



ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Legislative Update

ARIZONA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE 2009 LEGISLATIVE WRAP-UP

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Most Pro-Life Session Ever!

After one of the most unusual and bitter legislative sessions in memory, the Arizona Legislature adjourned sine die at 7:31 a.m. on July 1st, making it the latest ending date in Arizona history.

Despite the extraordinary length of the session, and a host of other challenges, the best thing about the 2009 legislative session is that it can be called the most pro-life session ever!

The Arizona Catholic Conference (ACC) is especially grateful that Governor Brewer has now signed into law the Abortion Consent Act (HB 2564). This bill will help parents, women, children, and health care providers by including the following provisions: 1) requiring informed consent and a 24 hour waiting period before abortions; 2) tightening parental consent requirements by mandating notarized signatures; 3) specifying that non-physicians cannot perform surgical abortions; and 4) protecting the rights of conscience of all health care workers, including pharmacists, with respect to their participation in abortions and the distribution of morning after pills.

The provision about non-physicians performing surgical abortions was added late in the session to another bill (SB 1175) due to new information about nurse practitioners performing many more abortions than was previously known. In the event that the Abortion Consent Act language is tied up in litigation, having a separate law in this regard could become very important to the safety of women.

In addition to these measures, Governor Brewer also signed into law a state ban on partial birth abortions (HB 2400) that will give local prosecutors the ability to make sure this horrific procedure never happens in Arizona as well as an important end of life measure (HB 2616) that preserves food and fluids for certain patients with guardians.

Enormous School Choice Victories

Pertaining to school choice, the primary goal was to remove the sunset provision on the scholarship (corporate) tuition tax credit. As a reminder, this tax credit is targeted to low and moderate income students who either are entering kindergarten or want to switch from public to private schools.

The scholarship credit saves the state money and enables parents to send their children to the school that best fits their needs.

This year, the ACC supported legislation that would make this credit permanent and allow insurance companies the ability to donate like other corporations (HB 2288). Additionally, HB 2287 would allow users of both the individual tuition tax credit and the charitable organization tax credit to donate through payroll deductions in a manner so that they would not see a drop in their paychecks.

Thankfully, Governor Brewer signed both of these bills into law!

In addition to these bills, the ACC was able to work collaboratively with others to fend off the usual attacks on these tax credits and will continue to pursue school choice as a top priority.

Finally, it would be remiss to not mention the special session that was called earlier this year to help the foster and disabled students who were set to lose their school vouchers at the end of the school year due to a recent Arizona Supreme Court decision. Thankfully, Governor Brewer called the special session and signed into law a new corporate tuition tax credit capped at \$5 million to rescue these children.

Help for Vulnerable Populations

In an effort to help faith based charities and crisis pregnancy centers struggling to meet increasing demands for services during a time of shrinking resources, the ACC initiated a bill (HB 2286) to streamline the charitable organization tax credit for nonprofit organizations that primarily serve low-income and disadvantaged people.

HB 2286 was designed to make the existing charitable tax credit like any other tax credit by eliminating the complicated baseline year requirement for those itemizing their taxes. Additionally, the bill had provisions to ensure that only legitimate nonprofit organizations are the recipients.

The ACC is grateful that Governor Brewer signed this measure which will significantly benefit nonprofit organizations, and urges that vulnerable populations are similarly not forgotten in the ongoing special session on the budget.

Immigration Concerns

A large number of bills targeting those not legally in the country were also introduced this year. Among these measures were bills such as SB 1177 that would make it a crime for these immigrants to seek employment or even to solicit work on their own for matters such as cutting palm trees or yard work.

The bill that garnered the most attention, however, ended up being a proposal (HB 2280) that would compel local police to enforce federal immigration laws above others and create a felony crime of trespass for all those not legally in the country. HB 2280 was opposed by the ACC and various chiefs of police because it would take away resources from more serious criminal violations and create a chilling effect on crime victims and witnesses stepping forward.

Fortunately, all of these measures failed to pass during this session, but they are expected to return next year.

Conclusion

The ACC is grateful to all of the people and groups it has worked with over the course of this session that have made our efforts successful. In particular, there are certain legislators that deserve special praise such as Representative Nancy Barto and Senator Linda Gray who have championed the pro-life and conscience measures through their respective chambers.

Representative Steve Yarbrough and Senator John Huppenthal likewise were outstanding leaders on both school choice and the charitable tax credit. A special acknowledgment is also due to Senator Amanda Aguirre who moved to reconsider the charitable tax credit bill when it was in trouble and provided the deciding vote on the Senate floor.

Finally, the ACC is grateful to all of the people who supported our efforts through prayers and e-mails this session. We look forward to working with you again on the public policy issues of greatest importance to the Catholic Church.

As always, your assistance in encouraging anybody you know to sign up for free e-mail updates at www.azcatholicconference.org will help us to continue to grow the influence of the Catholic Church on these matters.

Please feel free to forward this message and encourage the people you know to sign up for these free updates at www.azcatholicconference.org so that we can continue to expand our influence on matters of importance to the Catholic Church.