



Washington State Catholic Conference

The Public Policy Voice of the Bishops of Washington State

WSCC Newsletter for Catholic Schools

Spring Quarter 2021

The Washington State Catholic Conference is the public policy voice of the bishops of the state. This quarterly newsletter focuses on legislative issues of particular importance to Catholic Schools.

State Legislative Session Concludes

Due to COVID-19, this year's state legislative session was conducted virtually. The session commenced on January 11 and concluded on April 25. Governor Jay Inslee was then given 20 days to veto, partially veto, or sign into law bills passed by both the Senate and House of Representatives. The WSCC analyzes bills and lobbies to promote or oppose legislation of importance to Catholic schools, the five bishops of Washington state, and our Catholic faith, all in service of the common good.

Below are some of the bills impacting Catholic schools that the WSCC lobbied for or against.



Private Schools Emergency Waiver

[House Bill 1131](#) (HB 1131) provides a waiver for private schools to maintain their approval status when they are unable to meet minimum schools days or instructional hours due to a significant disruption resulting from an emergency situation. This bill is favorable to Catholic schools and allows them to be in good status with the state as schools contend with the challenges of the pandemic. The WSCC supported HB 1131, and it was passed into law.

Tax Credit for Scholarship Contributions

[Senate Bill 5200](#) (SB 5200) establishes a tax credit for contributions to student scholarship organizations. While this bill focuses on benefits for students who receive special education services or are foster children, the WSCC supports all efforts that lead to school choice and could be expanded in the future to benefit Catholic school students and families. SB 5200 was introduced in the Senate but did not pass out of the Senate Early Learning and K-12 Education Committee.

Copays for Student Reduced-Price Lunches Eliminated

[House Bill 1342](#) (HB 1342) eliminates lunch copays for students who qualify for reduced-price lunches under the National School Lunch Program. This program provides nutritionally balanced meals to qualifying low-

income children at public schools and nonprofit private schools, including Catholic schools. The WSCC supported HB 1342, and it was passed into law.

K-12 Education Vouchers

[Senate Bill 5205](#) (SB 5205) establishes a K-12 education voucher program. The WSCC is highly supportive of school choice programs that increase families' opportunities to attend Catholic schools. However, this is an issue that is traditionally opposed by the current majority in the House and Senate. Passing a school choice bill requires an extensive amount of planning and coalition building, which are part of the WSCC's long-term goals. WSCC supported SB 5205, but it did not progress past its introduction to the Senate.



Lead Testing in Schools

[House Bill 1139](#) (HB 1139) creates new water testing requirements for lead in schools. Catholic schools already conduct tests for lead in their water systems, and this legislation creates onerous requirements. The WSCC advocated for private schools to be exempt. HB 1139 was passed into law, and private schools are exempt from the new law.



The Bishops' State Legislative Priorities

Each year the five bishops of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Diocese of Yakima, and Diocese of Spokane select legislative priorities that reflect Catholic social teaching and our desire to serve the common good. Catholic schools are one of the bishops' priorities. Read about the eleven legislative priorities [here](#) or watch Bishop Daly speak to the legislative priorities in this [video](#). A small sample of the bills the WSCC worked on during this year's legislative session are listed below. For a more extensive list, see our [May Catholic Advocacy Bulletin](#).

- **The Working Families Tax Exemption, [House Bill 1297](#)** (HB 1297). This tax credit will assist low-income, working individuals and families, including tax-paying immigrants. The HB 1297 tax credit seeks to address Washington's regressive tax system, which causes low-income Washingtonians to pay six times more in taxes as a percentage of their household income in comparison to wealthier residents. The Working Families Tax Credit will reach 500,000 households, including one in four children; have an outsized impact on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities; and will provide a base credit of \$500 to \$900. In accordance with the bishops' priorities of the state budget, economic justice, and racial justice, the WSCC supported HB 1297, and it was passed into law.
- **Expansion of Postpartum Maternal Health Coverage, [Senate Bill 5068](#)** (SB 5068). SB 5068 expands postpartum maternal coverage from 60 days to one year for recipients of Apple Health. Apple Health provides health coverage for eligible families, children, low-income adults, and certain disabled individuals. Throughout Washington state and the US, maternal mortality rates are much higher than other developed countries, with stark ethnic disparities. Related to our health care and racial justice legislative priorities, the WSCC supported SB 5068, and it was passed into law.
- **Expansion of Assisted Suicide, [House Bill 1141](#)** (HB 1141). HB 1141 sought to expand access to assisted suicide. Provisions included decreasing the waiting period from 15 days to 72 hours, loosening the two-physician requirement to diagnose a patient, and changing the requirement that patients' mental health be evaluated by a psychiatrist or psychologist. Related to the WSCC's legislative priority to respect life, the WSCC opposed HB 1141, and it did not pass out of the Senate.
- **Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, [Senate Bill 5141](#)** (SB 5141). Low-income individuals and communities of color are disproportionately affected by environmental burdens. The HEAL Act addresses this by implementing recommendations of the [Environmental Justice Task Force](#). Among its provisions, the HEAL Act defines environmental justice and requires some state agencies to complete environmental justice assessments, using a

racial justice lens. The HEAL Act also incorporates tribal consultation, directs funding with environmental benefits towards communities highly impacted by pollution or climate change, and establishes the Environmental Justice Council. In accordance with the bishops' racial justice priority and the call of Pope Francis to care for God's creation in *Laudato Si'*, the WSCC supported the HEAL Act, and it was signed into law.

How Can I Learn More About Policy Issues That Are Important to Catholics of Washington?

Join our network to find out: wacatholics.org/join. You will receive our Catholic Advocacy Bulletin and occasional Action Alerts. Through the end of the year our Catholic Advocacy Bulletin will be emailed monthly. During the state legislative session it is emailed weekly. You can also find the WSCC at wacatholics.org, [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#), and [Instagram](#).

Policy Spotlight: Emergency Assistance for Non-Public Schools (EANS) Funding In Washington State In Response to COVID-19

As Congress made funding available to assist schools during the pandemic, WSCC worked with the Catholic school superintendents of the state to navigate the rules established to access funding. Below is an update on Emergency Assistance for Non-public Schools (EANS) Funding.



The state of Washington recently received an allocation of federal funding called Emergency Assistance to Non-Public Schools (EANS) available to schools for certain eligible expenses on a reimbursement basis. There have been two federal approvals for EANS 1 and 2 funding. EANS 1 was funded under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA), 2021. Congress authorized the EANS program as part of the Act's Governor's Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund. The U.S. Department of Education awarded a portion of the GEER Fund under the CRRSA Act to governors as a supplement to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act, of 2020. Washington state applied for and received an allocation of over \$46 million in EANS 1 funding.

President Biden also signed a new round of COVID relief into law with the American Rescue Plan in March 2021. This included \$2.75 billion for the EANS program (EANS 2). This second round of funding is like the first round, except for the important difference that the second round of EANS does not permit reimbursements, only projected expenses. EANS 2 funding was obtained in the same amount for Washington state as the first round and will become available to nonpublic schools, including Catholic schools, in Washington state later this year.

Students, parent/guardians, and educators of non-profit, private, and religiously affiliated schools who have been approved by the Washington State Board of Education are eligible for benefits provided by these federal education grant programs. Funding for these equitable services can provide a valuable supplement to the core programming and professional development private schools make available. While this may sound like very good news, as private and Catholic schools work with the state Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) on obtaining EANS funding, the process has proved challenging. In general, it has been difficult to secure these funds to pay for some of the most pressing needs, such as staffing.

Catholic schools in Washington state have applied for nearly \$8 million in EANS 1 funding to date. To be sure, the costs reimbursed by EANS 1, such as improved internet access, technology supplies, and safety equipment and supplies, have helped Catholic schools deliver quality educational services in a safe manner, as well as keep enrollment up during this COVID-19 pandemic. However, some of the bureaucracy required to

obtain these funds has been challenging. Members of our Catholic schools leadership team have been working with OSPI to find ways to make these funds more useable for Catholic schools.

Registration Open: Cornerstone Catholic Conference, October 30



The WSCC invites you to join the bishops of Washington at the Virtual [Cornerstone Catholic Conference](#) on October 30. Fr. Robert Spitzer and Gloria Purvis will present keynote addresses in English, and Fr. Agustino Torres and Brenda Noriega will present keynote addresses in Spanish. Featured musicians include Pedro Rubalcava and Martín Valverde. Throughout the conference workshops will be presented in English and Spanish. Please [register](#) to gain access to the conference, but there is no registration fee. We welcome donations to help cover the cost of the conference. Parishes are encouraged to host gatherings to view the conference in groups. We look forward to seeing you virtually on October 30!

Invitation to Join School Choice Efforts

You can do something *today* to make Catholic education accessible for all.

Join [Empower Washington](#) - a cross-partisan movement which is working to put families at the center of our education system. The policy we're fighting for would empower parents to decide how to spend their education tax dollars. This means families of any income could choose the school which is best for their child, including a Catholic school.



Never been involved in a political movement? Don't worry, there are plenty of ways to get involved. We need parents, teachers, school leaders, board members - anyone passionate about making a difference for kids in Washington. Don't feel qualified? Remember, God *never* calls the qualified.

Email quentin@empowerwashington.org to learn more.

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