

Unborn Life and Ethical Research Standards

Catholic Social Teaching:

“All human beings . . . belong to God who searches them and knows them, who forms them and knits them together with his own hands, who gazes on them when they are tiny shapeless embryos and already sees in them the adults of tomorrow whose days are numbered and whose vocation is even now written in the ‘book of life’ (cf. Psalm 139:1, 13-16).” *Evangelium Vitae, Pope John Paul II, para. 61 (1995).*

“Because all human beings are created by God, all possess an inherent dignity and therefore have certain basic rights, including the right to life and to those things that make life truly human (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, religious freedom, health care, education, and a safe environment). The right to life is the foundation of all others. Without it, no other rights are possible.” *Faithful Citizenship in Virginia, Virginia Catholic Conference (2007).*

2012 Legislation:

Abortion is never morally acceptable and must always be opposed. Unfortunately, policies proposed at the level of state government cannot put an end to legal abortion. They can, however, considerably reduce the number of abortions and encourage life-affirming decisions.

Viewing an ultrasound. Conference-supported bills (**SB 279, Senator Ralph Smith; SB 484, Senator Jill Holtzman Vogel; HB 261, Delegate Mark Cole; and HB 462, Delegate Kathy Byron**) would require that, prior to receiving an abortion, an ultrasound be conducted and the pregnant woman be given an opportunity to view the ultrasound image of her unborn child. **SB 279** and **SB 484** have been assigned to the **Senate Education and Health Committee**. **HB 261** and **HB 462** have been assigned to the **House Courts of Justice Committee’s Criminal Law Subcommittee**.

Talking points for Meetings with Legislators:

- Conducting an ultrasound is important to determine the gestational age of the fetus.
- Policies that promote life-giving decisions and provide the best possible information and services to pregnant women are essential. Helping to ensure a patient’s informed consent in the matter of abortion is one such policy.
- Enabling informed consent is one of a doctor’s most fundamental obligations, and the principle of informed consent should apply no less to abortion than to any other procedure.

- If every pregnant woman considering an abortion were given the opportunity to view an ultrasound image of her unborn son or daughter, it would be a great improvement to Virginia's current informed-consent law.
- This bill is necessary to ensure that women will always be able to choose this information if they wish to have it.

Banning abortions when fetuses can feel pain. Conference-supported legislation (**SB _____, Senator Mark Obenshain, and HB _____, Delegate Richard Anderson**) would add to Virginia law constitutionally permitted protections for unborn children from the stage at which substantial medical evidence indicates they are capable of feeling pain (thus banning most abortions from that stage onward). Bill numbers and committee assignments are pending.

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- There is substantial medical evidence that an unborn child can experience pain by 20 weeks after fertilization.
- An unborn child reacts to touch by eight weeks after fertilization.
- After 20 weeks, an unborn child reacts to stimuli in a way that would be recognized as an adult reaction to pain (*e.g.*, recoiling).

Preventing life-destructive research. A Conference-supported bill (**HB 1162, Delegate Ben Cline**) would ban embryonic stem-cell research. A Conference-supported budget amendment (**Budget Item _____, Delegate Mark Cole**) would ensure that no entity can receive funding under sections in the budget designated for biotechnology research if the entity performs research in Virginia on embryonic stem cells or aborted fetuses.

Talking points for Meetings with Legislators:

- Each of us began our life as a human embryo.
- Human dignity belongs equally to every member of the human family. Whether we are adults, adolescents, infants, fetuses, or embryos, we share a common humanity and an equal right to life.
- Embryonic stem cells have not helped a single human patient despite more than three decades of research, and stem cells that can be retrieved without ending a human life have already helped hundreds of thousands of patients.
- Virginia should support ethical, effective stem cell research using sources like adult tissues and umbilical cord blood, and **should end the kind of stem cell research that destroys lives and wastes money.**

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Criminal and Juvenile Justice

Catholic Teaching:

Death Penalty:

“[I]f non-lethal means are sufficient to defend and protect people’s safety from the aggressor, authority will limit itself to such means, as these are more in keeping with the concrete conditions of the common good and more in conformity with the dignity of the human person. Today, in fact, as a consequence of the possibilities which the state has for effectively preventing crime, by rendering one who has committed an offense incapable of doing harm—without definitively taking away from him the possibility of redeeming himself—the cases in which the execution of the offender is an absolute necessity are very rare, if not practically non-existent.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 2267).

“The new evangelization calls for followers of Christ who are unconditionally pro-life—who will proclaim, celebrate and serve the Gospel of Life in every situation. A sign of hope is the increasing recognition that the dignity of human life must never be taken away, even in the case of someone who has done great evil. Modern society has the means of protecting itself, without definitively denying criminals the chance to reform. I renew the appeal . . . for a consensus to end the death penalty, which is both cruel and unnecessary.” Pope John Paul II, Mass in St. Louis (1999).

“No matter how heinous the crime, if society can protect itself without ending a human life, it should do so.” *A Culture of Life and the Penalty of Death*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2005).

“With Virginia’s life-without-parole sentence and modern incarceration system, that protection is provided. The life-sentence alternative is unique in its ability to protect state residents while upholding the dignity of every person, even the one convicted of a brutal crime. Accordingly, we are convinced that—in our time and place—the death penalty is unnecessary and inappropriate, and that death sentences should no longer be imposed or carried out in Virginia.” *Virginia Catholic Bishops* (2007).

2012 Legislation:

This year, legislative initiatives – involving bills in both the House and Senate – threaten to expand the circumstances under which the death penalty can be imposed. These bills, opposed by the Conference, are as follows:

Legislation which eliminates the “triggerman rule”

Currently, with few exceptions, only the actual perpetrator of a capital murder (the “triggerman”) is eligible for the death penalty. **Senate Bill 58 (Senator Obenshain, currently in the Senate Courts of Justice Committee)** and **House Bills 389 and 954 (Delegate Gilbert and Delegate Bell, both before the Courts of Justice Criminal Subcommittee)** would eliminate this “triggerman rule” so that accomplices in the second degree could be sentenced to death.

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- Use of the death penalty is unnecessary and unjustified in our time and place, especially with the availability of life-without-parole sentences and maximum-security prisons.
- A society that can protect itself without ending a human life should do so.
- Other states have ended their use of the death penalty. Virginia – second only to Texas in number of executions – should be reducing and eliminating its use of capital punishment, not expanding the list of offenses for which it can be imposed.

Juvenile Justice:

“Punishment does not serve merely the purpose of defending the public order and guaranteeing the safety of persons; it becomes as well an instrument for the correction of the offender. . . . There is a twofold purpose here. On the one hand, encouraging the reinsertion of the condemned person into society; on the other, fostering a justice that reconciles, a justice capable of restoring harmony in social relationships disrupted by the criminal act committed.” *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, ¶ 403 (2004).

“Our beliefs about the sanctity of human life and dignity must be at the center of our approach to [criminal justice] issues. We respect the humanity and promote the human dignity of both victims and offenders. We believe society must protect its citizens from violence and crime and hold accountable those who break the law. These same principles lead us to advocate for rehabilitation and treatment for offenders, for, like victims, their lives reflect that same dignity. Both victims and perpetrators of crime are children of God.” *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2000).

“[The preferential option for the poor] recognizes that every public policy must be assessed by how it will affect the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society. Sometimes people who lack adequate resources from early in life (i.e., children—especially those who have been physically, sexually, or emotionally abused—the mentally ill, and people who have suffered discrimination) turn to lives of crime in desperation or out of anger or confusion. Unaddressed needs—including proper nutrition, shelter, health care, and protection from abuse and neglect—can be steppingstones on a path towards crime. Our role as Church is to continually work to address these needs through pastoral care, charity, and advocacy.” *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2000).

“We are still a long way from the time when our conscience can be certain of having done everything possible to prevent crime and to control it effectively so that it no longer does harm and, at the same time, to offer to those who commit crimes a way of

redeeming themselves and making a positive return to society. If all those in some way involved in the problem tried to . . . develop this line of thought, perhaps humanity as a whole could take a great step forward in creating a more serene and peaceful society.”
Pope John Paul II, July 9, 2000.

2012 Legislation:

Senate Bill 583 (Senator Edwards, currently before the Senate Committee on Courts of Justice) would allow – under certain circumstances – for a juvenile defendant of a violent felony to appeal a Commonwealth Attorney’s decision to transfer the case to the circuit court for trial as an adult.

- The need for constructive, redemptive punishment is very important when dealing with young offenders.
- Charging young offenders as adults can permanently impede their reintegration into society (viz., a higher recidivism rate, difficulty obtaining employment or education.)
- Given these serious consequences, Virginia has a moral and ethical obligation to ensure that its decisions to try juveniles as adults are made in the most responsible way.

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Religious Freedom

Catholic Social Teaching:

“The right to religious liberty is . . . a natural right of the human person to civil liberty, i.e., immunity, within just limits, from external constraint in religious matters by political authorities. This natural right ought to be acknowledged in the juridical order of society in such a way that it constitutes a civil right.” *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2108.

“[M]arriage as the lifelong union of a man and a woman is not one ‘model’ among many options of equal public significance. Rather, it is the very building block of the family and of society. Civil laws make a just and necessary distinction when they recognize the unique role the institution of marriage has in society, rather than reducing this institution to nothing more than one of many alternative kinds of voluntary relationships.” *The Institution of Marriage and the Common Good: A Pastoral Letter of the Virginia Catholic Bishops* (September 2006).

2012 Legislation:

Conference-supported legislation (**SB 349, Senator Jeffrey McWaters / HB 189, Delegate Todd Gilbert**) seeks to ensure that agencies performing adoption and foster-care placements are not forced to participate in placements that would violate their religious convictions, and are not barred from participating in government programs for following their convictions. These bills were introduced in response to debates last year at the State Board of Social Services regarding whether child-placement agencies should be required to provide services to same-sex couples. **SB 349** is currently in the **Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services Committee**. **HB 189** is currently in the **House Health, Welfare and Institutions Committee**.

Conference-opposed legislation (**SB 569, Senator Adam Ebbin**) seeks to prevent the state from contracting with or funding any child-placing agency unless the agency agrees to serve prospective adoptive parents without regard to their “family status” or “sexual orientation.” **SB 569** is currently in the **Senate Rehabilitation and Social Services Committee**.

Talking points for Meetings with Legislators:

- **SB 349** and **HB 189** do not change adoption law; they simply codify and clarify the status quo.
- A conflict over faith-based agencies’ conscience rights arose last year within the regulatory process. The State Board of Social Services – by a 7-2 vote on April 20 and a 6-1 vote on December 14 – affirmed the right of faith-based agencies to practice what they profess.

- In light of last year's regulatory debate, however, it is important for the Virginia General Assembly to clarify, in the state code, that faith-based agencies have a right of conscience, rather than waiting for another conflict to arise.
- Our Commonwealth and our country were built on religious freedom.
- Some child-placing agencies profess deeply held convictions and religious beliefs regarding the institution of marriage, the family unit, and human sexuality. These agencies must be allowed to continue the great work they are doing, without governmental intrusion into the practice of their faith.
- Many birthparents and prospective adoptive parents hold these convictions and beliefs as well, and they should have the choice to work with agencies that share their values.
- The state has reduced its foster care caseload from 7,557 (in December of 2007) to 4,718 (in July of 2011). The state has also decreased the number of children in group home placements from 1,922 (December of 2007) to 702 (July of 2011). Faith-based agencies played a vital role in these decreases.
- All agencies must be allowed to continue their great work if Virginia is to continue its trend of placing more children in permanent homes. If the goal is to provide more placements in permanent homes, nothing would be more detrimental to that cause than driving away highly skilled and experienced service providers.
- Instead of recognizing faith-based agencies as valuable partners when they collaborate with government to provide vital services in Virginia communities, **SB 569** would disrupt those partnerships, by failing to respect the deeply held religious convictions that animate the services being provided.
- **SB 349** and **HB 189** should be enacted because they would protect conscience rights. **SB 569** should be defeated because it would undermine conscience rights.

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Health Care

Catholic Social Teaching:

“Our approach to health care is shaped by a simple but fundamental principle: ‘Every person has a right to adequate health care. This right flows from the sanctity of human life and the dignity that belongs to all human persons, who are made in the image of God.’” *A Framework for Comprehensive Health Care Reform: Protecting Human Life, Promoting Human Dignity, Pursuing the Common Good, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (1993).*

During the recent and ongoing debates in Congress over health care reform, the U.S. Catholic Bishops have consistently and persistently called for:

- Access to quality, affordable, life-giving health care for all
- Prohibitions on abortion funding to the greatest extent possible
- Conscience protections for health-care providers and plans
- Removing current barriers to access placed on immigrants

2012 Legislation:

Restricting abortion funding. Under the Medicaid program, the federal government funds abortions when the life of the eligible woman is at risk and in cases of rape and incest, and in no other cases. This restriction on federal funding of abortion (in place since 1977) is called the Hyde policy. States are permitted, but not required, to spend their own funds (with no federal match) for abortions that fall outside these three categories. By funding abortions in cases of the fetus' physical deformity or mental deficiency, Virginia is among the minority of states that fund abortions beyond the Hyde policy circumstances. **HB 62 (Delegate Cole)** – currently in the **House Health, Welfare and Institutions Committee** – would repeal the state law that currently authorizes the Commonwealth to fund these non-federally-funded abortions. The result of enacting **HB 62** would be to conform Virginia's policy to the federal Hyde policy. The Conference opposes all government funding of abortion and supports **HB 62** because it would stop abortion funding to the fullest extent possible under federal law.

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- Our health care system should serve the life, health, and consciences of all.
- As a state taxpayer, I oppose the use of any of my money for abortion. No one should be forced to pay for another person's abortion.
- I was surprised to learn that, by funding abortions in cases of a fetus' physical deformity or mental deficiency, Virginia is among the minority of states that fund abortions beyond the federal “Hyde circumstances” (which are: life of the mother at risk, rape, and incest).
- According to a nationwide survey, 67 percent of U.S. adults oppose requiring people to pay for abortion coverage through their taxes.

- **HB 62** would conform Virginia’s policy to the federal “Hyde policy” on abortion funding in place for over three decades (since 1977).
- Most importantly, **HB 62** would save lives!

Immigrant Access to Health Care. Virginia’s Medicaid program excludes many immigrants who legally reside in Virginia and who meet the income criteria and all federal requirements for Medicaid eligibility, but who are not yet U.S. citizens. The Conference supports initiatives, *described in the Justice for Immigrants issue sheet*, that remove these barriers to health care access.

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Justice for Immigrants

Catholic Teaching:

“In our times a special obligation binds us to make ourselves the neighbor of every person without exception and of actively helping him when he comes across our path, whether he be an old person abandoned by all, a foreign laborer unjustly looked down upon, a refugee, a child born of an unlawful union and wrongly suffering for a sin he did not commit, or a hungry person who disturbs our conscience by recalling the voice of the Lord, ‘As long as you did it for one of these the least of my brethren, you did it for me’ (Matt. 25:40).” *Gaudium et Spes*, Second Vatican Council, ¶ 27 (1965).

“Every migrant is a human person who, as such, possesses fundamental, inalienable rights that must be respected by everyone and in every circumstance.” *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI, ¶ 142 (2009).

“Among the causes that greatly contribute to underdevelopment and poverty... mention must be made of... inadequate measures for guaranteeing basic health care.” *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, ¶ 447 (2004).

“The Gospel mandate to ‘welcome the stranger’ requires Catholics to care for and stand with immigrants, both documented and undocumented, including immigrant children.” *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, ¶ 83 (2007).

“Solidarity with migrants and refugees will take many forms, from participating in efforts to ensure that the U.S. government respects the basic human rights of all immigrants, to providing direct assistance to immigrants through diocesan and parish programs.” *Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003).

“We Catholic bishops commit ourselves to continue to work at the national level to promote recognition of the human rights of all, regardless of their immigration status, and to advance fair and equitable legislation for refugees and prospective immigrants. Present efforts need to be strengthened and supported with new initiatives, both at the local level and the national level as U.S. immigration law and practice change in the face of changing political pressures and social realities. In particular, Catholic lay people, diocesan officials and bishops should continue to work together with community organizations, labor unions, and other religious bodies on behalf of the rights of immigrants in the workplace, schools, public services, our legal system, and all levels of government.” *Unity in Diversity*, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003).

2012 Legislation:

Immigrant Health Care

This year, legislation in the House and Senate will seek to ensure that legal immigrants have better access to health care through Medicaid (the federal program which provides health insurance to certain very low-income individuals) and Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS), the state program which provides insurance for low-income women and children who are not poor enough to qualify for Medicaid. These bills and budget amendments, supported by the Conference, are as follows:

House Bill 183 and House Bill 782 (Delegates O’Bannon and Lopez, currently before the House Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions) and Senate Bill 568 (Senator Ebbin, currently before the Senate Committee on Education and Health) seek to provide Medicaid

and FAMIS Plan access for Legal Permanent Resident (LPR) pregnant women and children within the first five years of residency. **Budget Items 306#1s and 307#2s (Senator Ebbin, currently before the Senate Finance Committee)** and **___#__h (Delegate _____, currently before the House Committee on Appropriations)** also seek to secure funds for this care.

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- The Medicaid, FAMIS and FAMIS MOMS expansions for pregnant immigrants and immigrant children reflect recommendations made by the Joint Commission on Health Care.
- Prenatal care for low-income women is essential for reducing maternal death rates, miscarriages, birth defects, low birth weights, and other preventable problems.
- Medicaid already covers emergency services for Legal Permanent Residents. Offering preventive care to LPRs is more cost effective and will reduce the strain on hospitals and other care providers.

Immigration and Law Enforcement

The Conference opposes the following bills:

House Bill 89 and House Bill 320 (Delegate Albo and Delegate Ingram, both currently before the House Committee on Courts of Justice) supplement the existing law that requires sheriffs to make a query into legal presence when a person is "taken into custody" at a jail. These bills expand such inquiries by requiring immigration inquiries of everyone arrested, and require that an arresting officer inquire of every arrestee whether he (i) was born in a country other than the United States and (ii) is a citizen of a country other than the United States.

House Bill 1060 (Delegate Anderson, currently before the House Committee on Courts of Justice) mirrors House Bill 89 and House Bill 320, but also contains a provision which states "that when a *warrantless* arrest is made and the law-enforcement officer finds probable cause to believe that the person is not legally present in the United States, he shall communicate to the judicial officer the facts and circumstances underlying his belief. If the judicial officer concurs in the determination of the officer and finds probable cause to believe that the person will not appear for trial or hearing, the judicial officer may refuse to admit the person to bail."

HB 108 (Delegate Albo, currently before the House Committee on Courts of Justice) provides that no agency of the Commonwealth, political subdivision of the Commonwealth or locality, or an employee of any of them acting in his official capacity, may limit or restrict the enforcement of federal immigration laws to less than the full extent permitted by federal law.

- **Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:**
- Many localities use a "community policing" model and do not use law enforcement officers to routinely inquire about immigration status. These localities believe this community policing approach helps to *reduce* violent crime. They should be able to continue the practices they deem best.
- Absent provisions for victims of crime and witnesses of crime, using police officers to enforce immigration laws in this manner has discouraged victims of sexual and domestic

violence from cooperating with law enforcement – despite federal programs specifically designed to help these people in need.

- Federal law already makes it a criminal act to interfere in the enforcement of federal immigration laws.

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Education Opportunities

Catholic Social Teaching:

“A particularly important contribution many families make to the common good of society is the education of children. Parents – the first and most important educators – have a fundamental right to choose the education best suited to their children’s needs, including public, private, and religious schools. Governments should help provide the resources required for all parents to exercise this basic right without discrimination, and for all children to access the educational opportunities most suitable to their needs.”

Faithful Citizenship in Virginia, Virginia Catholic Conference (2007).

2012 Legislation:

Legislation (**HB 321, Delegate Massie; SB 241, Senator Obenshain; and SB 131, Senator Stanley**) would create income tax credits for businesses for donations they provide to scholarship foundations to enable low-income students to attend nonpublic K-12 schools. **HB 321** is currently under consideration in the **House Finance Committee**. **SB 241** and **SB 131** are currently before the **Senate Finance Committee**.

This “Education Improvement Scholarship” initiative – the Conference's top education priority for the 2012 General Assembly session – has been steadily gaining momentum over the last few years. Modeled after a successful and very popular Florida program that was created in 2001 and that has expanded considerably since then, this legislation would enable more families in need of financial assistance to choose the educational opportunities they believe are best suited for their children, via a tax credit scholarship program. Under the program, low-income Virginia students (eligibility levels vary among the three bills) would qualify for tax credit scholarships (to attend nonpublic K-12 schools) if they (a) were enrolled in the Commonwealth's public schools for the year prior to receiving a tax credit scholarship, (b) were prior recipients of tax credit scholarships, (c) are eligible to enter kindergarten or first grade, or (d) were not residents of Virginia during the preceding school year.

Scholarships under the program could not exceed the lesser of (a) the cost of tuition and instructional fees and materials or (b) the per-pupil amount distributed by the state to the local school division in which the student resides. Due to the limit on scholarship amounts and the fact that the tax credit is less than a dollar-for-dollar credit (70% tax credit in **SB 131** and **HB 321**; 84% tax credit in **SB 241**), the cost of the program would be more than offset by savings to the state’s public education expenses. In other words, the program would save the state money!

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- ***Education Improvement Scholarship legislation would provide options and opportunities.*** Virginia's lowest income children should have the same options and opportunities as all other children, especially when it comes to something as vital to their future as education.
- ***Education Improvement Scholarship legislation would sustain enrollment in nonpublic schools and thus save taxpayers a lot of money.*** Preventing declines in nonpublic-school enrollment is in the state's best economic interest. The more that students move from nonpublic schools to public schools, the greater the cost to state and local governments . . . and hence to the taxpayer.
- ***Education Improvement Scholarship legislation would be "revenue positive" for Virginia.*** Due to the limit on scholarship amounts and the less-than-dollar-for-dollar nature of the tax credit, this initiative would save the state money, as it has done in Florida.
- ***Education Improvement Scholarship legislation would increase incentives for private-sector investment in K-12 education.*** The attraction for businesses would be twofold: (1) receiving a tax credit for their donations, and (2) stimulating education opportunities, thereby attracting new residents and employees.
- ***Education Improvement Scholarship legislation would create a very popular program.*** A report by the Friedman Foundation, on the polling of 1,200 likely Virginia voters conducted in October 2009, found:
 - 65% in favor of tax credits for donations to scholarship organizations
 - only 23% opposed to this proposed policy
 - high support for these tax credits among Democrats (64%), Republicans (68%), and Independents (66%)

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Economic Justice

Catholic Teaching:

"In economic matters, respect for human dignity requires the practice of the virtue of *temperance*, so as to moderate attachment to this world's goods; the practice of the virtue of *justice*, to preserve our neighbor's rights and render him what is his due; and the practice of *solidarity*, in accordance with the golden rule and in keeping with the generosity of the Lord, who 'though he was rich, yet for your sake ... became poor so that by his poverty, you might become rich.'" *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [2407](#)

"Life and physical health are precious gifts entrusted to us by God. We must take reasonable care of them, taking into account the needs of others and the common good. Concern for the health of its citizens requires that society help in the attainment of living-conditions that allow them to grow and reach maturity: food and clothing, housing, health care, basic education, employment, and social assistance." *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, [2288](#)

"The demands of the common good are dependent on the social conditions of each historical period and are strictly connected to respect for and the integral promotion of the person and his fundamental rights. These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom." *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* [166](#)

2012 Legislation:

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Indexing. There has been only one TANF benefit increase since 1985. Consequently, a family of three currently receives less than \$3,840 per year – about one-fifth of the federal poverty level. Measures currently before the General Assembly seek to index TANF funding to other state spending:

Budget Item 327#1h (Delegate Jim Scott, currently before the House Committee on Appropriations) and Budget Item 337#1s (Senator Janet Howell, currently before the Senate Finance Committee) require the Commissioner of Social Services to provide federal TANF funds for a cost-of-living increase in TANF payments beginning in the fiscal year following a fiscal year in which a salary increase has been provided to state employees.

House Bill 976 (Delegate Jim Scott, currently before the Health and Human Resources Subcommittee of the House Committee on Appropriations) directs the Department of Social Services to develop and implement a process for annually reviewing the amount of assistance paid to eligible recipients through TANF, and to index TANF payments in an amount equal to the percentage change in the Consumer Price Index for the prior year.

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- There has been only one TANF benefit increase in Virginia since 1985.
- The TANF caseload in Virginia has been cut in half since 1995, yet the federal TANF Block Grant funding level has remained constant. Despite the economic slowdown, TANF caseloads remain at historic lows. The savings created by this combination are best used for a modest benefit increase.
- Indexing would prevent further erosion of recipients' ability to meet basic needs of children in own home care or in relative care.

Housing

Homelessness. The Governor's introduced budget includes \$1.5 million in funding for permanent supportive housing and rapid re-housing in the first year of the biennium. Please encourage General Assembly members to preserve this funding, and to also support efforts to include an additional \$1.5 million in funding for the second year of the biennium.

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- Rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing are proven, effective ways of reducing homelessness.
- Governor McDonnell has established a goal to reduce homelessness by 15% during his term.

Housing Trust Fund. Three Trust Fund bills – **House Bill 121 (Delegate Morrissey)**, **House Bill 790 (Delegate Lopez)**, and **House Bill 1100 (Delegate Herring)** are currently before the **House Committee on General Laws**. Supporters of a state housing trust fund are working to have these bills combined into a substitute modeled after legislation from previous years.

Talking Points for Meetings with Legislators:

- A state housing trust fund would provide a consistent source of flexible financing for the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing.
- Virginia is one of eight states without a Housing Trust Fund.

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