

82nd 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 moral and 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 82nd Legislative session. The Bishops and staff of the Conference will continue to monitor and respond to any relevant matters before the Texas Legislature.

1. Life and Family 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. Marriage and the family are central social institutions that must be supported and strengthened.

- ★ Support state funding to abortion alternative providers.
- ★ Support “Choose Life” license plate legislation.
- ★ Support the ability for women seeking abortions to view ultrasound images of their unborn child.
- ★ Support efforts to assure that Woman’s Right to Know brochures are distributed appropriately.
- ★ Stop all public funding to abortion providers.
- ★ Support a requirement that abortion practitioners have admitting privileges at a local hospital.
- ★ Ensure that all reporting of abortions is accurate and includes outcomes, 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, while recognizing the life of all human embryos by opposing legislation that would allow cloned embryos to be destroyed.
- ★ Support strong enforcement of regulatory violations of abortion providers.
- ★ Support creation of regulatory standards for In-Vitro Fertilization Clinics.
- ★ Support efforts to restrict judicial bypass in parental consent law by requiring that minors seek bypass in their own county.
- ★ Support efforts to ensure access to marriage for undocumented immigrants.
- ★ Support the creation of regulatory standards for pay-day lending to ensure that families are not placed in overwhelming financial situations.

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 entities enforcing federal immigration laws.
- ★ Oppose efforts that make acquiring Texas drivers licenses and identification documents more difficult for immigrants.

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

- ★ Support expansion of the school breakfast program to include state subsidies for the universal free breakfast program offered by the USDA.
- ★ Support a School Choice experimental program to ensure equal educational choices for poor families.
- ★ Support tax credits or tax deductions for educational expenses.
- ★ Support increased access to public and private pre-kindergarten programs.
- ★ Support efforts to reduce high school drop-outs.
- ★ Support abstinence-only education in Texas schools.
- ★ Support access to quality, affordable before and after school care for public and private schools.

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, environmental protections and support for morally appropriate health research.

- ★ Support improvements of the eligibility system, including adequate staffing levels, streamlined processes and documentation requirements, and outreach and application assistance, to ensure prompt access to food and health care assistance during this recession.
- ★ Enroll every eligible child in CHIP & Medicaid with 12 months continuous eligibility.
- ★ Support efforts to increase awareness of the risks of premature birth and ensure access to medical care for mothers and babies via the CHIP Perinatal program.
- ★ Support creation of a sliding scale CHIP buy-in program and other options 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 and protecting providers' consciences.
- ★ 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 that allows pharmacists to opt out of selling morning after pills to minors.
- ★ Support funding for adult stem cell research and for the expansion of the Texas Cord Blood Bank.
- ★ Support protection and improvement of air, land, and water quality, especially as it impacts poor communities and the unborn.
- ★ Support efforts to increase access to affordable housing.
- ★ Support efforts to end human trafficking and provide care for victims.
- ★ Support services that provide care and dignity for aging Texans.
- ★ Support services that provide care and dignity for Texans with disabilities.

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.

- ★ Support abolition or 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 for chaplains.
- ★ Support increased funding for the corrections, community supervision and parole divisions of the TDCJ, including funding for the training and salaries of officers in those areas.
- ★ Support efforts to improve access to medical care for the incarcerated in Texas.
- ★ Support efforts to assist in the transition of ex-offenders into society, including the opt-out of ban on drug felons receiving food stamps and student loans.
- ★ Support efforts to reform the juvenile justice system in Texas.