

81st Legislative Session Priorities

The Texas Catholic Conference is the association of the 15 ordinary Roman Catholic Bishops of Texas, and includes the Auxiliary and Emeritus Bishops as consultative members. A major function of the Conference is to be the public policy arm of the Bishops of Texas, before the Texas Legislature, the Texas delegation in Congress, and state agencies. The public policy issues addressed by the Conference include institutional concerns of the Catholic Church and issues related to Catholic social teachings. Because we are made in the image of God, there is an inherent value of human life from which all of our social obligations and rights flow. The following list highlights some of the priorities of the Texas Bishops prior to the 81st Legislative session. The Bishops and staff of the Conference will continue to monitor and respond to any matters before the Texas Legislature.

1. Life Issues: Our foundational principle to protect the life and dignity of all human persons calls us to work to end abortion, euthanasia, destruction of human embryos, cloning and assisted suicide.

- ★ Support “Trigger Ban” legislation that would abolish abortion in Texas when Roe v. Wade is overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court.
- ★ Support efforts to strengthen judicial bypass in parental consent law.
- ★ Support efforts to assure that Woman’s Right to Know brochures are distributed appropriately.
- ★ Support “Choose Life” license plate legislation.
- ★ Support state funding to abortion alternative providers.
- ★ Stop all state funding to abortion providers.
- ★ Ensure that all reporting of abortions is accurate and includes outcome, including death or injury to mother.
- ★ Oppose any legislation that would allow or fund embryonic stem cell research.
- ★ Support ban on all forms of human cloning, including opposing legislation that allows for the creation of cloned embryos that would be destroyed.
- ★ Support strong enforcement of regulatory violations of abortion providers.
- ★ Support allowing women seeking abortions to view ultrasounds.
- ★ Support requiring all abortion clinics to be subject to the same standards as the Surgical Ambulatory clinics.

2. Immigration: We recognize the historic and present-day contributions of immigrants in Texas by supporting their ability to work in a healthy environment in order to provide for their families and continue their valuable participation in the community.

- ★ Support comprehensive immigration reform including a pathway to legalization.
- ★ Support efforts to ensure students who attend Texas public schools have access to in-state college tuition.
- ★ Oppose efforts to reduce access to education for immigrants.
- ★ Oppose attempts to reduce access to healthcare for immigrants.
- ★ Oppose federal and state funding for a fence along the Texas-Mexico border.
- ★ Oppose local and state law enforcement acting as federal immigration agents.

3. Education: We recognize parents as the primary educators of their children through supporting parental choice in education.

- ★ Support the reinstatement of the exemption of accredited private schools from licensure as child care providers in the Human Resources code.
- ★ Support expansion of school breakfast program to include state subsidies for universal free breakfast program offered by the USDA.
- ★ Support a School Choice experimental program to ensure equal educational choices for poor families.
- ★ Support state loans of textbooks to children enrolled in non-public schools.
- ★ Support tax credits or tax deductions for educational expenses.
- ★ Support efforts to reduce high school drop-outs.

4. Health & Human Services: We show God's special concern for the poor and vulnerable by supporting programs that make health care more affordable and accessible while providing incentives, environmental protections and for morally appropriate health research.

- ★ Support improvements of the eligibility system, including outreach and application assistance, to enroll every eligible child in CHIP & Medicaid with 12 months continuous eligibility.
- ★ Support creation of a CHIP buy-in program for middle income families to purchase affordable health coverage.
- ★ Support adequate reimbursement for CHIP & Medicaid providers.
- ★ Increase access to mental health care, including services for the homeless.
- ★ Support efforts to reform the current Advance Directives statute to expand the family notification period while maintaining the ethical standards of care.
- ★ Recognize nutrition and hydration as ordinary medical care.
- ★ Support initiatives in public health related to obesity, cancer prevention, and healthy lifestyles.
- ★ Support a pharmacist conscience clause bill so that pharmacists are not required to sell morning after pills to minors.
- ★ Support ban on payment for ova donation.
- ★ Support the expansion of the Cord Blood Bank.
- ★ Promote funding for adult stem cell research.
- ★ Support protection and improvement of air, land, and water quality, especially as they impact poor communities.
- ★ Support efforts to increase access to affordable housing.

5. Criminal Justice Reform: We support fiscal and moral reform in our state's criminal justice system with an emphasis on ending the death penalty and supporting successful rehabilitation and reintegration of those re-entering society.

- ★ Abolish the use of the death penalty in Texas.
- ★ Support a moratorium on the death penalty in Texas.
- ★ Support a ban on executions of people who were mentally retarded at the time of the offense.
- ★ Increase funding and support for the chaplain corps within the Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ), including ensuring access to inmates by all chaplains.
- ★ Support increased funding for the community supervision and parole divisions of the TDCJ, including funding for the training and salaries of officers in those areas.
- ★ Provide an equitable pay scale for correctional officers, including funding for training.
- ★ Support full implementation & funding for the Indigent Defense Act.
- ★ Support the creation of an Innocence Commission in Texas.
- ★ Support the creation of an Office of Capital Writs and the expansion of public defenders offices throughout the state to ensure that all people are given the opportunity to quality counsel.
- ★ Support opt-out of ban on drug felons receiving food stamps and student loans in order to facilitate reintegration.