

Capitol Comments
Our Children and Our Seniors: Protecting Life at Every Age & Stage

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The Texas Legislature is in full swing with thousands of bills filed so far and many more on their way in the days that come. The Texas Catholic Conference staff has been busy monitoring all bills through the lens of Catholic social teaching. As the representatives of the Bishops of Texas, the TCC works support policies that protect all human life, at every age and stage. There are a number of bills that we are supporting and opposing and these along with our recent letters and statements can be found by visiting our newly redesigned website at: www.txcatholic.org.

Recently the Bishops issued two statements on critical statewide issues, the Governor's mandate of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine for 12 year old girls, and the proposals to build 19 new coal-fired plants. In addition to these statements, the TCC has issued several letters of concern for issues such as the Children's Health Insurance Program, elder care, and the death penalty provisions of Jessica's Law. At first glance these issues may not seem related, but the reality is that our positions on these issues all stem from the foundational principle of Catholic Social Teaching: the protection of human life and human dignity at every age and stage.

**Priorities of
The Texas Catholic Conference**

- ★ Life Issues
- ★ Immigration Issues
- ★ School Choice
- ★ Health and Human Services
- ★ Criminal Justice Reform

Jessica's Law

Jessica's Law (HB 8) is a bill that seeks to increase penalties on sex offenders, including the option of imposing the death penalty on repeat offenders. While the TCC certainly supports the effort to protect our children from sexual predators we believe the bill goes too far in seeking to impose the death penalty for repeat offenders.

The Bishops of Texas and the United States oppose the use of the death penalty in our country. Catholic teaching on capital punishment is quite clear: If non-lethal means are sufficient to defend human lives against an aggressor and to protect public order and the safety of persons, public authority should limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity with the dignity of the human person (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

Our Church fully believes that those who commit terrible violent crimes must be incarcerated, both as just punishment and in order to protect society. We stand in solidarity with victims and their loved ones. However, when it comes to matters of life and death, morality and common sense call for justice and careful safeguards. Therefore, the TCC asks for the removal of the provision in HB 8 that would impose the death penalty.

Elder Care:

Due to the high standard of living we enjoy in the United States, Americans are living longer and healthier lives than ever before. By 2030 it is expected that one in every five Americans will be 65 or older. Many of these elderly Americans are choosing to maintain independent lives in their homes with the support of personal assistants.

Personal assistants help the elderly with their daily tasks such as eating, dressing, bathing, and shopping. This relationship of reliance and trust, however, is threatened by Texas' lenient background check standards, and low standards of training. Demand for personal assistance in Texas has tripled since 1980. But with high turnover rates, low wages, and little support for home care workers, Texas may not be able to meet this demand. It is our duty to secure a high quality of life for elderly Texans by ensuring that they have access to highly trained personal assistants. The Texas Catholic Conference recommends enhanced background checks, more training requirements, and competitive wages for home care workers in order to improve the quality of life for our elderly brothers and sisters.

CHIP

The working poor are still trying to recover from harsh cuts to the Children's Health Insurance Program in 2003. The TCC provided written testimony requesting the following solutions:

- ★ Implement 12 months continuous eligibility for CHIP and Children's Medicaid.
- ★ Eliminate bureaucratic roadblocks to encourage personal responsibility and help low income families achieve self-sufficiency:
- ★ Provide adequate reimbursement for Medicaid and CHIP providers.
- ★ Invest in outreach and education to ensure that all eligible children get the care that they need.
- ★ Ensure that the working poor who access both CHIP and Medicaid have access to affordable, quality healthcare.