRA was passed in 2018 to expand access to fair and effective representation for historically marginalized and underrepresented communities. SB 5047 and HB 1048 improve the WVRA by refining language of who may recover costs incurred conducting research on alleged violations of the WVRA, allowing organizations and coalitions to file WVRA violations, permitting tribes to files WVRA claims, allowing the number of county commissioners to be increased to remedy violations related to tribal status, and establishing that state and local laws be construed in favor of protecting the right to vote. In line with the bishops' racial justice legislative priority, the WSCC supports SB 5047/HB 1048.

HB 1109: Special Education Funding

Currently, special education initial evaluations and the subsequent development of individualized education programs do not occur when school is out of session for the summer. [House Bill 1109](#) (HB 1109) would provide funding for initial evaluations and the development of individualized education programs to take place during summer months. In line with the bishops' legislative priorities of caring for children/families and those with disabilities, the WSCC supports HB 1109.

HB 1124: Protecting Tenants

[House Bill 1124](#), (HB 1124) would protect renters from excessive fees. This bill requires landlords to provide at least 180 days' notice for rent increases over 5 percent. It also allows tenants to terminate tenancy without penalty for a rent increase over 5 percent. Additionally, late rental payment fees are limited to the lesser of 10 percent of the rental amount or \$75 total. In line with the bishops' affordable housing legislative priority, the WSCC supports HB 1124.

***HB 1128/SB 5183: Increasing the Personal Needs Allowance**

[House Bill 1128](#) (HB 1128) helps Medicaid recipients by increasing the amount of income they may spend on personal needs. Medicaid recipients must contribute to the cost of their care. The amount of the required co-pay is equivalent to a recipient's income, minus

deductions, including a personal needs allowance. SB 5183 increases this monthly personal needs allowance from \$70 to \$100. Related to the bishops' economic justice and health care legislative priorities, the WSCC supports HB 1128 and its companion bill, SB 5183.

HB 1131/SB 5154: Washington Recycling and Packaging (WRAP) Act

The Washington Recycling and Packaging (WRAP) Act addresses plastic and packaging waste by creating a set of graduated fees to be paid for by packaging manufacturers. Fees will be based on how reusable, compostable, or recyclable products are. Fees will then be used to fund improvements to infrastructure and provide uniform recycling access across the state. In line with the legislative priority to care for God's creation, the WSCC supports [House Bill 1131](#) (HB 1131) and its companion bill, [Senate Bill 5154](#) (SB 5154).

HB 1151: Mishandling of Human Embryos

[House Bill 1151](#) (HB 1151) would mandate health coverage of fertility services. The WSCC specifically opposes the promotion of *in vitro* fertilization (IVF), which creates human embryos that are not properly cared for. Our Catholic faith teaches us to respect all life and that life begins at conception. However, IVF often results in unused embryos that are frozen indefinitely, destroyed, or abandoned. Life is not properly cared for nor respected. Additionally, IVF can treat children as commodities that are manufactured outside of the construct of the expression of love of a married couple. A more thorough explanation of the complexity of the Church's opposition to IVF may be found [here](#). In line with the legislative priority to respect life, the WSCC opposes HB 1151.

***HB 1177/SB 5137: Solving Crimes of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People**

[House Bill 1177](#) (HB 1177) was signed into law on April 20. Indigenous women experience violence at higher rates than other individuals and are murdered at rates greater than ten times the national average. These crimes are often unsolved or unreported. HB 1177 will create a Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and People Cold Case Investigation Assistance Unit within the Office of the Attorney General to increase capacity to help indigenous women and people and solve related crimes. In line with the bishops' legislative priority to respect the dignity of all, the WSCC supports HB 1177 and its companion bill, SB 5137.

***HB 1181/SB 5203: Growth Management Act (GMA) Updates**

The Growth Management Act (GMA) is a series of laws that was passed in 1990 and requires fast-growing cities and counties to develop a comprehensive plan to manage their population growth. [House Bill 1181](#) (HB 1181) and [Senate Bill 5203](#) (SB 5203) update the GMA by adding a climate change and resiliency goal and requiring some counties and cities to address adverse impacts of climate change on people, property, and ecological systems and identify ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled. In line with the bishops' legislative priority of caring for God's creation, the WSCC supports HB 1181 and SB 5203.

***HB 1238: Free School Meals**

[House Bill 1238](#) (HB 1238) requires certain public schools serving grades K-4 to provide breakfast and lunch each school day at no charge to any student who requests these meals. This program will be phased in over the next two upcoming school years. In line with the bishops' legislative priorities of children and families, economic justice, and education, the WSCC supports HB 1238.

***HB 1260: Providing Stability for Individuals with Disabilities**

[House Bill 1260](#) (HB 1260) improves rules for programs assisting those with disabilities or low incomes. Impacted programs include the Aged, Blind and Disabled Cash Assistance Program (ABD), supplemental security income (SSI) payments, Housing and Essential Needs (HEN), and the Pregnant Women Assistance (PWA) program. For example, beginning on October 1, 2025, individuals may receive both ABD and SSI. Also, under HB 1260 eligibility for programs is improved for those participating in substance use disorder treatment. In line with the bishops' economic justice priority and legislative priority to care for the aging and disabled, the WSCC supports HB 1260.

***HB 1265: Tax Exemption for Housing for Individuals with Disabilities**

On April 14, [House Bill 1265](#) (HB 1265) was signed into law. HB 1265 expands the property tax exemption for housing for individuals with disabilities. In line with the bishops' legislative priorities of caring for the aging and disabled and increasing affordable housing, the WSCC supports HB 1265.

***HB 1324: Restorative Justice and Juvenile Offenses**

[House Bill 1324](#) (HB 1324) supports restorative justice and those with juvenile offenses. Currently, prior juvenile offenses will add points to an adult's sentencing calculation for a separate crime. This practice unfairly punishes individuals twice for offenses committed as a juvenile, when one's decision-making capacity and impulse control are still developing. In line with the bishops' restorative justice legislative priority, the WSCC supports HB 1324.

***HB 1329: Prevent Utility Shutoffs During Extreme Heat**

[House Bill 1329](#) (HB 1329) helps individuals with low incomes by preventing utilities from shutting off their water or electricity due to nonpayment during periods of extreme heat. In line with the bishops' economic justice legislative priority, the WSCC supports HB 1329.

HB 1615: School Choice

[House Bill 1615](#) is a school choice bill that creates Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) that parents may use to pay for tuition at private schools, including Catholic schools. Priority would be given to children with disabilities, children who are from low-income households, or children who are from public schools that are identified as challenged schools in need of improvement. In line with the bishops' education and Catholic schools legislative priority, the WSCC supports HB 1615.

***HB 1784: Hunger Relief**

[House Bill 1784](#) (HB 1784) addresses food insecurity and provides funding for hunger relief organizations and senior nutrition services programs. In line with the bishops' economic justice priority and legislative priority to care for the aging, the WSCC supports HB 1784.

***Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign (HEIC)**

The Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign seeks to increase health care access for all immigrants, regardless of status. While a bill was explored, substantial movement on this issue was made through the budget process. Budget items passed include \$110 in premium assistance for immigrants to purchase private health insurance, with \$10 million specifically designated for undocumented individuals; \$49.5 million to fund a Medicaid equivalent program for all immigrants beginning in July 2024 ; \$3.7 million to support outreach, customer assistance, and administration of new programs; and \$7.7 million in new funds to increase the

limited number of low-income immigrants eligible for long-term care support. The WSCC signed on to a letter to the legislature advocating for these measures.

Legislation with an asterisk* was passed into law.