



Washington State Catholic Conference

The Public Policy Voice of the Bishops of Washington State

WSCC Newsletter for Catholic Schools

Spring Quarter 2023

As the public policy voice of the five bishops of Washington state, the Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) advocates for policies that serve the common good and recognize the dignity of every human person. Our advocacy is guided by Catholic Social Teaching, and supporting Catholic schools and education is a key goal of our mission.

The 2023 State Legislative Session Recap

The Washington State Legislature concluded their work on April 23, and Governor Jay Inslee was given until mid-May to sign bills passed by the Legislature into law, veto or partially veto them, or allow the bills to be passed into law without his action. Click [here](#) to view the WSCC's 2023 Legislative Priorities document. A list of bills the WSCC worked on that were passed into law may be found [here](#). The larger list of bills the WSCC took a position on may be viewed [here](#), and [detailed descriptions of the bills](#) are also available. Thank you for being a Catholic voice and advocating alongside the WSCC this session. In addition to signing in for or against bills, Catholic advocates also responded to our Action Alerts and sent over 7,700 messages to the governor and legislators. Please join us again in advocating for or against bills of importance to Catholics during the 2024 state legislative session, which will begin on January 8. Read further to learn more about important bills from the 2023 session.



Legislation Impacting Catholic Schools and Education Policy

Below are some of the legislative issues impacting Catholic schools and education that the WSCC worked on during the 2023 session. The legislative cycle is a biennium, a two-year cycle. Bills that did not pass in 2023 will still be active for the upcoming 2024 session.

School Choice Bills

The House Committee on Education conducted a hearing for [House Bill 1615](#) (HB 1615), which would establish education savings accounts that parents could apply to education costs, including tuition at Catholic schools. Priority would be given to children with disabilities, children who are from low-income households, and children who are from public schools that are identified as challenged schools in need of improvement. The WSCC coordinated testimony in support of the bill, and the

hearing may be viewed [here](#). In line with the bishops' education and Catholic schools legislative priority, the WSCC supported HB 1615. [House Bill 1093](#) is another school choice bill that was introduced. Neither of these bills progressed further, as concerted coalition-building is required to pass school choice legislation in Washington. At the same time, the WSCC is working on long-term plans outside of the legislative session to create school choice options that will help parents to send their children to Catholic schools. More to come!

Senate Bill 5180 Would Help Catholic Schools Hire New Teachers

[Senate Bill 5180](#) (HB 5180) would help Catholic schools hire new, qualified teachers. The bill would create the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact, which would allow certain licensed teachers from other states to also be licensed in Washington state. Additionally, SB 5180 aids military spouses in obtaining teaching licensure in Washington. The WSCC supported SB 5180. This bill made it through the Senate, but was not passed out of the House Committee on Education following a hearing. The WSCC will continue to work on this bill through 2024.

Free School Meals In Public Schools, House Bill 1238

[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 supported HB 1238, and it was passed into law.

Special Education Funding, House Bill 1109

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 education and caring for children/families and those with disabilities, the WSCC supported HB 1109. This bill made it through the House, progressed in the Senate, but ultimately did not pass out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee. The WSCC will continue to support this bill in the 2024 session. Given how far the bill progressed, HB 1109 will start from the House Rules Committee in 2024.



Additional WSCC Legislative Priorities

In addition to supporting Catholic schools and education, the WSCC has a number of other [legislative priorities](#), all based on Catholic Social Teaching. Below are just a few highlights of other bills the bishops supported or opposed.

- **Protecting Children and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Senate Bill 5280** - [Senate Bill 5280](#) (SB 5280) would have required clergy to be mandatory reporters of child abuse or neglect. The WSCC supports mandatory reporting with one exception – when information is obtained solely during the sacrament of reconciliation. Catholic priests are already mandatory reporters in our Church. The seal of the confessional is sacred, and it is a violation of canon law for a priest to reveal what has been confessed during the sacrament of

reconciliation. Revealing information confessed during reconciliation results in excommunication, whereby a priest would be forbidden to celebrate or receive the sacraments. The WSCC opposed an amendment made to SB 5280 that would require priests to report child abuse or neglect, even in cases where information is obtained during the sacrament of reconciliation. While this bill was not passed by the Legislature this year, legislators are likely to work on the bill once again during the 2024 legislative session. The WSCC looks forward to working with the House and Senate to pass a bill that protects children, the clergy-penitent privilege, and the sacrament of reconciliation.

- **Toxics Free Cosmetics Act, House Bill 1047** - The [Toxics Free Cosmetics Act](#) 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, includes hazard assessments of substitute chemicals, and provides incentives for small businesses to make safer cosmetics. In line with the bishops' legislative priority of caring for God's creation, the WSCC supported the Toxics Free Cosmetics Act, and it was passed into law.
- **Resolutions to Enshrine Abortion in the State Constitution Fail** - [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 issued an Action Alert, generating about 1,000 messages to legislators. Bishop Frank Schuster testified against SJR 8202 and his testimony may be viewed [here](#). In light of increased pro-abortion legislation during the 2023 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.
- **Death Penalty Eliminated, Senate Bill 5087** - [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 supported the passing of SB 5087.

- **Hunger Relief Bill Passes, House Bill 1784** - [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 supported HB 1784, and it was passed into law.

Join the WSCC for Year-Round Advocacy

As the state legislative session has concluded for the year, the WSCC invites you to continue to be a Catholic voice via year-round advocacy efforts. Now is an ideal time to learn more about Catholic Social Teaching and policy issues of importance to our faith, reach out to your local legislators, and talk with fellow parishioners about our call to be advocates for the common good. Learn more from our [year-round advocacy resources](#) and [advocacy tool kit](#). Numerous advocacy topics and resources may also be found throughout our [website](#). Additionally, the WSCC is available to give presentations to your deanery, parish, or ministry on topics such as faithful citizenship, advocacy, legislative priorities, and Catholic Social Teaching.



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