

CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC *Public Affairs* CONFERENCE

FINAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMARY 2023 SESSION

OVERVIEW

The Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference had a successful 2023 state legislative session. We defeated efforts in the Connecticut General Assembly to expand abortion rights and services in our state, and we stopped the effort to allow physician-assisted suicide. The Conference also acted to derail legislation that threatened religious freedom. Support was also given to efforts to better protect workers' rights and to provide more funding to non-profit charities. These victories were due in large part to the people of our faith who took an active part in influencing these outcomes.

CT MARCH FOR LIFE 2023

The Conference was proud to be a major sponsor of the second **CT March for Life** on March 22nd at the State Capitol. Working closely with the National March for Life, the Family Institute of Connecticut, and the Knights of Columbus, the march was a resounding success. The estimated attendance of over 3,000 people exceeded that of the 2022 march. Once again thousands of people converged on Hartford in order to make their voices heard proclaiming the sanctity of the life of the unborn and to listen to a fantastic list of speakers. The Conference and all the organizations that helped make this event a success hope to make the 2024 march even more successful.

LIFE ISSUES

Physician-Assisted Suicide (SB 1076)

The Conference's lobbying effort was successful once again in turning back the effort to legalize **physician-assisted suicide** in our state. The legislation was voted out of the Public Health Committee as expected, but once again died in the Judiciary Committee. The leadership of the committee publicly stated that they did not have enough "yes" votes in the committee to move the legislation forward. Over the past eleven years the Conference has been successful in blocking numerous attempts to legalize physician-assisted suicide.

Abortion - Constitutional Amendment (SJR 42)

Senate Joint Resolution 42 was an attempt to place a referendum question on the November 2024 ballot to adopt a state constitutionally guaranteed right to abortion. While the General Assembly's Government Administration and Elections Committee voted in favor of this proposal, it died awaiting action by the Senate due to our vigorous opposition and our work with other groups. The Conference argued that this amendment would allow constitutional challenges to current restrictions in our state, which would lead to abortion on demand at any point of gestation.

Abortion - Funding for Women from out of state (HB 6618)

The Conference strongly opposed proposed legislation to have state taxpayers cover the expenses for out-of-state women to come to Connecticut in order to have an abortion. This was an effort by pro-abortion legislators to help women circumvent their home state's restrictions on abortion. While this was a major priority for abortion supporters, the legislation failed without a vote in the General Assembly's Human Services Committee. The Conference was informed that many Democrats opposed the legislation, even though funding was included in the Governor's budget. The Appropriations Committee, co-chaired by Sen. Cathy Osten, removed the \$2 million proposed by the Governor from the final budget. There were also many concerns about how such a program would be administered, problems which the Conference highlighted.

Healthcare - Overriding of Healthcare Agent (SB 897)

The Conference opposed SB 897 because a healthcare agent, who has been designated by a patient, should, when necessary, make decisions that affect the fate of an incapacitated patient. The Public Health Committee heard testimony on SB 897, which would have required a previously existing advance directive to supersede decisions of a patient's appointed healthcare agent. Information on the proposed advance directive form could easily be misinterpreted by a healthcare facility. This legislation would have required a medical facility to rely on a patient's advance directive regarding withdrawal of life support. This directive could be written years before a patient becomes ill. An appointed healthcare agent, who is usually a family member very familiar with the patient's most current wishes, would not be able to overrule or change the patient's prior directives regarding withdrawal of life support. The bill died in Committee without a vote.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Patient Access to Reproductive Healthcare (HB 6818)

The Conference testified in opposition to this legislation due to its potential impact on the ability of Catholic hospitals to oversee the practices of their medical staff. The bill did not force Catholic hospitals to perform reproductive healthcare procedures that violated

Catholic healthcare directives, but it removed their ability to discipline staff that did perform prohibited procedures as part of their practice. The bill died without a vote in the Public Health Committee.

Adoption of federal law prohibiting activities outside of abortion clinics (SB 9)

This bill was primarily aimed at establishing more safeguards and assistance programs for people suffering from the rising drug abuse crisis. The Conference objected to language in the bill that was aimed at incorporating the Federal FACE Act into state law. These provisions were totally unrelated to the purpose of the bill. The federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act prohibits certain activities outside abortion clinics, churches, and pregnancy care centers. The language in this bill only included protections for abortion clinics and never mentioned churches and pregnancy care centers. The Conference proposed an amendment to include all the provisions of the FACE Act in the bill. The bill was voted out of the Public Health Committee with the FACE Act language removed.

EDUCATION

School Climate Policy- (SB 1166)

Senate Bill 1166 included several mandated provisions regarding school social climate policies, which included surveys for students and revised laws against bullying. Some Catholic schools' handbooks referenced state statutes on bullying, which was the initial reason for the Conference's involvement. The Conference determined a need to protect parental rights and religious freedom of Catholic students in public schools. The bill used language familiar to Catholics, such as social justice and restorative justices, but the terms were undefined and demonstrably open to broad, secular interpretations.

The Conference met with legislators who were drafting a revisions of the bill and successfully argued for necessary changes which include: parental opt-out provisions for school climate surveys with intrusive questions regarding gender and sex that would be foreign or confusing to young children, raising ideas contrary to their families' religious beliefs; parental notification of the content of the surveys; age appropriate surveys; removal of undefined social justice standards; removal of references to a private, liberal advocacy group's standards for school climate policies; removal of provisions that would allow schools to punish parents and nonprofits for perceived bullying, and a clearer definition of bullying. These revisions were then incorporated and included in Senate Bill 1- An Act Concerning Transparency in Education- which will become law.

School Nurse & School Transportation Mandates Maintained

Despite unprecedented spending on public education this session, the Conference remained vigilant to ensure that the few benefits available to nonpublic school students remain in place. There were no changes to the mandate for publicly provided school

nurses and transportation for nonpublic school students. Additionally, there were no new mandated vaccines.

School Security Grants

Despite assurances by many legislators, we were unable to secure provisions to remove the requirement for private matching grants in order to receive public matching grants for school security upgrades for nonpublic schools. At the end of the session, however, the same legislators and agency leaders pledged to work with the Conference to achieve this goal next session. The Conference will continue to advocate for this relief.

Tax-Credit Scholarship Program (HB 5424)

The provisions of this bill were included in the final budget implementer bill (HB 6941), but due to a late-night amendment, the language was stripped from the bill at the behest of the Connecticut Education Association, which represents public school teachers. It would have set aside \$2.5 million in tax credits for corporate and individual donors' donations to scholarship organizations serving low-income families. This was a tremendous step forward to having a program passed, but it also serves as a reminder of how the success of Catholic schools can be perceived as a threat to the CEA.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Increase Wage and Hour Inspectors in Department of Labor (HB 5854)

The Conference testified in favor of legislation attempting to increase the number of wage and hour inspectors in the Department of Labor at the request of the CT Domestic Workers Coalition. The Conference worked with this organization in previous years to help secure changes in state law providing domestic workers (primarily immigrants) protections from employer abuses. The lack of state inspectors was an unanticipated problem in enforcing these laws when problems occur. The Labor Department has a six-month backlog of requests in the Wage and Hour Enforcement Division. The legislation was voted out of the Labor Committee, but died in the Appropriations Committee.

Increase Funding for Nonprofits (State Budget)

The Conference supported an increase in state budgetary support for many nonprofits in the state that provide vital human services. Catholic charity organizations fall under this umbrella. The nonprofits were seeking a 9% increase in the first year of the budget, followed by a 7% increase in the second year to make up for inflation and the lack of increases over the last 10 years. The Appropriations Committee only placed a 1% increase in the budget for each of the years. The Conference did not support a specific percentage increase. The final budget contained a 2.5% increase in each budget year.
