



Washington State Catholic Conference

The Public Policy Voice of the Bishops of Washington State

WSSCC Newsletter for Catholic Schools

Fall Quarter 2023

As the public policy voice of the five bishops of Washington state, the Washington State Catholic Conference (WSSCC) 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.

WSSCC Bishops Appoint New Executive Director

The bishops of the Washington State Catholic Conference (WSSCC) appointed Jean Welch Hill as the new WSSCC executive director. Mario Villanueva retired from the position in August. Jean has more than 25 years of experience in state and federal advocacy. She previously worked as the Government Liaison and Director of the Office of Life, Justice, and Peace for the Diocese of Salt Lake City for 11 years and as an attorney for the Utah State Board of Education and its Professional Practices Advisory Commission for 12 years. She comes to the WSSCC directly from Salt Lake County government, where she was Director of the Office of Homelessness and Criminal Justice Reform and the county's Criminal Justice Advisory Council.



As the WSSCC executive director Jean will lead advocacy efforts and represent the bishops of the Archdiocese of Seattle, the Diocese of Spokane, and the Diocese of Yakima on public policy matters. She will also direct year-round advocacy across Washington state.

As the WSSCC promotes the values of Catholic Social Teaching in public policy, we are thankful for the gifts Jean brings to lead the WSSCC.

New State Legislative Session Begins in January

The 2024 state legislative session begins on January 8 and will run for 60 days. Advocating for Catholic schools is a WSSCC legislative priority. Join us in advocating for Catholic schools and other legislative priorities that serve the common good and reflect Catholic Social Teaching. [Sign up](#) to stay informed of legislative issues via our [Catholic Advocacy Bulletin](#). During the session we will include quick links to sign in electronically for or against legislation. We will also provide ways to contact your legislators at key moments when they are considering bills of importance to Catholic Social Teaching. The Catholic Advocacy Bulletin is currently emailed monthly, and during the state legislative session it is sent weekly.

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Bill Spotlights

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. Below are spotlights of two bills returning for the 2024 session that the WSCC will work on. Approximately 2,000 new bills are likely to be introduced in 2024.

- **Senate Bill 5180 Would Help Catholic Schools Hire New Teachers** - [Senate Bill 5180](#) (SB 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 supports SB 5180. This bill made it through the Senate during the 2023 session but was not passed out of the House Committee on Education following a hearing. The WSCC will continue to support this bill in the upcoming session.
- **Protecting Children and the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Senate Bill 5280** - [Senate Bill 5280](#) (SB 5280) would require 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. It is important to preserve the clergy-penitent privilege. 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. 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.



Resources for the 2024 Legislative Session

Leading up to and during the upcoming 2024 legislative session, the following links may be of use.

- [Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship](#) – This document from the US Conference of Catholic Bishops outlines the Church’s position on numerous public policy issues and emphasizes the importance of faithful citizenship.
- [WSCC website](#)
- [WSCC Catholic Advocacy Bulletins](#)
- [Washington State Legislature](#) - Information on bills, hearings, legislators, and more.
- [Identify your district and legislators](#)
- [Find bill information](#)

The WSCC Supports Initiative 2081

The WSCC supports Initiative 2081 (I-2081), which would establish a parents' bill of rights for parents of children in public schools. In the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching, families are a central social institution that must be supported and strengthened, not undermined. I-2081 strengthens family rights.

The text of I-2081 may be viewed [here](#). I-2081 names parents as the primary stakeholders in their children's upbringing. It also reiterates or establishes numerous parents' rights within the public school system. Among those listed are the right to review medical

records and health records, the right to receive prior notification when medical services are being offered to their child (except when emergency medical treatment is required), the right to receive notification of a medical service or medications provided to their child that could result in financial impact, the right to receive reassurance that a child's public school will not discriminate against a child based upon sincerely held religious beliefs, and the right to receive notification if a child is taken or removed from a public school campus without parental permission, including to stay at a youth shelter or host home. I-2081 also calls for parents to receive notification and the ability to opt their children out of activities that include questions about a child's sexual experiences or are on the topic of sexual activity.



At the discretion of pastors, signatures for this initiative may be collected at parishes. Parishioners must obtain approval from pastors prior to collecting petition signatures on church grounds. I-2081 is an initiative to the Legislature, and petitions are due to the Secretary of State on December 29, 2023. To qualify for legislative action, 324,516 valid signatures must be collected. Visit our [website](#) for more information about signing or obtaining petitions. Bishop Frank Schuster also speaks to the initiative in this [video](#).



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We invite you to contact us at any time.

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