

PRESS RELEASE

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News Flash



Virginia Catholic Bishops Press State Leaders for Research Funding Guidelines, Governor Fails to Respond to Bishops' Appeal

As the Virginia General Assembly considered a large infusion of state funds into university research during this year's protracted budget debate, Arlington Bishop Paul Loverde and Richmond Bishop Francis DiLorenzo pursued ethical spending guidelines through a multi-pronged advocacy campaign. Organized by the Virginia Catholic Conference (the public-policy arm of the two bishops and their dioceses), this campaign urged lawmakers to invest generously in the thousands of forms of research that do not involve the taking of human life, and not to force taxpayers to subsidize research that requires unborn lives to be destroyed.

A key component of the campaign was a January 24th breakfast for state government leaders that highlighted budget provisions -- lobbied aggressively by the Virginia Catholic Conference and several other pro-life organizations throughout the lengthy budget process -- directing state money toward life-affirming research and prohibiting state spending on embryonic stem-cell research and research on the remains of aborted babies. Hosted by the Virginia bishops, the legislative breakfast featured a presentation by Fr. Tad Pacholczyk, Director of Education for the National Catholic Bioethics Center and a nationally renowned expert on the science and ethics of various forms of stem-cell research. Governor Tim Kaine was among those who attended the presentation.

Last week, however, after months of intense pressure from two of Virginia's public universities, the General Assembly submitted a budget to Governor Kaine without the language sought by the Conference and originally included in the House of Delegates' version of the budget. Following the legislature's inaction on the issue, Bishops DiLorenzo and Loverde appealed to Governor Kaine for a remedy. In a letter to the Governor dated June 22nd, the bishops called the sought-after provisions "absolutely essential to ensure that human lives are protected and that taxpayers' consciences are respected." They also observed, "While stem cells obtained by destroying human embryos have not helped a single human patient in over 25 years of research, stem cells obtained from adult tissues and umbilical-cord blood (obtained without terminating any lives) have already helped thousands of patients with about 100 different conditions. Surely, taxpaying citizens of our Commonwealth have every right to expect that their contributions will be invested only in research that is ethically sound and scientifically promising." The Governor, however, did not respond to the letter before today's Reconvened Session of the General Assembly, nor did he include the bishops' requested revisions in his package of 36 proposed budget amendments.

Commenting on the need for ethical guidelines on research spending, Conference Director Jeff Caruso noted, "Starting in July, universities will receive a very generous sum of new money for research. In return, they should embrace a standard that is self-evident to many Virginians: Experimentation that sacrifices some lives under the pretext of saving others cannot be justified and must not be funded." He predicted that many of the Commonwealth's taxpayers will be "very irate" when they learn that they will

be forced to pay for destructive research, and he promised that the Conference would "continue pressing for the protection of unborn lives and taxpayers' consciences."

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