



WSCC 2024 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 the WSCC

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- A budget that mirrors the values of Catholic Social Teaching
- 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

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, with New Introductory Letter, USCCB 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*, USCCB 2019). The WSCC opposes assisted suicide and opposes the loosening of any safeguards on assisted suicide laws in Washington state.

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*, 2020). The WSCC supports policies that assist victims of human trafficking and eliminate its practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Laws that protect the sanctity of every 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
- Laws that enforce strong restrictions on the immoral practice of human trafficking
- Policies that support victims 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 increases in life expectancy. Consequently, social service budgets and the health care system are strained. 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:

- Respecting the dignity of life through its natural end
- Protecting seniors and vulnerable persons
- Supporting home care programs
- Increasing funding for Volunteer Services, whose mission is to assist low-income seniors and adults with chronic illnesses or disabilities so that they may remain independent in their own homes. Volunteer Services is administered by Catholic Community Services, and volunteers from parishes and throughout the community perform work such as light housework, simple chores, and errands.

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

... we are obliged to respect the right of all individuals to find a place that meets their basic needs and those of their families, and where they can find personal fulfillment. Our response to the arrival of migrating persons can be summarized by four words: welcome, protect, promote and integrate. – Pope Francis, 2020, Fratelli Tutti (129)

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. We are called to welcome the stranger and respect the dignity of every human person. The WSCC supports programs that ensure the basic needs of all are met.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Just and fair immigration reform
- 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) and currently in our federal immigration system
- Health care access for all immigrants
- Programs that respect the dignity of all persons, documented or undocumented, and ensure basic human needs are met
- Funding for programs that assist immigrants in achieving citizenship
- A wage replacement program for immigrant workers who become unemployed

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, with New Introductory Letter, USCCB, 2019

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
- “Raising the age” of juvenile court jurisdiction
- Banning long-term use of solitary confinement

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 that 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: Families should have affordable, accessible, age-appropriate, high-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:

- Policies that strengthen and support families. The WSCC opposes public policies that undermine families.
- Improving the child welfare system by focusing on the reduction of placements in the state’s child dependency system.
- Increasing resources to support high quality, age-appropriate childcare and early learning programs, including programs provided by Catholic Charities and Catholic Schools. Additionally, the WSCC supports increasing the number of families that can access these childcare and early learning programs.
- Increasing families’ access to high quality 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)

SCHOOL CHOICE: Thirty-two states and the District of Columbia have school choice options that allow parents to send their children to faith-based schools or private schools. Additionally, the recent US Supreme Court decisions of *Makin v. Carson* (2022) and *Espinosa v. Montana Department of Revenue* (2020) ruled that it is lawful to use public funds to attend private schools. Now is the time to create school choice options that allow parents to use public funds to select Catholic schools and other private schools for their children.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- School choice options that access public funds, give parents the opportunity to send their children to Catholic schools and other private schools, and allow for religious freedom
- School policies that allow for religious freedom and do not conflict with Catholic Social Teaching
- Free breakfast and free lunch for all students
- A thriving public school system that meets the needs of all students

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 . . . the plight of those living in poverty in our state has reached crisis proportions. - WSCC, Who Is My Neighbor? The Face of Poverty in Washington State, November 17, 2016

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. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and inflation continue to put pressure on low-income families and individuals. The WSCC advocates for programs that reduce poverty and assist families and individuals in supporting themselves.

WORKING FAMILIES TAX CREDIT (WFTC): The WFTC is an annual tax credit up to \$1,200 for Washington residents with low to moderate incomes. Undocumented and mixed status families are eligible for this tax credit. Currently, single adults aged 18 to 24 are not eligible to receive this tax credit. Adults over the age of 65 are also ineligible. The WSCC supports amending the WFTC to cover all adults aged 18 and over. This will particularly benefit individuals that aged out of the foster care system or are attending community college or trade school. Increasing WFTC eligibility will also benefit the increasing population of aging individuals living in poverty.

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. The WSCC advocates for improving TANF access and supports.

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. The COVID-19 pandemic 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. 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 brought to light the critical need that exists in those areas for quality, high speed broadband service. Safety, education, business, and health care access are all negatively impacted by insufficient broadband access. Additionally, virtual access to these services and resources is a necessity. The WSCC advocates for improved broadband access to underserved areas and communities, including BIPOC, rural, and tribal communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Reducing the number of people living in poverty, including those from BIPOC communities
- Improving the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) to include all eligible individuals aged 18 and over.
- Increasing food assistance programs to meet current needs
- Support funding and policies in the state that can provide high speed broadband in areas without individual access to this important service
- Outreach efforts that connect families and individuals to programs they qualify for
- Improving TANF by increasing grants, broadening time limit exemptions, increasing asset allowances for TANF recipients, supporting recipients with resources as they leave the program, and allowing for 100% child support pass through, whereby recipients are permitted to keep all of the child support funds paid to them

HOSPITALS & HEALTH CARE

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: The 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. The WSCC supports making ongoing, and appropriate investments in dental care for people in poverty.

ACCESS TO BEHAVIORAL 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 behavioral health. Unfortunately, many people with behavioral health conditions and substance abuse disorders continue to experience dangerous gaps in coverage and care. Additionally, there is a shortage of behavioral health practitioners. The WSCC supports policies that increase access to behavioral health care and improve workforce development in this health care field.

CONTINUUM OF CARE: There are not enough behavioral health care options for some individuals with complex needs. For example, residential behavioral health care is no longer provided by state hospitals to the general population; only those accused of crimes or those who were recently incarcerated are given residential behavioral health care. The WSCC supports creating a continuum of residential health care options to include 24-hour care for high needs individuals.

MATERNAL HEALTH OUTCOMES: The U.S. morbidity rate for women who are pregnant or giving birth is the highest amongst developed nations. Additionally, BIPOC women are two to three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related causes. Women living in rural areas, where there may be maternal care deserts, are 60% more likely to die. The WSCC supports legislation that will improve maternal health outcomes, including increasing Medicaid eligibility of pregnant and post-partum mothers, creating a postdelivery and transitional care program for people with substance use disorder at the time of delivery, and increasing the number of days of hospitalization for mothers giving birth.

PRICE OF PHARMACEUTICALS: The 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, affordable prescription drugs, and substance abuse treatment
- Providing health care services, including maternity support services and basic health care for adults, children, and immigrant families, especially those living in poverty and those living in underserved or rural areas.
- Workforce development for the behavioral health care field
- Creating residential options with 24-hour health care
- Improving maternal health outcomes

AFFORDABLE HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

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 FIRST – The WSCC supports Housing First policies that prioritize housing over income, employment, or sobriety requirements. Once individuals are housed in a safe environment, they are more properly equipped to receive social services, treatment or health care or address other obstacles they are encountering. Housing First includes making wrap-around services available to residents. Housing First respects the dignity of every human person.

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.

PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING (PSH): While some individuals encounter temporary obstacles that lead to homelessness, others have more extensive or long-lasting situations that call for permanent supportive housing. An increasing senior population and those with behavioral health challenges or disabilities, are examples of individuals who may require permanent supportive housing. The WSCC supports policies that increase permanent supportive housing for these special populations. The WSCC also recognizes those living in PSH may need ready access to supportive services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Increasing funding for the Housing Trust Fund in order to reduce homelessness and address housing needs of low-income families
- Increasing funding for the Housing Trust Fund for special needs housing including low-income senior citizens, people with disabilities, and agricultural workers
- Increasing funding for communities of color who want to build affordable housing in their communities
- Home ownership opportunities for populations who have historically been discriminated against in the housing market
- Rental assistance for low-income families and individuals
- The development of more permanent supportive housing
- Policies that encourage the building of low-income housing and middle housing
- Increasing supports and services for those living in permanent supportive housing

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, living wages for all workers
- Cash resources provided through a Guaranteed Basic Income program

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*

*“With deep conviction I wish once more to declare that the use of atomic energy for purposes of war is today, more than ever, a crime not only against the dignity of human beings but against any possible future for our common home. The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral, as I already said two years ago. We will be judged on this. Future generations will rise to condemn our failure if we spoke of peace but did not act to bring it about among the peoples on the earth. How can we speak of peace even as we build terrifying new weapons of war?” - Pope Francis, *Address at the Peace Memorial, Hiroshima, November 24, 2019**

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 world 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.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS: Washington state is home to the Bangor Trident nuclear submarine base, which has the largest number of deployed U.S. nuclear weapons. Additionally, the production of nuclear weapons has damaged God's creation at the Hanford nuclear site and around uranium mines near Spokane. In order to respect the dignity of all life and care for creation, we pray for peace and promote nuclear disarmament.

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
- Nuclear disarmament and working for peace in the international community

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

PRINCIPLES

“Religious liberty is not only about our ability to go to Mass on Sunday or pray the Rosary at home. It is about whether we can make our contribution to the common good of all Americans.” - *Our First, Most Cherished Liberty*, USCCB, 2012

“The human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all people are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that in matters religious no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to her or his own beliefs ... whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.” - *Second Vatican Council, Declaration on Religious Liberty (Dignitatis Humanae), no. 2.*

RECOMMENDATIONS

WSCC SUPPORTS:

- Policies that permit the Catholic Church and Catholic organizations to follow the teachings of the Church
- Policies that permit Catholic hospitals to follow the *Ethical and Religious Directives*
- Legislation that protects children, the sacrament of reconciliation, and the clergy-penitent privilege. Catholic priests are mandatory reporters, except for when an individual is confessing sins to a priest during the sacrament of reconciliation.
- Policies that allow the Church and Catholic organizations to serve all individuals, documented or undocumented