

**USCCB LEGISLATIVE ISSUES
109TH CONGRESS**

PRO-LIFE ACTIVITIES

Abortifacient Drugs

- Support legislation to rescind Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval for RU-486.

Abortion Funding Bans

- Maintain current appropriations riders that prevent federal support of abortion in health programs, military hospitals, District of Columbia, federal prisons, and federal employees' health plans.

Abortion Non-Discrimination Act

- Oppose Legislation to remove the provision from the 2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act which protects health care providers from forced involvement in abortion, and work to incorporate this policy into permanent law.

Abortion Regulations

- Support legislation ensuring informed consent for women (e.g., information about the pain an abortion may inflict on the unborn child), and safety regulations and reporting requirements for abortion clinics.

Assisted Suicide/Palliative Care

- Support legislation to prevent assisted suicide while improving palliative care for terminally ill patient.

Bankruptcy Legislation

- Oppose legislation that would deny bankruptcy protection to abortion protesters.

Child Custody Protection Act

- Support legislation to prevent transport of minors across state lines to evade parental involvement laws on abortion.

Contraceptive and Abortifacient Mandates

- Oppose legislation creating new mandates for contraceptive or abortifacient drugs (e.g., "emergency contraception")
- Support legislation to provide conscience protection for all who may be affected by contraceptive or abortifacient mandates.

(Pro-Life Activities Cont'd.)

Domestic Family Planning Program

- Support amendments to domestic family planning programs to ensure parental involvement and protect underage children from statutory rape.

Foreign Aid

- Oppose legislation to require U.S. funding of organizations that promote abortion overseas or support coercive population programs.

Genetic Discrimination

- Monitor legislation on genetic discrimination to ensure that it protects against pressure toward abortion based on the results of prenatal genetic diagnosis.

Human Cloning

- Support legislation to ban human cloning for any purpose, and to prevent patenting of human embryos.

Roe v. Wade

- Oppose congressional resolutions or other action to endorse the *Roe v. Wade* abortion decision or prevent its reversal.

Stem Cell Research

- Oppose legislation to expand U.S. funding of embryonic stem cell research; and support funding for morally acceptable alternatives.

Teen Pregnancy/AIDS Prevention

- Support provisions placing emphasis on abstinence education, adoption assistance, and conscience protection for grantees who object to certain prevention methods.

MIGRATION AND REFUGEE SERVICES

Asylum

- Oppose legislation that would further erode the protection of asylum in the United States.
- Support legislation to repeal the annual cap on the number of asylees whose immigration status can be adjusted to lawful permanent residency.
- Support legislation to repeal the annual cap on the number of persons who can be granted asylum or refugee status based on claims of coercive family planning practices.
- Support legislation to provide separate appropriations to fund asylum and refugee adjudications. [See also “Refugees – Admissions”.]

Children

- Support legislation to provide adequate funding for the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to exercise its new responsibilities with respect to the care of unaccompanied alien children.
- Support legislation to improve the rights and treatment of unaccompanied alien children who are encountered by or in the custody of immigration authorities.
- Support legislation to adjust the status of undocumented high school and college students. [See also “Legalization --Legalization of Specific Populations of Undocumented Immigrants”.]

Citizenship and Naturalization

- Oppose legislation to deny citizenship at birth to children born in the United States of parents who are not citizens or permanent resident aliens.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

- Support legislation that would make comprehensive reforms in the nation’s immigration laws, including increased opportunities for immigrants to legally enter the United States, particularly to reunify with family members or to obtain jobs; a broad legalization program for the undocumented in the United States who have built up equities in their communities and have otherwise contributed to their communities; an appropriate temporary worker program that protects the rights and dignity of foreign workers; and restoration of some due process rights eliminated by previous amendments to U.S. immigration laws.

(Migration and Refugee Services Cont'd.)

Detention of Aliens

- Support legislation to reduce instances where aliens are held in detention by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) through appropriations for alternatives to detention.
- Oppose legislation that would increase the number of instances in which aliens are held in indefinite detention and support legislation that would reduce the number of such instances.

Due Process for Aliens

- Support legislation to provide discretionary relief from removal for aliens who have United States citizen minor children.
- Support legislation to provide due process reforms for aliens in removal proceedings.
- Oppose legislation that would further erode due process rights of aliens in removal proceedings.

Eligibility of Aliens for Public Benefits

- Support legislation to repeal restrictions on benefit eligibility for refugees who have been in the United States for more than seven years.

Immigration Enforcement

- Support legislation to reduce the number of migrant deaths that occur along the United States border with Mexico.
- Support legislation to ensure that Department of Homeland Security (DHS) immigration enforcement activities and personnel respect the human and civil rights of those whom they encounter, including efforts to mandate human rights training for such personnel.
- Oppose legislation that would expand the use of expedited removal.
- Oppose legislation that would limit the ability of aliens to use matricula consular identification cards to establish proof of their identity.

(Migration and Refugee Services Cont'd.)

- Oppose legislation that would require state and local law enforcement agencies to detain criminal illegal aliens within the course of their regular duties, under the penalty of the loss of federal funds for non-cooperation with the policy.
- Oppose legislation that would make it more difficult for immigrants to obtain drivers licenses and other state-issued identification documents, with the goal of ensuring full access by immigrants to such state-issued identification documents.

Immigration Services

- Support legislation to provide adequate appropriations for the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services to enable it to efficiently process immigration benefit applications and petitions, as well as eliminate current backlogs in such applications and petitions.
- Support legislation to assist immigrants and refugees in integrating into American society, including such measures as the provision of government-subsidized English language and civics instruction, with an emphasis on the involvement of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in the formulation and provision of services. [See also “Integration of Immigrants into American Society”.]

Integration of Immigrants into American Society

- Support legislation to assist immigrants and refugees in integrating into American society, including such measures as the provision of government-subsidized English language and civics instruction, with an emphasis on the involvement of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) in the formulation and provision of services. [See also “Immigration Services”.]
- Support legislation with line item funding to successfully assist in the resettlement of Cuban and Haitian entrants through the Cuban/Haitian Primary/Secondary Resettlement Program.
- Support legislation to ensure that refugees, asylees, and other aliens residing in the United States under the color of law are able to obtain driver’s licenses and state-issued identification cards without having to endure extraordinary, unnecessary, and burdensome requirements in order to obtain or renew them.
- Support legislation to ensure that refugees, asylees, and parolees receive employment authorization documents immediately upon their arrival in the United States or upon being granted the status.

(Migration and Refugee Services Cont'd.)

Legal Immigration

- Support legislation to more quickly reunify U.S. citizens and Lawful Permanent Residents (LPRs) with close family members by reducing the backlog in priority dates for family preference immigration visas and increasing the number of such visas.

Legalization

- Support legislation to legalize current undocumented aliens who have resided in the United States for some time and have built equities here.
- Support legislation to legalize specific populations of undocumented aliens, including such populations as undocumented farm workers and undocumented high school and college students who came to the United States as young children. [See also “Children – Legalization of Undocumented Students”.]
- Support legislation to provide for the permanent extension of section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which would permit aliens eligible for immigration visas to receive their visas in the United States, notwithstanding their violation of the immigration laws by already being present in the United States unlawfully.

Refugees – Admissions

- Support legislation to provide adequate appropriations to support robust refugee admissions.
- Support legislation to provide for reauthorization of the Department of State’s Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA) account at levels adequate to ensure a robust refugee admissions programs.
- Support legislation to increase the number of refugees admitted into the United States, including increasing the number of admissions of both particularly vulnerable refugees and refugees who have been in protracted refugee situations for some time.
- Support legislation to make reforms in the refugee admissions process, including support for mechanisms that would better ensure the development of an adequate infrastructure for the identification of refugees for admission into the United States, the identification of particularly vulnerable refugees, greater participation by United States nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the admissions process, and better management of the flow of refugees to the United States (David Martin Report).

(Migration and Refugee Services Cont'd.)

- Support legislation to clarify that persons who meet the definition of a refugee and who also are eligible to immigrate to the United States as special immigrants or immediate relatives of United States citizens can be admitted to the United States as refugees.
- Support legislation to provide separate appropriations to fund asylum.

Refugees – Overseas Assistance

- Support legislation to provide adequate appropriations to assist refugees in countries of first asylum.

Refugees - Resettlement in the United States

- Support legislation to provide adequate appropriations for the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) to successfully assist in the early self-sufficiency of refugees in the United States, including match grant funding.
- Support legislation to provide for reauthorization of funding for the ORR's programs.

Religious Worker Visas

- Support legislation to permit foreign-born religious seminarians to receive nonimmigrant religious worker visas.

Trafficking

- Support legislation to modify the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 to make it a more useful tool for protecting the victims of trafficking.

INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE AND PEACE

Arms Trade

- Support legislation to promote international adherence to an arms sales code of conduct, making the sale of conventional weapons conditioned on respect for human rights.

Balkans

- Support legislation to ensure a peaceful political transition in any settlement governing the “final political status” of Kosovo.

Cuba Sanctions

- Support legislation to lift restrictions on travel and on the sale of food and medicines to Cuba as a step toward an eventual end of economic sanctions.

Development Assistance

- Support legislation to increase funding for humanitarian assistance and development programs, including the Millennium Challenge Account, and for morally appropriate efforts to treat and prevent infectious diseases abroad with a special focus on Africa, including HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria.

Food Security in Africa

- Support legislation to provide both humanitarian assistance to African nations facing severe food shortages and mid-term and long-term solutions for Africa’s food security.

Global Climate Change

- Support provisions in global climate change legislation that assist the poor in adapting to the impacts of climate change.
- Support legislative provisions that would assist developing countries with energy efficiency, renewable technologies and ameliorating the impact of global warming on the poor.

International Debt Relief

- Support legislation to approve and fund new multilateral debt cancellation for poor countries.

(International Justice and Peace Cont'd.)

International Peace and Reconciliation Initiatives

- **Middle East Peace** – Support legislative initiatives that contribute to a revival of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians.
- **Colombia** – Support legislation that promotes human rights and the peace process.
- **Africa Great Lakes Region** – Support legislation to promote peace, security and a just political transition in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).
- **Sudan** – Support legislation to enhance the peace process, promote respect for human rights, and ensure delivery of humanitarian assistance, particularly in Darfur.

Iraq

- Support legislative initiatives that provide for a “responsible transition” in Iraq.
- Support legislation to enhance US support for U.N. and other multilateral efforts to stabilize and rebuild Iraq.
- Support legislation to fund humanitarian relief and substantial reconstruction.
- Support Congressional action to investigate abuses of human rights in Iraq, especially among persons in custody.
- Support congressional action to ensure religious liberty in the permanent constitution of Iraq.

Landmines

- Support ratification of the Ottawa Mine Ban Treaty.
- Support legislation to restrict the U.S. use of anti-personnel land mines.

Natural Resources of Developing Nations

- **Extractives Industries** – Support legislation that would require a public accounting of revenues from extractive industries to ensure that resource-rich developing nations invest in sustainable economic development for their people, especially the poor.
- **Conflict Diamonds** – Support legislation designed to strengthen conditions for the sale and distribution of diamonds and to promote a more responsible use of revenues to reduce the likelihood of funding armed conflict.

(International Justice and Peace Cont'd.)

Nuclear Weapons

- Monitor congressional action related to weapons of mass destruction, e.g. Iran, North Korea.
- Oppose legislation that funds the development of new nuclear weapons systems.

Trade Policy

- Support provisions in legislation relating to US bi-lateral and regional trade agreements consistent with the Bishops' criteria for ethical trade, including as developments warrant: Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement; Andean Free Trade Agreement; US-Southern African Customs Union FTA; and Free Trade Area of the Americas.
- Support provisions in legislation related to the reauthorization of the President's Trade Promotion Authority consistent with the Bishops' criteria for ethical trade.
- Support legislation on trade preferences for Haiti to stimulate economic development.

EDUCATION

Budget/Appropriations Issues

- Support legislation that provides increased funding for all federal programs benefiting public, private, and religious school students and teachers, particularly increasing education funding for Title V, Part A of No Child Left Behind.
- Oppose any budget rescission legislation which would reduce federal education funding that benefits students and teachers in public, private, and religious schools.

Child Care Block

- Oppose legislation to remove certificates as a method of providing child care assistance to parents.
- Support legislation that includes private, faith-based, and family-based child care providers and is not limited to government providers, and that would provide sufficient flexibility relating to standards and licensing to allow those groups to offer such services.

Elementary and Secondary Education

- Support legislation that allows students in private and religious schools to access the benefits of federal education programs on an equitable basis with students in public schools, including benefits for vocational-technical education and new initiatives for secondary school students.

Health, Safety, and Environment

- Support legislation that includes adequate and equitable funding for public, private, and religious schools to address scientifically-based evidence of environmental hazards and issues of health, fire, and safety, including technical assistance and training to school personnel.
- Support legislation to provide funding to cover the cost of CPR training, and purchasing defibrillators and other health equipment in public, private, and religious schools.
- Support legislation that requires independent studies that provide scientifically-based evidence of environmental and safety hazards that might affect both students and staff in public, private, and religious schools.

(Education Cont'd.)

Higher Education

- Support an amendment to increase loan forgiveness for teachers in public, private, and religious schools, especially those teaching in schools serving Title I children, without additional burdens placed on private school teachers.
- Support amendments to extend services that increase teacher quality and provide professional development opportunities to teachers in public, private, and religious secondary schools.
- Support amendments that include the participation in any merit-based or need-based student federal financial aid program for private or religious secondary school students.

Parental Rights

- Initiate a grassroots effort to pro-actively urge Congress to consider refundable tax credits/deductions for families with children in public, private, or religious elementary, secondary, and post-secondary schools to help pay for various educational expenses, including tuition.
- Proactively support legislation to provide tax credits for personal and corporate donations to organizations providing scholarships for children.
- Support legislation to provide an adequately funded student scholarship demonstration project of educational choice, similar to that already existing in the District of Columbia, especially for those parents most in need.
- Support legislation to make Coverdell Education Savings Accounts permanent.

Teacher Benefits

- Support legislation that provides tax credits to teachers in public, private, and religious schools to cover educational expenses.
- Support legislation for programs of professional development for teachers of math and science in public, private, and religious schools.
- Support legislation that provides tax incentives to teachers in public, private, and religious schools who purchase homes in Title I areas.
- Support legislation that provides equitable programs of professional development and other benefits to teachers in public, private, and religious schools.

(Education Cont'd.)

Telecommunications (E-rate Program)

- Oppose any amendment that would have the effect of excluding private and religious schools from the “E-rate” program, which provides discounts for connecting schools and libraries to the Internet.
- Support an amendment that simplifies the E-Rate application process.
- Support an amendment that provides adequate protections against fraud and abuse of E-rate funds. [E-rate is also a legislative priority for the Communications Department.]

DOMESTIC SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Access to Health Care

- Support legislation to expand health care coverage to the 45 million uninsured Americans.
- Oppose legislation that would undermine the Medicaid program

Agriculture and Environment

- Support legislation to provide full funding of programs such as the Conservation Security Program, which rewards farmers and ranchers who practice good stewardship and environmental protection on land that is in active production.
- Support legislation to target federal payments and other forms of agricultural support to small and moderate-size farms, especially minority-owned farms, to help them through difficult times caused by changes in global agricultural markets or weather patterns that destroy crops.

Assault Weapons Ban

- Support legislation to ban assault weapons.

Budget

- Support budget and tax legislation that would protect families and children.

CARE ACT

- Continue support for the Charity Aid, Recovery and Empowerment (CARE ACT) which provides direct financial assistance to church related charities as well as incentives for contributing to those entities. (See General Counsel section under lobbying for “Conscience Protection: Religious Integrity Issues”.)

Children’s Health and the Environment

- Support legislation that would track diseases and protect children, born and unborn, and other vulnerable populations, from environmental (indoors and outdoors) exposures that endanger their health.

(Domestic Social Development Cont'd.)

Civil Rights

- Support legislation to address disparities resulting from discrimination and bias in any facet of American life.

Criminal Justice

- Support legislation that will assist released prisoners and help to reduce recidivism.
- Support legislation to increase investment in community-based juvenile crime prevention programs.

Death Penalty

- Oppose legislation to expand the death penalty at the federal level.
- Support legislation to limit the use of the death penalty, especially for juveniles.

Farmworkers

- Support legislation that would provide better living and working conditions for migrant farmworkers.
- Support legislation to allow undocumented migrant farm workers to earn the right to permanent resident status, along with their spouse and minor children. [Migration and Refugee Services is the lead USCCB office on this issue.]

Food & Nutrition

- Support legislation to provide sufficient funding for the Women, Infant and Children's program (WIC) together with needed program improvements to ensure all eligible families receive these benefits.

Housing

- Support legislation to establish a National Affordable Housing Trust Fund that would provide new resources to fund the development and maintenance of rental housing affordable to low income families.
- Support legislation to end "predatory lending" practices that are discriminatory or put low income home buyers at a disadvantage.

(Domestic Social Development Cont'd.)

Minimum Wage

- Support legislation for raising the minimum wage to help full-time workers to support themselves and their families.

Social Security Reform

- Oppose social security “reform” legislation that would decrease the income of low income recipients.

TANF Reauthorization

- Support legislation for reauthorization of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program to help low income families through policies that effectively support work, strengthen marriage and family life, and sustain the needy and vulnerable among us, especially children and immigrants.

Unemployment Insurance

- Support legislation to continue of federal unemployment insurance as needed.

Worker Protections

- Support legislation that would provide workers with paid sick leave.
- Oppose legislation that would erode work place protections including, but not limited to, the 40 work week, overtime, compensatory time, etc.

COMMUNICATIONS

Alcohol Advertising

- Support legislation to restrict the spread and extension of alcohol advertising on broadcast, cable and satellite outlets at times when children are in the audience.

Broadband/ Internet Access

- Support legislation that narrows the gap separating low-income and underserved communities from the benefits of the information age.
- Support legislation to ensure that affordable high-speed Internet access is provided to Catholic schools and libraries, the elderly, the poor, the disabled, immigrants and other communities in need of such services.

Children's Media

- Support constitutional efforts to reduce children's exposure to violent, indecent, and/or obscene radio and television programming.
- Support the enactment of legislation to increase the number of hours dedicated to educational children's programming aired by television licensees on digital channels.
- Support the enactment of legislation to limit the amount of commercial television advertising during children's programming aired on the digital channels.

Copyright Protection/Fair Use

- Oppose copyright legislation that would prevent Catholic schools, libraries and other educational institutions from making lawful use of copyrighted material to advance the education and scholarship of their communities.

Digital Television

- Support legislation that would require the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to establish specific obligations of digital television broadcasters to better serve the needs of children and parents, and all segments of the community.

Indecency

- Support legislation to deter indecent and obscene programming on the public airwaves. Seek congressional hearings dealing with obscenity in the media and over the Internet.

(Communications Cont'd.)

Low Power FM Radio/Television.

- Support legislation that would authorize the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to lift existing limitations and extend Low Power FM radio service to many communities.
- Support legislation that would permit the expansion of non-commercial, community-run, public-access television and radio systems that provides a platform for religious organizations, schools and community-based organizations to serve local citizens.

Overhaul of the 1996 Telecommunications Act

- Support legislation that would promote diversity and discourage consolidation of ownership of television and radio stations, cable systems and newspapers.
- Support legislation to modify broadband-cable rules to protect the interests of noncommercial speakers on the Internet, such as Catholic Dioceses, schools and charities, and users seeking access to these sites.
- Support legislation that would ensure greater access to religious programming on cable systems.
- Support legislation that would codify specific obligations of digital television broadcasters to better serve the needs of children and parents, and all segments of the community, including: (a) requiring broadcasters to determine the needs and interests of their communities and make those needs public; and (b) establishing minimum guidelines for locally originated and independently produced programming. (Encourage and seek Congressional hearings and oversight that would enforce compliance with the public interest obligations of digital television licensees.)
- Support legislation that would authorize the full funding for the Universal Service telephone programs to ensure access to a range of services in low-income and rural areas.
- Support legislation that would ensure the continuation of the E-rate program, which benefits Catholic schools and libraries, and rural healthcare providers by providing telecommunications and Internet service at a discounted rate. [This is also a legislative priority of the USCCB Education Department.]

(Communications Cont'd.)

Public Access to Airwaves

- Support legislation that would define the “public interest” in a manner that would ensure broadcast licensees understand and meet local needs and interests with responsive programming. [See “Digital Television.”]
- Support legislation to require broadcasters to meet their federally mandated public interest obligations by (a) increasing the public’s access to broadcast media; (b) increasing the amount of local news and public affairs programming (including public service announcements); and (c) increasing the amount of programming that serves the educational needs of children, persons with disabilities, and underserved communities.
- Support legislation that would remove existing barriers religious organizations schools, and other community-based organizations confront in getting their programs aired on commercial broadcast and cable stations.
- Support legislation that would encourage and provide incentives for commercial radio and television broadcasters to distribute original religious and community-based local programming.

Violent Programming

- Support legislation to decrease violent programming on broadcast, cable and satellite outlets at times when children are watching.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, CHURCH/STATE AND TAX ISSUES

Conscience Protection; Religious Integrity Issues

- Support legislation to protect both the identity and integrity of religious entities partnering with government to provide health education and social services.

Political Activity

- Monitor legislation to address political activity by churches and religious organizations.

Public Policy Advocacy Restrictions on Nonprofit Organizations

- Oppose unreasonable restrictions on public policy/advocacy activities of churches or other non-profit entities.

Religious Liberty

Monitor all legislation that impacts on Church/State relations particularly to explore any opportunity for Congressional consideration of legislation protecting the religious freedom rights of churches.

Reporting Requirements

- Oppose legislation to change churches exemptions from annual information returns to the Internal Revenue Service as well as other possible government oversight of religious organizations.

Same-Sex Marriage

- Support a constitutional amendment to define a marriage as consisting only of the union of a man and a woman.

Tax Policy Affecting Charitable Contributions

- Support legislation to increase incentives for charitable giving.