



WSCC 2022 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

An authentic faith . . . always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths, and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. If indeed "the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics," the Church, "cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice." - Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, no. 183

STATE BUDGET

PRINCIPLES

In order to truly serve the common good, Washington State revenue policies must consider the impact of the current tax structure on individuals, families, small businesses, and corporations in order to create an economic environment that promotes and supports the creation of jobs, living wages and state revenues sufficient to support essential services for poor and vulnerable people. – WSCC, Seeking the Common Good, Fall 2015

ESSENTIAL SERVICES: Funding for essential services is a top priority for WSCC

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Establishing new revenue sources if the state is not able to address the needs of people in poverty through existing resources
- Creating a just tax structure
- COVID-19 relief strategies that address the economic and personal well-being of all citizens, in particular, the needs of people living in poverty

RESPECTING LIFE AND THE DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON

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 ... are all serious moral issues that challenge our consciences and require us to act. – Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, 2015 (with Introductory Letter 2019)

ABORTION: God loves each human life from the instant of his or her conception and entrusts this gift to the protection of a mother and father. Abortion ends the life of a child and offends God. It also deeply wounds the women and men involved. The WSCC opposes abortion.

RACIAL JUSTICE: Racism arises when—either consciously or unconsciously—a person holds that his or her own race or ethnicity is superior, and therefore judges persons of other races or ethnicities as inferior and unworthy of equal regard. When this conviction or attitude leads individuals or groups to exclude, ridicule, mistreat, or unjustly discriminate against persons on the basis of their race or ethnicity, it is sinful. Racist acts are sinful because they violate justice. They reveal a failure to acknowledge the human dignity of the persons offended, to recognize them as the neighbors Christ calls us to love (Mt 22:39). – *Open Wide Our Hearts* USCCB 2019. The WSCC supports policies that combat racism.

ASSISTED SUICIDE: The purposeful taking of human life by assisted suicide and euthanasia is not an act of mercy, but an unjustifiable assault on human life (*Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, 2019). The WSCC opposes assisted suicide and opposes the loosening of any safeguards on current assisted suicide laws in Washington state.

DEATH PENALTY: The application of the death penalty is deeply flawed and biased by factors such as race, economics, quality of legal representation, and location of legal proceedings. States are re-examining the death penalty – its fairness, effectiveness, and social and moral dimensions. In 2018, the Washington State Supreme Court ruled the death penalty unconstitutional for the fourth time. There are now 21 states without the death penalty and four states in which the governor has placed a moratorium on executions. The WSCC supports legislation that abolishes the death penalty.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING: Trafficking in persons and other contemporary forms of enslavement are a worldwide problem that needs to be taken seriously by humanity as a whole: “since criminal organizations employ global networks to achieve their goals, efforts to eliminate this phenomenon also demand a common and, indeed, a global effort on the part of various sectors of society.” – *Fratelli tutti* October 2020. The WSCC supports policies that assist victims of human trafficking and eliminate its practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Laws that protect the sanctity of each human life from conception to natural death
- Policies that are fair and equitable regardless of race and that seek to provide equal opportunity for all persons
- Abolishing the death penalty
- Laws that can enforce strong restrictions on the immoral practice of human trafficking

AGING AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

PRINCIPLES

...the Holy Father encourages all of you to let the light of that glory shine so brightly that everyone may come to recognize the inestimable value of all human life. Even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn and the poor, are masterpieces of God's creation, made in his own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect. - Pope Francis, Day of Life Message, 2013

INCREASING ELDERLY POPULATION: The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that the nation's 65-and-older population is projected to reach 94.7 million in the year 2060, nearly double in size from the 2016 level of 49.2 million. A large part of this growth is due to the aging of “baby boomers” and the increase in life expectancy, straining social service budgets and the health care system. To assure that the human dignity of the elderly is respected and protected, legislators should strengthen policies and programs that prevent elder abuse and financial exploitation. Just as important, the legislature will need to provide adequate resources to protect vulnerable adults by meeting their long-term care needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Improving home care programs and services
- Adequate funding for volunteer services
- Protecting seniors and vulnerable persons
- Respecting the dignity of life through its natural end

IMMIGRATION

PRINCIPLES

The Catholic Church in the United States is an immigrant Church with a long history of embracing diverse newcomers and providing assistance and pastoral care to immigrants, migrants, refugees, and people on the move. Our Church has responded to Christ's call for us to “welcome the stranger among us,” for in this encounter with the immigrant, the migrant, and the refugee in our midst, we encounter Christ. The new immigrants call most of us back to our ancestral heritage as descendants of immigrants and to our baptismal heritage as members of the body of Christ. Welcoming the Stranger Among Us: Unity in Diversity, A Statement of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, November 2000

IMMIGRATION REFORM

The U.S. Bishops have repeatedly called for a just and effective solution for all people who have fled persecution, violence, and poverty in order to build a better life for themselves and their families. In 2020, SB 5165 expanded the Washington Law Against Discrimination to include a prohibition on discrimination based on immigration or citizenship status, unless differential treatment on the basis of citizenship or immigration status is authorized by federal or state law, regulation, or government contract.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Just treatment of immigrants and refugees including those detained and waiting for status processing within the United States immigration system
- Just and fair treatment for young persons under DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) currently in our federal immigration system
- Just and fair immigration reform

RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

PRINCIPLES

An ethic of responsibility, rehabilitation, and restoration should be a foundation for the reform of our broken criminal justice system. A humane and remedial rather than a strictly punitive approach to offenders should be developed. – Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB, 2015 (with new Introductory Letter 2019)

PROGRAMS FOR SUCCESSFUL REENTRY: The State’s Reentry Council has recommended improved access to educational opportunities for the incarcerated. Other recommendations include expansion of the ability to vacate criminal convictions after the debt to society has been paid and continuing to reform legal financial obligations. Another aid would be to make it easier for people to restore their voting rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Improving opportunities for former offenders as they return to our communities
- Expanding the ability to vacate criminal convictions to provide people with a genuine fresh start once their debt to society has been paid
- Reforming legal financial obligation laws

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

PRINCIPLES

The “home” represents the most precious human treasures, that of encounter, that of relations among people, different in age, culture, and history, but who live together and help one another to grow. For this reason, the “home” is a crucial place in life, where life grows and can be fulfilled, because it is a place in which every person learns to receive love and to give love. Pope Francis, address during visit at the homeless shelter, Dono Di Maria, 2013

CHILD WELFARE: All children deserve to be loved and cared for by their family of origin. Families at risk of being placed (or have been placed) in the child dependency system deserve to receive the resources necessary to retain or reunite with their children, promoting the long-term well-being of the children and the family.

EARLY LEARNING AND CARE: Childcare and early learning programs in Washington have undergone change with the creation of the new Department for Children, Youth and Families. Families should have affordable, accessible, and quality care for their children in early (birth to 5-years) and school-age care programs. Those who provide the care should be provided a compensation package that recognizes the important role they play in caring for children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Improving the child welfare system by focusing on the reduction of placements in the state's child dependency system
- Providing needed resources for childcare and early learning programs

EDUCATION AND 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 consistent with the beliefs and responsibilities of their parents.
- *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, USCCB, 2015 (with new Introductory Letter 2019)

HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: Children who are homeless experience significant impediments to learning. Recent data from public schools has indicated that there are more than 40,000 homeless students statewide.

SCHOOL CHOICE: Efforts around the nation have found increasing success in implementing school choice programs. Importantly, these have succeeded in striking down anti-Catholic Blaine Amendments in various state constitutions. Care has been taken to maintain religious freedom while opening the door to public resources being made available to support Catholic education. School choice efforts can include establishing education savings accounts where parents can apply for public funds for private school education costs. In a number of these efforts, personal tax credits have been established whereby donors supporting tuition and other benefits for Catholic schools and their students, receive a tax credit for their contribution, commensurate in some way to the amount of their donation.

SEX EDUCATION: Washington state passed legislation requiring the teaching of comprehensive sexual health education in public schools. Existing curriculum conflicts with Catholic values and does not adequately address complex moral issues tied to human sexuality nor properly discuss sex in the context of marriage. Additionally, current law does not permit locally elected school boards to fully determine their own policy in this sensitive area.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Improving services for students suffering homelessness

- School choice action that allows for religious freedom and access to public resources for Catholic schools and educational savings accounts, tax credits, or similar mechanisms, to foster private investment in Catholic education
- Sex education curriculum that protects the dignity of each child, respects the primary role of parents in educating their children, and allows for local priorities

ECONOMIC JUSTICE

PRINCIPLES

We gratefully acknowledge the programs and services in the State of Washington designed to reduce poverty, alleviate suffering, and ensure basic human rights for those living in poverty. It is unfortunately true, however, that “... when revenue collections fall short, these essential lifelines are among the first to be reduced or eliminated...” With the impacts of COVID-19, “the plight of those living in poverty in our state has reached crisis proportions.”
- WSCC, *Who Is My Neighbor?*

POVERTY REDUCTION: Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Washington was experiencing a booming economy in many parts of our state. However, many Washingtonians still continued to struggle to make ends meet. In 2018, 776,000 persons or approximately 1 in 10 Washington residents, suffered from poverty. For children, the situation was significantly worse – close to 4 in 10 were in poverty. Prior to 2020, the number of households with children that received food stamps had declined. WSCC advocates for programs such as the Working Families Tax Credit that assists families to support themselves.

TANF: Many families are seeking stable housing, lining up at local food banks, and requesting assistance to meet needs, e.g., 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 childcare.

HUNGER: Hunger programs such as the Emergency Food Assistance Program, the Farmer’s Market Nutrition Program, and school meal programs provide access to food for struggling families. Increasing numbers of people are coming to food banks and free meal programs. COVID-19 has exacerbated this. Approximately 5 percent of people in Washington State (over 350,000) experience hunger. Food insecurity, defined as families who are financially stretched to a point where they cannot be certain all household members will not go hungry, impacts 1 in 10 Washingtonians – 1 in 6 of these are children. This will likely increase due to economic and social impacts of COVID-19. Advocates will work to protect eligibility and increase funding for needed food assistance programs.

BROADBAND ACCESS – The impacts of COVID -19 on our rural and tribal communities has brought to light the critical need that exists in those areas for quality, high speed broadband service. Safety, education, business, and health care services have been shown to be suffering for individuals and families, as travel and the ability to gather together in large groups have been greatly restricted. The lack of this basic infrastructure resource and the need for it in these areas is comparable in importance to the need for roads and electrical, water, and sewer services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Reducing the number of people living in poverty

- Increasing food assistance programs to meet current needs
- Support efforts to mitigate the negative consequences of recent federal rulemaking
- Support funding and policies in the state that can provide high speed broadband in areas without individual access to this important service

HOSPITALS & HEALTHCARE

PRINCIPLES

Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. The nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, respect the principle of subsidiarity, 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, 2015 (with new Introductory Letter 2019)

CATHOLIC HOSPITALS: WSCC supports Catholic hospitals in our state in their right to follow USCCB Ethical and Religious Directives (ERDs). The ERDs present “a theological basis for the Catholic health care ministry” and govern the way health care is delivered in Catholic health facilities and systems, including hospitals, clinics, and managed care organizations.

ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE: In 1963, Pope St. John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* included health care as one of the fundamental rights for a life befitting human dignity. For some time, the U.S. Bishops have advocated for universal health care insurance as well as needed life affirming reforms, especially for the poor and most vulnerable.

ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE: In 2014, Washington’s Medicaid program resumed covering dental care for adults. However, there are long waits to get authorization for dental procedures. There is also a significant need to increase reimbursement rates so that more dentists will accept Medicaid patients. WSCC supports making ongoing, and appropriate investments in dental care for people in poverty.

ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE: Washington State’s Mental Health Parity Act requires all health plans that include medical and surgical services to also cover mental health services. Copays, cost-sharing, and prescription drug coverage limits apply to all services, including mental health. Unfortunately, many people suffering from mental illness continue to experience dangerous gaps in coverage and care.

PRICE OF PHARMACEUTICALS: WSCC supports legislation to enable individuals to access affordable prescription drugs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Catholic Hospitals’ right to fully follow the USCCB Ethical and Religious Directives
- Providing access to health care for all, including access to mental health services, dental services, and affordable prescription drugs
- Providing health care services, including maternity support services and basic health care for adults, children, and immigrant families, especially those living in poverty

AFFORDABLE 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, 2015 (with New Introductory Letter 2019)

HOUSING TRUST FUND: The Housing Trust Fund (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 and Mercy Housing to build affordable housing. Since the HTF’s establishment in 1987, over 50,000 affordable housing units have been built or preserved. Unfortunately, many people still remain homeless or in need of affordable and decent shelter as the supply of affordable housing fails to keep pace with the demand.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSSC SUPPORTS:

- Increasing funding for the Housing Trust Fund in order to reduce homelessness
- Increasing funding for the Housing Trust Fund in order to address the housing needs of low-income families
- Increasing funding for the Housing Trust Fund for special needs housing including low-income senior citizens and agricultural workers

DIGNITY OF WORK & RIGHTS OF WORKERS

PRINCIPLES

Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God’s creation. Employers contribute to the common good through the services or products they provide and by creating jobs that uphold the dignity and rights of workers – to productive work, to decent choice of whether to organize and join unions, to the opportunity for legal status for immigrant workers, to private property, and to economic initiative. Workers also have responsibilities – to provide a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay, to treat employers and co-workers with respect, and to carry out their work in ways that contribute to the common good. Workers, employers, and unions should not only advance their own interests but also work together to advance economic justice and the well-being of all. - Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, USCCB 2015 (with new introductory letter 2019)

*In many cases, poverty results from a violation of the dignity of human work, either because work opportunities are limited (through unemployment or underemployment), or "because a low value is put on work and the rights that flow from it, especially the right to a just wage and to the personal security of the worker and his or her family." - Pope Benedict XVI, *Charity in Truth* [[Caritas in Veritate](#)], no. 63*

During consideration of legislative proposals on infrastructure, the bishops shared with members of the U.S. Congress that Pope Francis considers employment to be the “biggest issue” in politics as it relates to reducing economic inequality. We emphasized the importance of creating jobs for those who are poor and marginalized, prioritizing organized labor and continued protection of workers’ rights. We also called for the legislation to support working families and address the ecological crisis that impacts all workers. - USCCB Labor Day Statement 2021

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Policies that ensure the dignity and fair treatment of all workers, while recognizing the rights of religious organizations. This includes equity of wages, benefits, and opportunities for all, regardless of sex, immigration status, race, or ethnicity. Workplaces should also be free of any harassment.
- Policies that enable workers to support and care for their families, including elder care, childcare, and maternity/paternity leave, and health care
- Just wages for all workers

CARE FOR GOD’S CREATION

PRINCIPLES

ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. This necessarily entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production, and consumption. It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected... Just as the different aspects of the planet – physical, chemical, and biological – are interrelated, so too living species are part of a network which we will never fully explore and understand.

The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us; he never forsakes his loving plan or repents of having created us. Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. It would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis. A certain way of understanding human life and activity has gone awry, to the serious detriment of the world around us. – Pope Francis, Laudato Si’ 2015

PRESERVATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT: Efforts to reduce harmful man-made impacts to our environment must be supported in an ongoing way. Harmful impacts on the environment brought about by policies that promote commerce and economic gain above the need to preserve the environment, mitigate the effects of climate change and promote sound conservation practices cannot be our goal. We must work together to achieve both the betterment of our society through commerce and development and preserve the creation around us with sound efforts of caring for God’s creation.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: Environmental justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. No group of people should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Standards that promote the increased use of renewable energy methods such as wind, hydroelectric, solar and biofuels.
- Conservation standards that promote, protect, and preserve clean air, water and natural resources including our forests
- Environmental justice