

ADVOCACY
REPORT ON THE
97TH
MICHIGAN
LEGISLATURE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2013-2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION



MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE



ADVOCACY
REPORT ON
THE

97TH

MICHIGAN
LEGISLATURE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE 2013-2014 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Dear Friends:

At the conclusion of each two-year legislative session, Michigan Catholic Conference public policy and communications staff assembles a report to document the organization's advocacy efforts. As such, I am pleased to share with you this *Advocacy Report on the 97th Michigan Legislature: An Analysis of the 2013–2014 Legislative Session*.

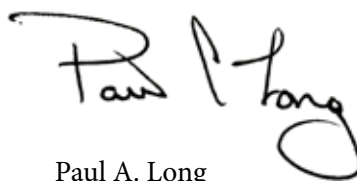
Over the past two years, the Legislature continued to focus its policy-making efforts on elevating the state's economic status that was damaged during the national recession. While the attention of Governor Rick Snyder, the Legislature and business leaders center on budgetary priorities, a powerful voice for human dignity and the common good permeates the halls of the Capitol. That voice is the Catholic Church. No organization that advocates on behalf of its constituents speaks to the breadth and range of issues as does a state Catholic conference.

As MCC confronts important issues of the day, building relationships, strengthening friendships and continuing to dialogue with others remains paramount. Such an approach to legislative advocacy this session resulted in stringent laws against human trafficking, strengthened policies for indigent persons seeking fair and competent legal counsel, health care access for low-income families, and initiated legislation protecting taxpayers from contributing to abortion funding, just to name a few.

Michigan Catholic Conference will continue its work to uphold the dignity of all human persons. I trust you will find this publication to be a reflection of the Conference's extensive engagement with the Michigan Legislature.

With profound gratitude for your support and friendship, I am

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Paul A. Long". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Paul A. Long
President and CEO

Table of Contents

A	Summary of the 2013–2014 Michigan Legislature	4
	<i>State Budget</i>	4
	<i>Religious Liberty</i>	5
	<i>Human Life and Dignity.</i>	6
	<i>Children and Families</i>	6
	<i>Health Care.</i>	7
	<i>Education.</i>	7
	<i>Economic Justice and Regulatory Policies.</i>	8
	<i>Restorative Justice</i>	8
	<i>Immigration</i>	9
	<i>Catholic Advocacy Network.</i>	9
B	Religious Freedom Policy	11
	<i>Religious Censorship Prohibition (SB 120)</i>	11
	<i>Religious Liberty and Conscience Protection Act (SB 136).</i>	12
	<i>Religious Absences and Student Attendance (HB 4454).</i>	12
	<i>Conscience Protection for Adoption and Foster Care Providers (HBs 4927–4928 and 4991)</i>	12
	<i>Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act (HB 5958)</i>	12
C	Human Life and Dignity	13
	<i>“Judge Shopping” Prohibition (SB 254)</i>	14
	<i>Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Penalties (SBs 866–867)</i>	14
	<i>Abortion Coercion (SBs 1156–1157 and HBs 4598–4599).</i>	14
	<i>Perinatal Hospice (HB 5626)</i>	15
	<i>Fetal Heartbeat (HBs 5643–5645)</i>	15
	<i>Human Trafficking (Public Acts 324–338, 340–344, 387, and 461 of 2014)</i>	15
	<i>Abortion Opt-Out (Public Act 182 of 2013)</i>	18
	<i>Unclaimed Bodies Program (HB 485).</i>	18
D	Children and Families	19
	<i>Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse (HB 4493).</i>	20
	<i>Immunization Schedules (Public Acts 120–122 of 2013)</i>	20
	<i>Michigan Student Safety Act (Public Act 183 of 2013)</i>	21
	<i>Children’s Services Support Subsidy (Public Act 308 of 2014)</i>	21
	<i>Direct Placement Adoption Reform (Public Acts 117–119 of 2014).</i>	21
	<i>Private Foster Care Agency Administrative Rates (Public Act 138 of 2013)</i>	21
	<i>Expanded Duties of Children’s Ombudsman (Public Act 243 of 2014)</i>	22

Paternity and Child Support Package (Public Acts 364–372 of 2014) 22
Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act Expansion (HB 5804, SB 1053, and HB 5959) 22

E Health Policy 23

E-Cigarette Regulation (HB 5393, SBs 667–668, and HB 4997) 24
Medical Good Faith Act (Public Act 57 of 2013) 24
Health Care Disciplinary Subcommittees (Public Acts 95–98 of 2014) 24
Do-Not-Resuscitate (Public Acts 155–157 of 2013) 24
Medicaid Expansion and Reform (Public Act 107 of 2013). 25
“Right to Try” (Public Acts 345–346 of 2014) 25

F Education 26

Residential Boarding Schools for At-Risk Youth (HB 4725) 26
Epi-Pen Legislation (HB 5668) 26
Strict Discipline Academy Eligibility (Public Act 256 of 2014). 27
Non-Public School Professional Development (Public Act 484 of 2014). 27

G Economic Justice and Regulatory Policies 28

Homestead Property Tax Credit (SB 752). 29
Energy Freedom Legislation (HBs 5673–5676) 29
Low-Income Energy Assistance (Public Act 95 of 2013) 29
Earned Income Tax Credit (Public Act 469 of 2014) 30
Nonprofit Housing Property Exemption (Public Act 456 of 2014). 30
Pawnbroker Usage Fees (SB 1138 and HB 5954) 30
Welfare Drug Testing (Public Act 394–395 of 2014). 30

H Restorative Justice. 31

Juvenile Life Without Parole (Public Acts 22–23 of 2014) 32
Indigent Defense (Public Acts 93–94 of 2013). 32
Prisoner Employability Certificate (Public Acts 359–361 of 2014) 32
Criminal Justice Reform (Public Acts 465–466 of 2014) 32

I Immigration Policies 33

In-State Tuition for Certain Non-Citizen Students (HB 4618) 33
Immigration Clerical Assistants (Public Act 174 of 2014) 34
Temporary Work Visas for High Skilled Professionals (HR 108). 34
EB-5 Visas (HRs 315–316 of 2014) 34

Summary of the 2013–2014 Michigan Legislature

State Budget

Each year, as the governor outlines his or her budget priorities and the Michigan Legislature considers funding for various initiatives, Michigan Catholic Conference staff examine the proposals and their impact on issues of concern to the Catholic Church. During the 2013–2014 session, Michigan Catholic Conference worked with lawmakers in several areas of the budget, especially in relation to measures regarding human life, the poor and vulnerable, health care, and education.

In February 2013, Governor Rick Snyder gave his budget recommendations for 2013–2014 year, which included \$47.6 billion in state and federal money.

- **The Department of Community Health Budget** included \$700,000 in funding, at the request of staff, for the creation of a Pregnancy and Parenting Support Program run by the nonprofit Real Alternatives. The program provides women in crisis pregnancies with alternatives to abortion from their child's conception through the first twelve months of the child's life, including pregnancy counseling, prenatal health information, parenting support and education, and necessary care items such as clothing, diapers, and formula. The budget unfortunately did not include funding for Medicaid expansion to more low-income Michiganders, but legislation passed later in 2013 to accomplish this goal.
- **The Higher Education Budget** maintained \$31.7 million in funding for the Tuition Grant Program, which helps students in financial need attend Michigan's private or independent colleges or universities. The Tuition Incentive Program received a \$3.2 million increase in funding to allocate a total of \$47.0 million to assist low-income students with the cost of tuition for college or degree programs.
- **The Department of Human Services Budget** included \$60 million in energy assistance for low-income individuals. Additionally, \$5.1 million was allocated for the administrative rates of Michigan private foster care agencies, such as Catholic Charities agencies, that provide child placement services, increasing the rate by \$3 per child, per day up to \$40.

When discussions began in February 2014 regarding the 2014–2015 state budget, the governor recommended \$52.0 billion in funding overall.

- **The Department of Community Health Budget** provided continued funding for the Pregnancy and Parenting Support Program. The Senate included \$2.2 million in funding the program, and the House allocated \$1.5 million. After negotiations between the two chambers, it was decided that any of the \$700,000 left at the end of last session was kept

for the program in addition to \$800,000 in new funds. Additionally, the approximately \$17.5 billion DCH budget included funding for the “Healthy Michigan Program,” commonly referred to as Medicaid expansion, which could be combined with more than \$12 billion in federal funding to serve lower income individuals and families.

- **The Michigan State Police Budget** included \$5 million in grant funding for local public safety technology and equipment needs, which included funding for schools to implement changes like enhanced 911 abilities and emergency alert software. MCC staff worked to guarantee that non-public schools are also included in this program.
- **The Higher Education Budget** provided funding for the Tuition Grant and Tuition Incentive Programs, at \$31.7 and \$48.5 million respectively.

Religious Liberty

Throughout the 2013–2014 session, the protection of faith-based individuals and institutions remained a significant priority for Michigan Catholic Conference staff. The continued push by the federal government for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) contraceptive mandate, along with numerous examples of discrimination against individuals and institutions of faith, demonstrated the need for greater protections. Also during this two year period, the U.S. Supreme Court decided in *Hobby Lobby v. Burwell* that “closely-held corporations” cannot be required to provide contraceptive coverage in employee health benefit plans due to the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Congress considered a measure to reverse this decision, but it was unable to receive enough votes to pass.

While work was done throughout the two year session to pass religious freedom protections, lawmakers debated these measures mostly during *Lame Duck*, or the period of time between the November 2014 election and the start of the new legislative session. Early in December 2014, the Michigan House passed legislation to enact a Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act, conscience protections for faith-based child placement agencies, and a measure prohibiting an absence due to a religious holiday from counting against a student’s attendance record. Shortly thereafter, the Michigan bishops issued a statement on religious freedom, which was distributed to lawmakers, and staff engaged grassroots advocates to promote passage of these religious liberty measures. Unfortunately, despite support from a majority of lawmakers, time ran out for the Senate to approve the bills before the end of session. Michigan Catholic Conference also advocated for conscience protections for health care workers and institutions, which were not approved before the end of session.

Human Life and Dignity

During these past two years, Michigan lawmakers approved several key measures related to the topic of human life and dignity. In the 2013–2014 and 2014–2015 budgets, Michigan Catholic Conference successfully advocated for funding that helps women in crisis pregnancies choose alternatives to abortion. In June 2013, Michigan Catholic Conference asked parishes and Catholics across Michigan to gather signatures to bring a voter initiated law prohibiting taxpayer funding of abortion before the Michigan Legislature. In December 2013, both the House and Senate approved the measure, which became law. Staff also worked closely with lawmakers on the passage of legislation addressing human trafficking, including measures that increased penalties for traffickers, provided support to victims, and worked to promote awareness of the crime. In October 2014, Governor Rick Snyder approved over twenty pieces of legislation related to the topic.

At the end of the Lamé Duck session, bills defining and implementing the penalties for abortion coercion were considered. These clean-up bills, which were passed by the Senate, would have allowed the 2011–2012 law against abortion coercion to be fully implemented but they did not receive a vote in the full House. Michigan Catholic Conference will continue to work in the upcoming session to enact these measures.

Children and Families

During the past two years, Michigan Catholic Conference staff focused on provisions that would help Michigan's children be supported and placed in loving homes. These measures included legislation to streamline the adoption process, consolidate child support services, determine paternity more efficiently, and provide financial assistance to adoptive parents for children with a medical condition or impairment that was present but not known at the time of the adoption. All were passed by the Michigan Legislature and signed into law by Governor Rick Snyder. Additionally, staff supported a new student safety measure that has been enacted into law, OK2Say, which connects children, parents, and school personnel to law enforcement. The program and supporting hotline encourages individuals to break their silence and to address the culture of violence and harmful behavior.

Michigan Catholic Conference also spent time during the year supporting Michigan's Marriage Amendment, which defines marriage as the union between one man and one woman. During court cases at the federal district and appellate level, Michigan Catholic Conference issued amicus briefs and press statements in defense of the amendment, which was most recently upheld by the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati. On January 16, 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it would consider Michigan's case this year, along with cases from Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee, to address state policies regarding marriage.

Health Care

In May 2013, Michigan Catholic Conference staff joined with leaders of the Catholic Health Systems in Michigan to advocate and issue guiding principles for Medicaid reform. During the end of the 2013 year, MCC staff celebrated the passage of a Medicaid expansion bill, which opened the opportunity for more Michiganders to receive access to health care. From April to December 2014, over 481,000 residents had enrolled in the program as a result of the new legislation. Another MCC-supported measure that passed successfully during the year was a series of bills that addressed the investigation of medical misconduct violations. These bills were introduced following an incident where the State Board of Medicine failed to investigate complaints concerning a Muskegon abortion clinic due to a conflict of interest on behalf of one of the board members. Additionally, during this session, the Michigan Legislature approved two measures to make Michigan the fifth “Right to Try” State. The new legislation allows terminally ill patients to have access to medications that have passed the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) safety inspections, but that have not been fully approved as effective medications. MCC staff worked to make sure the acts protect the vulnerable and require informed consent.

Education

During the 2013–2014 session, Michigan Catholic Conference was pleased to see funding preserved in the budgets for the Tuition Grant and Tuition Incentive Programs, as well as a one-time inclusion of grant funding for school safety measures available to all schools. MCC-supported legislation expanding eligibility for strict discipline academies also passed the Michigan Legislature and was signed into law, providing more opportunities for parents with troubled teens. Both years, the Michigan Senate and House passed resolutions recognizing Catholic Schools Week and the contributions made to the state by Catholic schools. Finally, towards the end of the Lame Duck period, a bill was signed into law to allow non-public schools to be added to the list of authorized providers of professional development. MCC worked on the language with the bill sponsor and welcomed the measure, which allows non-public school professional development to count towards teacher recertification, as is currently allowed in public schools.

Additionally, Michigan Catholic Conference advocated for a \$10 million appropriation to compensate non-public schools for state health, safety, and welfare regulations they are required to complete each year. While this funding was not included in the governor’s budget or the final legislative budgets in 2014, the Legislature did approve language requiring the Michigan Department of Education to compile a report identifying the mandates required of all schools in Michigan. The report was issued in November 2014. While there is still a constitutional ban against aid for Michigan non-public schools,

MCC received a letter from the Michigan Attorney General's office that providing funding to non-public schools in order to comply with state requirements would not be unconstitutional. MCC will continue to advocate for this funding in the upcoming legislative session.

Economic Justice and Regulatory Policies

Towards the end of the 2011–2012 session, Michigan lawmakers passed legislation creating a new program to provide low-income individuals with energy assistance. This legislative session, Michigan Catholic Conference supported legislation, now enacted into law, putting into place the funding mechanism for that program. Funding for other important programs that help low-income Michiganders were also considered during the budget process.

During discussions about how to increase road and transportation funding in Michigan, a compromise was reached that could allow for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to be restored to its 2010 level of twenty percent of the federal credit. In 2011, the credit was slashed to six percent but was saved from total elimination due to advocacy from MCC and other organizations. In order for the EITC to be restored to twenty percent in 2016, Michigan voters must first approve a wider road funding proposal during a special election in May 2015.

Restorative Justice

Early in the 2013–2014 session, lawmakers approved legislation creating a Michigan Indigent Defense Commission (MIDC) to establish minimum standards for indigent defense across the state. Previously a patchwork of policies governed the various counties, and Michigan Catholic Conference welcomed the new policy after years of advocacy. Another policy that staff supported was the creation of certificates of employability for parolees, which would be awarded by the Department of Corrections to those upon release who had proved their readiness to be hired. Governor Rick Snyder signed the legislation into law at the end of the session.

Legislation was also approved in March 2014 to eliminate the *mandatory* sentencing of juvenile offenders to life without parole prospectively. Life without parole is still a sentencing option, but it would not be automatically given to juveniles for committing certain crimes, which would allow judges the opportunity to consider factors such as age and maturity. As the U.S. Supreme Court case *Miller v. Alabama* (2012) did not specify whether or not past cases should be resentenced when it decided mandatory sentencing of life without parole was unconstitutional, the legislation does not apply retroactively. In summer 2014, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled against applying the decision retroactively, but in December, the U.S. Supreme Court announced that it would consider the issue

further in the case *Toca v. Louisiana*. Michigan Catholic Conference dedicated its May 2014 FOCUS publication to the topic of juvenile life without parole to highlight the impact of the sentence in Michigan and to explain the Catholic position on restorative justice.

Immigration

Although discussion of immigration reform took place mostly at the federal level, Michigan Catholic Conference supported several resolutions that called for increasing the number of skilled visas available for foreigners. Additionally, MCC worked on a bill that removed the requirement for immigration clerical assistants to be registered with the state, making sure to maintain prohibitions against fraudulent activities and to enact penalties for violations.

In February 2014, Governor Snyder announced his intent to create an Office for New Americans during his State of the State Address. Staff issued a press release speaking to the need to reach out to all immigrants in these ways, not just the most highly skilled. During the summer of 2014, the arrival of tens of thousands of Mexican and Central American children at the border brought greater awareness to the issue of immigration, poverty, and violence in other countries. Michigan Catholic Conference and the bishops spoke to the need for immigration reform with several articles and statements at that time.

Conference staff also met with Michigan's U.S. Representatives while in Washington DC on two occasions to speak to the need for comprehensive immigration reform and will continue to do so until a solution is reached.

Catholic Advocacy Network

During the 2013–2014 legislative session, Michigan Catholic Conference kept Catholics across the state informed through the Catholic Advocacy Network, a grassroots email system. At the beginning of the legislative session, the Catholic Advocacy Network had 4,185 members. The number has since more than doubled, with 8,450 members, by the end of the session.

Through its regular *Lansing Update*, staff provides brief updates to members about issues of concern to the Church, including when MCC testifies on specific legislation or when measures are to be considered for a vote. Less frequently, staff uses *Action Alerts* to call on members to communicate with their elected officials to encourage support or opposition to specific measures.

In the recent session, Catholic Advocacy Network members contacted their elected officials about a myriad of issues. On the state level, they wrote concerning health care and adoption conscience issues, the creation of a Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act, the preservation of funding for Real

Summary of the 2013–2014 Michigan Legislature

Alternatives, and the adoption of Medicaid expansion and reform, among others. On the federal level, in addition to advocacy work from MCC staff with the Michigan delegation, they wrote concerning cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, immigration reform, and the passage of legislation to prohibit federal funding of abortion. Action was especially crucial during the Lame Duck session, as quick action was needed to demonstrate Catholic priorities to lawmakers on particular bills.

Grassroots advocacy is a powerful tool for bringing issues of concern to lawmakers, and the 10,110 messages sent during 2013–2014 on the issues mentioned above allowed the Catholic voice to be more strongly heard. ■



Religious Freedom Policy

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
Senate Bill 120	Prohibits the censoring of religious references in original source documents during historical instruction in public schools.	Education (Passed)	Education (Passed)	Support	Passed Senate. Died in House.
Senate Bill 136	Expands conscience protections for health care providers and institutions; requires employers to implement a conscience protection policy.	Health Policy (Passed)	N/A	Support	Passed Senate Committee. Died in Senate.
House Bill 4454	Prohibits absences due to a religious holiday from counting against a student's attendance record.	Education	Education (Passed)	Support	Passed House. Died in Senate Committee.
House Bills 4927, 4928 and 4991	Protects conscience rights for faith-based agencies who work with foster care and adoption.	Families, Seniors, and Human Services	Families, Children, and Seniors (Passed)	Support	Passed House. Died in Senate.
House Bill 5958	Creates the Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act.	N/A	Judiciary (Passed)	Support	Passed House. Died in Senate.

Religious Censorship Prohibition (SB 120)

This legislation would have prohibited school boards and officials from censoring historical instruction in public schools based on religious references in original source documents. For example, school boards and officials could not omit the reference to “our Creator” in the Declaration of Independence. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the legislation, which would ensure that students accurately learn the history of America and of Michigan, including the role religion has played throughout it. The measure passed the Senate and House Education Committees but did not receive a vote before the full House.

Religious Liberty and Conscience Protection Act (SB 136)

Senate Bill 136 would have prevented health institutions and individuals from being forced to pay or provide health care services in violation of their moral or religious beliefs. Michigan Catholic Conference worked closely with the bill sponsor to encourage support for the legislation. Staff testified before the Senate Health Policy Committee and asked parishes and Catholic Advocacy Network members to send messages of support to lawmakers on behalf of the measure. The bill passed the Senate Health Policy Committee but was not taken up again during the 2013–2014 session.

Religious Absences and Student Attendance (HB 4454)

The Michigan Legislature considered House Bill 4454 to prohibit a public school from counting school absences due to religious holidays against a student's attendance record. Michigan Catholic Conference testified in support of the measure, urging lawmakers to protect student religious liberty rights and to prevent religious absences from disqualifying them from attendance awards or recognition. The legislation was approved by the Michigan House during *Lame Duck* but was not considered in the Senate Education Committee before the end of session.

Conscience Protection for Adoption and Foster Care Providers (HBs 4927–4928 and 4991)

During the 2013–2014 session, lawmakers considered a package of bills regarding conscience protections for faith-based adoption agencies. For decades, faith-based agencies have worked with the State of Michigan to place Michigan's most vulnerable children in loving homes while operating according to their own conscience or faith. Michigan Catholic Conference and staff from St. Vincent Catholic Charities in Lansing testified in support of the bills. During *Lame Duck*, despite grassroots and staff advocacy, the Senate adjourned before passage of the bills, which were approved in the House in December 2014.

Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act (HB 5958)

After the November election and into the *Lame Duck* session, lawmakers began consideration of a Michigan Religious Freedom Act (RFRA) to protect individuals from government interference into their religious beliefs. The bill was modeled after federal legislation, which was approved with almost unanimous Congressional support in 1993. Michigan Catholic Conference worked with lawmakers to encourage passage of such legislation and engaged its grassroots advocacy through the Catholic Advocacy Network to send messages to lawmakers. Additionally, Michigan Catholic Conference arranged a media call with several constitutional scholars, who spoke in favor of the bill. The House approved the legislation, but time ran out in the Senate before a vote could be taken. ■

Human Life and Dignity

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
Senate Bill 254	Forbids a minor from “judge shopping” for a waiver from abortion parental consent requirement.	Judiciary (Passed)	N/A	Support	Passed Senate Committee. Died in Senate.
Senate Bills 866–867	Prohibits and prescribes criminal penalties for abuse against elder or vulnerable adults.	Judiciary (Passed)	Criminal Justice	Support	Passed Senate. Died in House Committee.
Senate Bills 1156–1157	Defines abortion coercion in law as a crime and provides related penalties.	Judiciary (Discharged)	Criminal Justice	Support	Passed Senate. Died in House Committee.
House Bills 4598–4599		N/A			Died in House Committee.
House Bill 5626	Requires a physician to make available information on perinatal hospice care and the latest information of a life-limiting condition, to a patient after the results of a prenatal test.	N/A	Health Policy	Support	Died in House Committee.
House Bills 5643–5645	Prohibits abortion after the detection of a fetal heartbeat.	N/A	Healthy Policy	Support	Died in House Committee.
*See below	Addresses various aspects of human trafficking, including penalties for traffickers, services for victims, and awareness.	Families, Seniors, and Human Services (Passed), SB 602: Judiciary also (Passed)	Criminal Justice (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 324–338, 340–344, 387 and 461 of 2014.

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
Initiated Legislation 1	Prohibits taxpayer funding of abortion coverage in the state health exchange and requires individuals with private insurance to purchase an optional rider if they want abortion coverage.	Government Operations (Discharged)	N/A	Support	Became law. Public Act 182 of 2013.
Senate Bill 485	Creates an Anatomy Board to determine criteria, standards, and procedures for the scientific use of unclaimed bodies.	Health Policy (Passed)	Health Policy	Oppose	Passed Senate. Died in House Committee.

“Judge Shopping” Prohibition (SB 254)

A minor seeking an abortion in Michigan must currently provide her own written consent along with the written consent of a parent or guardian. The minor may petition in family court, however, for a waiver from the parental/guardian consent requirement. The bill, similar to those introduced in several previous legislative sessions, would ensure that a minor who was denied a waiver of parental consent by one family court would not be allowed to seek a waiver for the same pregnancy in another family court, a practice also known as “judge shopping.” This measure passed the Senate Judiciary Committee but was not considered by the full Senate.

Elder and Vulnerable Adult Abuse Penalties (SBs 866–867)

The measures would have created penalties for crimes against elder and vulnerable adults, such as abuse, neglect, and exploitation. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the bills in the Senate Judiciary Committee, which passed the Senate but did not pass the House before the end of session.

Abortion Coercion (SBs 1156–1157 and HBs 4598–4599)

During the 2011–2012 legislative session, pro-life legislation was approved that included several important provisions, including prohibitions against abortion coercion. Unfortunately, while the abortion coercion measure passed, the bill defining abortion coercion and outlining the penalties for it was not approved, leaving the measure unenforceable. Michigan Catholic Conference worked with the bill sponsors on legislation that would add definitions and penalties to the relevant sections of law to protect against this crime. House Bills 4598 and 4599, introduced early in the 2013–2014 session,

died in the House Criminal Justice Committee before receiving a vote. Similar measures introduced in the Senate, Senate Bills 1157 and 1158, were considered in Lane Duck and passed by the Senate, but were not taken up by the House in time for final approval.

Perinatal Hospice (HB 5626)

House Bill 5626 would have required Michigan doctors to provide information to parents who receive a poor prenatal diagnosis for their unborn baby concerning the availability of perinatal hospice. Often parents who receive such news are advised to abort their baby, making this measure an important step towards offering parents alternatives that respect the life and dignity of their child. Perinatal hospice programs incorporate the philosophy and expertise of hospice and palliative care into the care of this new population of patients, the unborn and newborn. These programs allow families whose babies are likely to die before, or shortly after birth, with the opportunity to go through the natural grieving process. While unfortunately the legislation died in the House Health Policy Committee shortly after introduction, Michigan Catholic Conference was pleased to see efforts to provide assistance to parents in their time of need.

Fetal Heartbeat (HBs 5643–5645)

These measures, which were introduced in June 2014, would have banned abortion after the detection of a fetal heartbeat. Fetal heartbeats are usually detectable at ten to twelve weeks gestation, but may be detected as early as six to seven weeks into the pregnancy. Similar bills introduced in North Dakota and Arkansas were challenged in the courts and declared unconstitutional. Although the bills never received a committee hearing and died in the House, Michigan Catholic Conference offered its support.

Human Trafficking

Michigan Catholic Conference staff worked with lawmakers to support a major package of legislation regarding the crime of human trafficking, or modern human slavery. Governor Rick Snyder signed most of the bills in October at Walsh College, with MCC staff attending, and two more were approved during the Lane Duck session.

- **Theresa Flores’s Law (Public Act 324 of 2014, Introduced as SB 584):** Named for a Michigan victim of human trafficking, Theresa Flores, this law lengthens the criminal statute of limitations for offenses of child sex trafficking or commercial sexual exploitation of children. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure, which was signed into law as Public Act 324 of 2014.

- **Human Trafficking Commission (Public Act 325 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5158):** The measure creates a state human trafficking commission to collect and analyze information about human trafficking and improve public awareness about the crime. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the bill, which is now Public Act 325 of 2014.
- **Solicitation of a Minor (Public Acts 326–328, Introduced as SBs 205–206 and 602):** The measures increase penalties for individuals who solicit prostitution from a minor and require those caught to be placed on the sex offender registry. They were signed into law as Public Acts 326–328 of 2014.
- **Revised Human Trafficking Act (Public Act 329 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5234):** The bill revises Michigan’s existing Human Trafficking Act to make it more consistent with current policy and to consolidate penalties for violations of the act. The measure was signed into law as Public Act 329 of 2014.
- **Expanded Definition of Kidnapping (Public Act 330 of 2014, Introduced as HB 4021):** HB 4021 expands the crime of kidnapping to include restraining a minor with the intent of engaging in sexually abusive activity. It was signed into law as Public Act 330 of 2014.
- **Elimination of Gender References (Public Act 331 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5231):** The measure eliminates gender references in certain prostitution statutes to better serve all victims, and it provides for increased penalties. It was enacted as Public Act 331 of 2014.
- **Forfeiture of Assets (Public Acts 332–333 of 2014, Introduced as HBs 5236 and 5233):** These bills provide for the seizure and forfeiture of property related to a human trafficking crime. They were signed into law as Public Acts 332–333 of 2014.
- **Deferred Sentencing for Prostitution (Public Act 334 of 2014, Introduced as SB 585):** This bill allows courts to defer sentencing for a victim of human trafficking charged with prostitution-related crimes. The measure was introduced in an effort to make Michigan’s approach to human trafficking more victim-centered, rather than continuing to treat victims as criminals. The measure was signed into law as Public Act 334 of 2014.
- **“Safe Harbor” Legislation (Public Acts 335–336, Introduced as HBs 5025 and 5012):** Together, these two pieces of legislation are known as “safe harbor” measures. House Bill 5025, now enacted as Public Act 335 of 2014, allows human trafficking survivors the possibility of having their criminal records expunged for certain crimes committed while victims of

trafficking. House Bill 5012, now enacted as Public Act 336 of 2014, creates a presumption that minors charged with prostitution or a similar crime were coerced. These measures are also a more victim-centered approach than previous policy.

- **DHS and Human Trafficking Victim Services (Public Act 337–338 of 2014, Introduced as SBs 587 and 593):** Senate Bills 587 and 593 both address the role of the Department of Human Services (DHS) in addressing child human trafficking victims. Senate Bill 587 requires DHS to perform an assessment of child victims of human trafficking and to provide appropriate services for that child, including reunification, adoption, and counseling services. Senate Bill 593 allows DHS to give special consideration to child victims of human trafficking in the foster care system so that they can be placed in an environment with any services that are needed. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measures, which have now been enacted as Public Acts 337–338 of 2014.
- **Restitution for Human Trafficking Victims (Public Act 340 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5237):** The measure includes human trafficking crimes in a provision requiring the court to order convicted defendants to pay restitution for a victim's losses. The bill was enacted into law as Public Act 340 of 2014.
- **Medical Assistance for Human Trafficking Victims (Public Act 341 of 2014, Introduced as SB 592):** To promote measures that help victims of human trafficking connect with the services that they need, Senate Bill 592 allows victims of human trafficking the opportunity to receive medical assistance benefits for medical and psychological treatment. Governor Rick Snyder signed the bill into law as Public Act 341 of 2014.
- **Family Court Jurisdiction of Dependent Juveniles (Public Act 342, Introduced as HB 5026):** The bill allows family court the jurisdiction over dependent juveniles who are in danger of substantial physical or psychological harm. The measure has become law as Public Act 342 of 2014.
- **Training for Medical Professionals (Public Act 343 of 2014, Introduced as SB 597):** This measure establishes requirements for training medical professionals on how to identify the signs and victims of human trafficking. The bill passed the Legislature and became Public Act 343 of 2014.

- **Reporting of Human Trafficking (Public Act 344, Introduced as HB 5239):** The legislation requires the Michigan Department of Human Services and other mandatory reporters to report suspected child abuse or neglect involving human trafficking to local law enforcement.
- **Human Trafficking Public Nuisance (Public Act 387 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5230):** Under the legislation, a building, vehicle, boat, aircraft or place will be marked a nuisance if it was used for crimes related to human trafficking or used to facilitate armed violence with the unlawful use of a weapon. The measure now becomes law as Public Act 387 of 2014.
- **Human Trafficking Health Advisory Board (Public Act 461 of 2014, Introduced as SB 596):** To better address issues related to human trafficking and health, this bill creates a seven-member Human Trafficking Health Advisory Board within the Michigan Department of Community Health. The board will be responsible for collecting information regarding human trafficking, identifying and distributing information about Michigan medical and mental health services available to victims, and establishing a public awareness program about these services. The measure now becomes Public Act 461 of 2014.

Abortion Opt-Out (Public Act 182 of 2013, Introduced as IL 1)

In June 2013, Right to Life of Michigan engaged in a statewide effort to gather at least 258,088 signatures to bring a citizen-initiated measure before the Michigan Legislature. The measure prohibits taxpayer funding for abortion coverage in the state health exchange created by federal reform. Additionally, it requires individuals with private insurance to pay for an optional rider if they want to purchase abortion coverage. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the signature gathering effort by sending a letter out to all the parishes in the state encouraging their participation. Once gathered, the initiated legislation was approved by both the Michigan House and Senate and became law. As initiated legislation, the measure did not need the governor's signature to be enacted.

Unclaimed Bodies Program (HB 485)

This measure would create an Anatomy Board within the Department of Community Health to develop criteria, standards, and procedures for considering unclaimed bodies suitable for scientific use. Michigan Catholic Conference was concerned that the legislation did not do enough to make sure families of the deceased were contacted and their wishes respected, and therefore staff opposed the bill. House Bill 485 passed the Senate but died in the House Health Policy Committee. ■

Children and Families

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
House Bill 4493	Extends the list of individuals within a school who are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect.	Families, Seniors, and Human Services (Passed)	Families, Children, and Seniors (Passed)	Support	Passed House. Died in Senate.
Senate Bills 237–239	Requires students to submit a certificate of immunization upon enrolling in Grade 7.	Health Policy (Passed)	Health Policy (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 120–122 of 2013.
Senate Bill 374	Provides for the development and implementation of a school safety program that allows for confidential reporting.	Education (Passed)	Appropriations (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 183 of 2013.
Senate Bill 890	Provides for an adoption assistance support subsidy for families with children with special needs not known at the time of the adoption.	Families, Seniors, and Human Services (Passed)	Families, Children, and Seniors (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 308 of 2014.
House Bills 4646–4648	Allows out-of-court parental rights releases, limits the time a birth mother can revoke her release of parental rights, and shortens the time needed for direct adoptions for children under the age of one.	Families, Seniors, and Human Services (Passed)	Families, Children, and Seniors (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 117–119.
House Bill 4961	Requires the Department of Human Services to pay 100% of the \$3 foster care administrative rate in the 2013–2014 Fiscal Year.	Appropriations (Passed)	Appropriations (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 138 of 2013.

Children and Families

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
House Bill 5039	Expands the duties of the Children's Ombudsman.	Families, Seniors, and Human Services (Passed)	Families, Children, and Seniors (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 243 of 2014.
House Bills 5463–5471	Expedites the process of determining paternity and allows the counties to consolidate child support services.	Families, Seniors, and Human Services (Passed)	Families, Children, and Seniors (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 364–372 of 2014.
House Bill 5804	Expands the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation, gender identity and expression.	N/A	Commerce	Oppose	HB 5804 died in House Committee.
Senate Bill 1053		Government Operations	N/A		SB 1053 died in Senate Committee.
House Bill 5959	Expands the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act to include sexual orientation.	N/A	Commerce	Oppose	Died in House Committee.

Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse (HB 4493)

Amending the Child Protection Law, this bill would have extended the requirement to report suspected child abuse or neglect to individuals employed by a public or non-public school or by another entity contracted with the schools. Current law requires medical professionals, marriage therapists, licensed counselors, social workers, social service technicians, school counselors, teachers, law enforcement officers, members of the clergy, and regulated child care providers to make an oral report to the Department of Human Services if they have a reasonable cause to suspect child abuse. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure, which passed the House but died in the Senate.

Immunization Schedules (Public Acts 120–122 of 2013, Introduced as SBs 237–239)

These three measures, similar to those enacted in twenty-four other states, allow students in Michigan schools to submit their certificate of immunizations upon entering Grade 7, rather than Grade 6 as currently required. Over the years, vaccines have been added to the list of those required for students that the Center for Disease Control recommends children receive at ages eleven or twelve. Since many

students entering Grade 6 begin at ten years of age, moving the immunization certificate submission to Grade 7 is more consistent with the new vaccine requirements. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the bills, which have now been signed and enacted as Public Acts 120–122 of 2013.

Michigan Student Safety Act (Public Act 183 of 2013, Introduced as SB 374)

The bill, which creates the Student Safety Act, allows for a program to be developed and implemented for the confidential reports of violence, self-harm, and crimes directed at students, employees, and schools. A hotline would be maintained at all times to receive these confidential tips. Michigan Catholic Conference testified in support of the measure, which has now been signed into law as Public Act 183 of 2013.

Children’s Services Support Subsidy (Public Act 308 of 2014, Introduced as SB 890)

The Legislature considered and approved, with wide bipartisan support, legislation that would assist adoptive parents who realize their child has special health care needs that were not known at the time of the adoption. The bill provides financial assistance for these behavioral, emotional, and mental health conditions, physical or medical impairments, and exceptional educational support needs. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the passage of this measure, which will better help parents take care of the needs of their adoptive children, and it has now been signed into law as Public Act 308 of 2014.

Direct Placement Adoption Reform (Public Acts 117–119 of 2014, Introduced as HBs 4646–4648)

The measures allow out-of-court parental rights releases, limit the time period a birth mother can revoke her release of parental rights, and shorten the time to complete an adoption for a child under the age of one from six to three months. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the bills, which create a greater sense of permanency through the consent duration and supervisory requirements. The bills also ensure the father’s rights are respected through the process while placing Michigan’s most vulnerable children in loving homes. In March 2014, Governor Rick Snyder signed the bills into law as Public Acts 117–119 of 2014.

Private Foster Care Agency Administrative Rates (Public Act 138 of 2013, Introduced as HB 4961)

During the 2013–2014 state budget process, Michigan Catholic Conference advocated for increased funding for the administrative rates of private foster care agencies, such as Catholic Charities. The final budget passed by the Legislature and approved by Governor Snyder increased funding by \$3 per child, per day (from \$37 to \$40). House Bill 4961 formalizes this increase into Michigan law and ensures that

the Department of Community Health provides 100 percent of the increased funding, not the counties. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure. House Bill 4961 was signed into law as Public Act 138 of 2013.

Expanded Duties of Children’s Ombudsman (Public Act 243 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5039)

The legislation requires the Children’s Ombudsman, or public advocate charged with investigating and addressing complaints against the government or the administration, to notify the Michigan Department of Human Services of an immediate safety concern about a child who was the subject of an open Child Protective Services (CPS) or foster care case. The investigation of child fatality cases suspected to have occurred because of child abuse or neglect must be completed within twelve months. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure, which was enacted as Public Act 243 of 2014.

Paternity and Child Support Package (Public Acts 364–372 of 2014, Introduced as HBs 5463–5471)

This package of bills expedites the process of determining paternity through genetic testing and removes unnecessary court bureaucracy, as most cases are uncontested. Instead of requiring prosecutors to bring cases to court to establish paternity and child support, these measures will notify all involved parties and give them the opportunity to object and request a hearing only if they need one, saving court resources. Additionally, the legislative package allows counties to consolidate child support services, making the process easier for parents. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the package, which was passed in Lane Duck and signed into law as Public Acts 364–372 of 2014.

Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act Expansion (HB 5804, SB 1053, and HB 5959)

Three measures were introduced this session to amend the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, which currently protects individuals from discrimination based on religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, or marital status. Two similar measures, HB 5804 and SB 1053, introduced in both the House and the Senate would have added sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression to the list of protected classes, while the third, HB 5959 would have added sexual orientation only. While Michigan Catholic Conference opposes unjust discrimination, the bills did not do enough to protect the ability of religious institutions to operate according to their religious beliefs. Staff opposed all three measures, which did not receive a vote in their respective committees. ■

Health Policy

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
House Bill 5393	Defines and regulates e-cigarettes as “tobacco products;” prohibits sale to minors.	N/A	Regulatory Reform	Support	Died in House Committee.
Senate Bills 667–668 HB 4997	Prohibits the sale of e-cigarettes or alternative nicotine products to minors and their possession by minors.	Regulatory Reform (Passed) N/A	Regulatory Reform (Passed) Regulatory Reform (Passed)	Oppose	Passed by the Legislature. Vetoed by the governor.
Senate Bill 165	Requires a health care entity with a non-beneficial treatment policy to disclose the policy upon request.	Health Policy (Passed)	Health Policy (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 57 of 2013.
Senate Bills 575–578	Requires medical disciplinary and licensing committee members to reveal conflicts of interest during investigations.	Reforms, Restructuring and Reinventing (Passed)	Regulatory Reform (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 95–98 of 2014.
House Bills 4382–4384	Requires a DNR order to be accessible in a declarant’s place of residence or setting outside of a hospital.	Judiciary (Passed)	Judiciary (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 155–157 of 2013.
House Bill 4714	Expands Medicaid to those earning up to 133 percent of the federal poverty line.	Government Operations (Passed)	Michigan Competitiveness (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 107 of 2013.
Senate Bill 991 House Bill 5649	Provides terminally ill patients with access to potentially life-saving drugs that have passed the FDA safety inspections, but have not yet been approved for general use.	Health Policy (Passed)	Health Policy (Passed)	Oppose as introduced, neutral	Signed into law. Public Acts 345–346 of 2014.

E-Cigarette Regulation (HB 5393, SBs 667–668, and HB 4997)

House Bill 5393 would have defined e-cigarettes as “tobacco products” to regulate them under existing laws, including prohibiting their sale to minors. Michigan Catholic Conference indicated its support for the measure in the House Regulatory Reform Committee as well as in a joint letter to House and Senate leadership with Michigan health organizations, underscoring the importance of protecting children and protecting against health risks. Other measures prohibiting the sale of e-cigarettes to minors, such as Senate Bills 667–668 and House Bill 4997, were opposed by Michigan Catholic Conference because staff had concerns that the bills did not include strong enough regulations. House Bill 5393 died in the House Committee on Regulatory Reform. Senate Bills 667–668 and House Bill 4997 were passed by the Michigan Legislature but were vetoed by the governor.

Medical Good Faith Act (Public Act 57 of 2013, Introduced as SB 165)

During this legislative session, Senate Bill 165 was introduced at the request of a family whose daughter has Trisomy-18, a rare chromosomal disorder, as they found some hospitals were unwilling to treat their daughter, deeming care for her to be “futile.” They found on numerous occasions that hospitals would admit their daughter but would not disclose this policy until after, which made transfer and treatment more difficult. Senate Bill 165 requires that if a health facility has a policy involving life-sustaining or non-beneficial treatment, this policy must be disclosed in writing, upon request, to ensure greater transparency for patients. Michigan Catholic Conference staff worked with lawmakers on language that would protect life and supported the measure, which was enacted into law as Public Act 57 of 2013.

Health Care Disciplinary Subcommittees (Public Acts 95–98 of 2014, Introduced as SBs 575–578)

The Michigan Legislature considered and approved four bills, Senate Bills 575–578, regarding the investigation of medical misconduct violations. Under the legislation, members of medical disciplinary subcommittees and licensing committees would be required to reveal personal conflicts of interest that emerge within violation investigations. These bills were introduced following an incident where the State Board of Medicine failed to investigate complaints concerning a Muskegon abortion clinic, which was later found to have unsanitary conditions, due to a conflict of interest on behalf of one of the board members. Michigan Catholic Conference indicated its support for the bills, which defend against professional violations and protect the health and safety of patients. The measures were signed into law as Public Acts 95–98 of 2014.

Do-Not-Resuscitate (Public Acts 155–157 of 2013, Introduced as HBs 4382–4384)

These three measures expand the locations where Michiganders can sign a Do-Not-Resuscitate (DNR) order to include nursing facilities, hospice agencies, and other healthcare and residential settings outside of hospitals. The bills address the use of CPR but do not address other forms of life sustaining

treatment. Additionally, guardians may be able to sign DNR forms for their wards located outside of a hospital, provided certain conditions are met. Governor Rick Snyder signed Senate Bills 237–239, which were supported by MCC, into law as Public Acts 155–157 of 2013.

Medicaid Expansion and Reform (Public Act 107 of 2013, Introduced as HB 4714)

With passage of the Affordable Care Act, the federal government gave states the opportunity to receive extra funding for expanding Medicaid services to those earning up to 133 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL). House Bill 4714 extends this coverage to over 450,000 Michiganders who qualify and enacts several other reforms to Medicaid. These reforms include allowing participants to reduce their premiums based on performance of healthy behaviors and requiring able-bodied adults to purchase private health insurance through an exchange or contribute more to cost sharing after four years. Michigan Catholic Conference and the major Catholic health systems in the state, Ascension Health, St. Francis Hospital and Medical Group, and Trinity Health, joined together in May 2013 to issue guiding principles for Medicaid reform. The principles highlighted the need for proposals to not deny care to those in need, to be truly universal, and to be respectful of the life and conscience of every person. MCC supported the legislation, which was enacted as Public Act 107 of 2013.

“Right to Try” (Public Acts 345–346 of 2014, Introduced as SB 991 and HB 5649)

“Right to Try” laws provide terminally ill patients with access to medications that could potentially be life-saving but are not yet fully approved by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Public Act 345 of 2014, formerly Senate Bill 991, implements a “Right to Try Act” in Michigan, authorizing access to, and use of, experimental treatments that have passed the safety phase of the FDA clinical trial process, but have not yet been approved or shown to be effective for general use by the FDA. This policy provides hope to patients with a terminal illness, when they have already exhausted other approved treatment options. Public Act 346 of 2014, formerly House Bill 5649, prohibits disciplinary action to be taken against professional licenses held by health care providers and health facilities that recommend or provide treatment as authorized by the “Right to Try Act.” Michigan Catholic Conference, after consulting with the National Catholic Bioethics Center, successfully worked with the bill sponsors on the language of the measures in order to protect vulnerable people and outline a strong informed consent provision. Michigan, with approval of these measures as Public Acts 345–346 of 2014, joins four other states with such language: Colorado, Missouri, Louisiana, and Arizona. ■

Education

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
House Bill 4725	Allows a charter school to operate a voluntary residential program after hours as an option for low-income students who attend the school.	N/A	Education (Passed)	Support	Passed House Committee. Died in House.
House Bill 5668	Allows physicians to prescribe an auto-injectable epi-pen to schools, restaurants, and other such places should they request one; establishes storage, training requirements, and liability.	N/A	Health Policy (Passed)	Support	Passed House Committee. Died in House.
Senate Bill 644	Expands the definition of eligible students to attend "strict discipline" academies.	Education (Passed)	Education (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 256 of 2014.
House Bill 5669	Adds non-public schools to the list of authorized providers of teacher professional development.	Education (Passed)	Education (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 484 of 2014.

Residential Boarding Schools for At-Risk Youth (HB 4725)

This legislation would allow a charter school to operate a voluntary residential program after school hours as an option for students from low-income families attending the school. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure as an avenue for supporting parents who are looking for school options for their children. House Bill 4725 passed the House Education Committee but did not receive a vote in the full House.

Epi-Pen Legislation (HB 5668)

A law passed during this session, Public Act 187 of 2013, required public schools to have at least two Epi-Pens, or injectable medical devices used to treat severe allergic reactions, on hand in addition to staff trained in their use. Under legislation considered later in the session, HB 5668, other entities would be allowed but not required to obtain, store, and use an epi-pen. These entities include restaurants, recreation camps, youth sports leagues, amusement parks, and sports arenas. Employees in these places

would need to complete a training program for administering an Epi-Pen, and they would not be liable for injuries or damages. Michigan Catholic Conference worked with the bill sponsor to add religious institutions and non-public schools to the list of authorized entities to make sure language adequately covered non-public schools who would request the device. The legislation passed the House Health Policy Committee but did not receive a vote in the full House.

Strict Discipline Academy Eligibility (Public Act 256 of 2014, Introduced as SB 644)

Under this bill, more students would be eligible to attend “strict discipline” academies. Strict discipline academies are currently an option for students who have either been expelled from a regular school or who the Michigan Department of Human Services or court has placed there. Under this legislation, students who have been placed in a high- or medium-security juvenile facility, mental health facility, or child caring institution operated by a private agency would also be eligible to attend these academies. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the legislation, which was signed into law as Public Act 256 of 2014.

Non-Public School Professional Development (Public Act 484 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5669)

The legislation adds non-public schools to the list of authorized providers of teacher professional development. Previously under state law, non-public school teachers could count college credits or continuing education units towards their recertification requirements, but they could not count professional development hours offered by their own schools like public school teachers could, even if those hours included the same content. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure, which was enacted into law as Public Act 484 of 2014. ■

Economic Justice and Regulatory Policies

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
Senate Bill 752 (also originally Senate Bill 847 before amended)	Expands the Homestead Property Tax Credit.	Finance (Passed)	Tax Policy	Support	Passed Senate. Died in House Committee.
House Bills 5673–5676	Creates additional options and incentives for the production of renewable energy.	N/A	Energy and Technology	Support	Died in House Committee.
Senate Bill 284	Creates an energy assistance funding mechanism for low-income individuals.	Energy and Technology (Passed)	Energy and Technology (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 95 of 2013.
Senate Bill 847	Increases the Earned Income Tax Credit from 6% of the federal credit to 20% in 2016.	Finance (Discharged)	Tax Policy (Discharged)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 469 of 2014. Goes into effect if road funding proposal approved.
House Bill 5182	Exempts eligible nonprofit housing for up to five years if the housing is intended for low income residents.	Finance (Passed)	Tax Policy (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 456 of 2014.
Senate Bill 1138	Allows pawnbrokers to charge 20% per month as a usage fee for individuals to retain possession and continue to use their pawned property.	Regulatory Reform (Discharged)	N/A	Oppose	SB 1138 died in Senate. HB 5954 died in House Committee.
House Bill 5954		N/A	Financial Services		

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
House Bill 4118	Requires DHS to establish a pilot program of suspicion-based drug screening for Family Independence Program applicants and recipients.	Family, Seniors, and Human Services (Passed)	Families, Children, and Seniors (Passed)	Oppose as introduced	Signed into law. Public Act 394 of 2014.
Senate Bill 275					

Homestead Property Tax Credit (SB 752)

Senate Bill 752 (and originally Senate Bill 847, before the Lame Duck amendment) would have helped low-income homeowners or renters lower their housing costs associated with property taxes, allowing taxpayers with household income between \$49,001 and \$70,000 to claim twenty percent of the credit. Currently, the credit is allowed at a ten percent rate for taxpayers with income between \$49,001 and \$50,000. Michigan Catholic Conference issued a press release in June in support of Senate passage of the policy with bipartisan support. Unfortunately, the bill died in the House Tax Policy Committee after passing the Senate.

Energy Freedom Legislation (HBs 5673–5676)

This four bill package creates additional options and incentives for the production of renewable energy. A few examples of these options include net metering, which allows an energy customer to generate some of their own power and sell excess energy to the electric utility, and the creation of community renewable energy gardens, among others. Michigan Catholic Conference supported these energy measures as opportunities for individuals and groups to voluntarily engage in environmental stewardship if they were interested and able. They did not receive consideration in the House Energy and Technology Committee.

Low-Income Energy Assistance (Public Act 95 of 2013, SB 284)

Senate Bill 284 creates an energy assistance fund for eligible low-income households, which is an important step towards helping Michigan’s poor and vulnerable find a path to energy self-sufficiency. The measure allows for the Michigan Public Service Commission to issue an annual collective surcharge of up to \$60 million for the fund, which will be supplemented with funds from the Michigan Legislature during the budget process. Additionally, the measure prohibits utility companies that choose not to issue a surcharge to pay for the fund from turning off a customer’s heat between the months of November and April. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the measure throughout the legislative process, which then became Public Act 95 of 2013.

Earned Income Tax Credit (Public Act 469 of 2014, Introduced as SB 847)

As originally introduced into the session, Senate Bill 847 would have increased the homestead property tax credit. To gain support for a larger road funding package, changes were made to the bill in Lamé Duck to instead allow for an increase in the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) to its 2010 level, twenty percent of the federal credit. Michigan Catholic Conference has been a longtime supporter of the EITC, which lends a hand to working families who are trying to make ends meet and rise out of poverty. The measure has been signed into law as Public Act 469 of 2014 but will only go into effect if the voters pass the larger road funding package during a special election in May.

Nonprofit Housing Property Exemption (Public Act 456 of 2014, Introduced as HB 5182)

This legislation exempts eligible nonprofit housing for up to five years, as long as the ultimate occupancy of the place is intended for low-income residents. Current law allows nonprofit housing to be exempt only if local units of government approve the exemption, but the legislation removes the need to obtain permission from those local units. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the bill, which was passed by the Michigan Legislature and signed into law as Public Act 456 of 2014.

Pawnbroker Usage Fees (SB 1138 and HB 5954)

Under current law, pawnbrokers may allow an individual to maintain possession or use of pawned or pledged property for a usage fee of \$1 per month. This legislation would allow pawnbrokers to add a twenty percent monthly usage fee for these items, including an individual's car. The measure would have continued the cycle of debt and caused significant harm to Michigan's poor. Michigan Catholic Conference opposed the bill, which died in the Michigan Senate.

Welfare Drug Testing (Public Act 394–395 of 2014, Introduced as HB 4118 and SB 275)

The legislation authorizes the Michigan Department of Human Services to conduct a pilot project in three or more counties allowing suspicion-based drug screening for those who apply for and receive Family Independence Program (FIP) assistance. Michigan Catholic Conference worked with the bill sponsor to address several concerns. As a result, changes were made to the bill, including allowing those who test positive for drug use to continue to receive assistance if the recipient seeks treatment and if it was a first time offense. House Bill 4118 and Senate Bill 275 passed both chambers and were signed into law as Public Acts 394–395 of 2014. ■

Restorative Justice

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
Senate Bill 319 (Senate Bill 318) House Bill 4808 (House Bills 4806–4807)	Eliminates the mandatory sentencing of juveniles to life without parole for certain crimes.	Judiciary (Passed)	Criminal Justice (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 22–23 of 2014.
House Bill 4529 (House Bill 4530) Senate Bill 301 (Senate Bill 300)	Creates the Indigent Defense Commission to develop minimum state standards for indigent defense.	N/A Judiciary (Passed)	Criminal Justice (Passed) N/A	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 93–94 of 2014.
House Bills 5216–5218	Creates a “certificate of employability” to eligible parolees as evidence of their readiness to be hired.	Judiciary (Passed)	Commerce (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Acts 359–361 of 2014.
House Bill 5928 Senate Bill 1141	Creates a Criminal Justice Policy Commission to address sentencing and release policies.	Judiciary (Discharged) N/A	Appropriations (Passed) Judiciary (Passed)	Support	HB 5928 signed into law. Public Act 465 of 2014. SB 1141 died in Senate.
House Bill 5929 Senate Bill 1139	Reflects revisions to Michigan’s sentencing guidelines and other corrections-related statutes.	Judiciary (Discharged) N/A	Appropriations (Passed) Judiciary (Passed)	Support	HB 5929 signed into law. Public Act 466 of 2014. SB 1139 died in Senate.

Juvenile Life Without Parole (Public Acts 22–23 of 2014, Introduced as SB 319 and HB 4808)

This legislation eliminates the mandatory sentencing of juvenile offenders to life without parole going forward. While the sentence is still allowed as a continued option under state law, this legislative change provides judicial discretion and allows all of the factors of a particular case, including age and maturity, to be considered before a sentence is issued. In February, Governor Snyder signed the measures into law as Public Acts 22–23 of 2014. A trigger was included to allow the law to apply retroactively only if Michigan courts allowed it. Since that time, the Michigan Supreme Court has considered the issue of retroactivity and has denied resentencing to those sentenced to life without parole as juveniles prior to passage of the legislation.

Indigent Defense (Public Acts 93–94 of 2013, Introduced as HB 4529 and SB 301)

During the session, identical measures were introduced in the House and the Senate to create the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission, which would establish and implement minimum standards for indigent defense across the state. Michigan Catholic Conference testified in support of the measures, emphasizing the importance of all persons, regardless of wealth, receiving their constitutional right to adequate legal counsel. The bills were enacted as Public Acts 93–94 of 2013.

Prisoner Employability Certificate (Public Acts 359–361 of 2014, Introduced as HBs 5216–5218)

Once individuals have served time for a crime and left prison, it can be difficult for them to reintegrate into society, including finding employment. Three bills introduced this session introduce a mechanism to encourage the hiring of parolees. Under the legislation, the Michigan Department of Corrections is required to provide a prisoner with documents on his or her criminal history, job skills, and institutional history, such as record of misconduct, completion of counseling, and/or completion of a GED. Additionally, the Department could award a “certificate of employability,” after considering the aforementioned factors, which the person could present to potential employers. Michigan Catholic Conference supported the package as positive step towards prisoner re-entry, which was enacted into law as Public Acts 359–361 of 2014.

Criminal Justice Reform (Public Acts 465–466 of 2014, Introduced as HBs 5928–5929 and SBs 1139 and 1141)

These measures, supported by Michigan Catholic Conference, address sentencing guidelines in the state. House Bill 5928 creates a Criminal Justice Policy Commission to collect and analyze data concerning sentencing and release policies. Additionally, House Bill 5929 updates the Community Corrections Act of 1988 to reflect revisions to Michigan’s sentencing guidelines and other corrections-related statutes. The measures were adopted into law as Public Acts 465–466 of 2014. ■

Immigration Policies

Bill	Description	Senate Committee	House Committee	MCC Position	Outcome
House Bill 4618	Allows certain non-citizens to receive in-state tuition at Michigan public universities.	N/A	Government Operations	Support	Died in House Committee.
House Bill 4528	Removes the requirement that immigration clerical assistants register with the state.	Regulatory Reform (Passed)	Regulatory Reform (Passed)	Support	Signed into law. Public Act 174 of 2014.
House Resolution 108	Urges Congress to permanently raise the cap on H1-B temporary work visas for immigrant professionals and eliminates the cap for those holding a master's degree or higher from U.S. universities.	N/A	Michigan Competitiveness (Support)	Support	Adopted by the House.
House Resolutions 315-316	Encourages the President and Congress to support Michigan's application for a state-sponsored EB-5 regional center and 50,000 EB-2 visas for Detroit.	N/A	Michigan Competitiveness (Passed)	Support	Adopted by the House.

In-State Tuition for Certain Non-Citizen Students (HB 4618)

Under this legislation, non-citizen students would be eligible for in-state tuition at a public university if they met certain conditions. These conditions include receiving federal deferred action status, attending a Michigan public or private school for 3 years, graduating from high school or receiving the equivalent of a high school diploma, and having filed or filing in the future when eligible for lawful permanent residence status. Although the bill never received a hearing in the House Government Operations Committee, during the 2014 election season, Michigan Catholic Conference highlighted the issue by including a question about the policy in the gubernatorial candidate surveys.

Immigration Clerical Assistants (Public Act 174 of 2014, Introduced as HB 4528)

Immigration clerical assistants, or individuals who provide services related to the provision of immigration documents, are no longer required to register with the state under this measure. Michigan Catholic Conference worked with the bill sponsor on language to maintain protections against fraudulent activities and to increase the damages awarded to those individuals harmed by willful violations of the act. The measure has now been enacted into law as Public Act 174 of 2014.

Temporary Work Visas for High Skilled Professionals (HR 108)

House Resolution 108, which was adopted by the House, urges Congress to raise the cap on H1-B temporary work visas for immigrant professionals. The resolution also encourages the elimination of the cap for those holding a master's degree or higher from U.S. universities. MCC supported the resolution in an effort to encourage the expansion of safe and legal opportunities for foreign-born workers to enter the country. Additionally, language is included in the resolution so that future caps will be data-driven, taking into account the availability of American workers.

EB-5 Visas (HRs 315–316 of 2014)

These measures urge the president and Congress to increase the number of employment-based visas available for highly skilled, advanced degree professionals to come to Detroit. Additionally, they would encourage approval of the state's application for a regional center to expedite visas and work permits for immigrants who will create jobs and invest in Michigan. These resolutions are in line with the governor's proposal to create an Office for New Americans. Following his proposal in January, Michigan Catholic Conference issued a statement calling for greater attention to the issue of immigration at both the state and federal level. Staff indicated its support for the resolutions, which encourage the facilitation of legal opportunities for immigrants to come into the state. The resolutions were both adopted by the House. ■



SELECTED
STATEMENTS AND
COMMENTARY

Religious liberty worth the debate

The Detroit News 11:49 p.m. EST December 16, 2014



(Photo: Chris Farina / The Detroit News)

Cynthia and Robert Gifford own a farm near Albany, New York, and rent their facilities a few times a year for special occasions. Now, they face \$13,000 in fines because they didn't feel comfortable opening their facilities to a lesbian couple's wedding.

The Giffords, who live on the property, are Christians and felt it went against their beliefs to host a gay ceremony. While the Giffords offered their farm for the reception, that didn't satisfy the couple, who sued for discrimination under New York's Human Rights Law.

The friction in this scenario, and in many others across the U.S., is what sparked a heated debate in Michigan this year. As some lawmakers considered including sexual orientation in the state's Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act, others maintained that shouldn't happen without additional protections for religious liberty.

House Speaker Jase Bolger last month introduced a bill that would offer additional protections for an individual's faith. While that bill was meant to be paired with Rep. Frank Foster's legislation to add sexual orientation to the civil rights act, the two weren't tied.

So even when Foster's bill stalled in the Commerce Committee earlier this month, Bolger's bill moved right along. The bill passed the House and now awaits action in the Senate, with two days remaining in the lame-duck session.

This discussion has merit. Even though gay rights are more in vogue right now than religious freedoms, that doesn't mean constitutional protections for religion should become a secondary concern.

Douglas Laycock, a law professor at the University of Virginia and a leading scholar on First Amendment religious rights, wrote a letter to the House Judiciary Committee in support of the Michigan legislation. He also encouraged the Legislature to add protections for gays and lesbians.

"We teach our children that America offers 'liberty and justice for all.' To fulfill that promise, we must protect the liberty of gays and lesbians and of traditional religious believers — of all sides in the contemporary culture wars," Laycock wrote.

Bolger's bill is modeled after the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act. That law got a lot of attention earlier this year in the Supreme Court's Hobby Lobby decision. The court upheld the business owners' religious rights in their decision not to offer employees certain kinds of birth control in insurance plans.

Obamacare had mandated that businesses offer a wide range of birth control, including miscarriage-inducing drugs, to employees free of charge.

But this federal religious safeguard doesn't apply to state laws. That's why 19 states have adopted their own versions of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Texas' version of the law was applied a few months ago when the city of Houston issued subpoenas to five area pastors, demanding to see the texts of all sermons relating to homosexuality and gender identity. The mayor, a lesbian, has since withdrawn the subpoenas.

"Government action cannot substantially burden someone's right to religious liberty unless it shows a compelling governmental interest to do so," says Dave Maluchnik, director of communications for the Michigan Catholic Conference, which has pushed for this legislation.

Opponents of the law argue it's not necessary and would be an opening for discrimination against certain groups of people.

That's a legitimate concern. The law should be crafted in such a way that it doesn't permit excluding any group from public places such as stores and restaurants. But a small businessperson should not be compelled, for example, to photograph a gay wedding in violation of his or her religious beliefs.

The federal law has been around more than 20 years and has undergone many court tests, and it has not resulted in discrimination against gays and lesbians.

Individuals shouldn't have to face discrimination lawsuits just because of what they believe.

While Bolger's bill should be considered in conjunction with including gays and lesbians in Elliott-Larsen, it has value on its own.



STATEMENT FROM CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN MICHIGAN REGARDING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

“The civil and political rights, privileges and capacities of no person shall be diminished or enlarged on account of his religious belief.”

- Constitution of the State of Michigan, Article I, Section IV

Religious liberty and the right to conscience are cornerstones of a free society: the hallmark of American identity. Religious liberty is not to be diminished legislatively or regulated by government entities, as the United States Supreme Court found this summer when it upheld all of the existing provisions of the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

The unalienable and constitutional right to religious freedom is under aggressive assault nationally from some sectors of society and in some corners of government. Religious liberty allows citizens to live their faith and exercise their conscience outside the walls of a house of worship. As Pope Francis has exemplified, Christians must go to the peripheries to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and shelter the homeless. Many faith-based child placement agencies, hospitals, schools and charity agencies – all of which represent the largest non-public service providers in their respective fields - have been accused of discrimination based on adherence to their faith tradition. In other places, persons have faced civil fines and loss of business specifically because of their religious beliefs.

Due to the growing intolerance toward religious belief and practice carried out in the public square, it is thus necessary to strengthen existing religious liberty laws in Michigan and, where appropriate, to pass legislation that upholds First Amendment religious liberty rights for individuals, family-owned business and institutions. The application of such laws would provide greater protection for citizens to live out their faith in their daily lives and in service of others. We urge Michigan lawmakers to assess the increasing threats to religious liberty in today’s society and to enact measures that promote and protect the constitutional right of every Michigander to religious freedom.

Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron
Archdiocese of Detroit

Most Reverend Earl A. Boyea
Diocese of Lansing

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Diocese of Kalamazoo

Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone
Diocese of Saginaw

Most Reverend John F. Doerfler
Diocese of Marquette

Most Reverend Steven J. Raica
Diocese of Gaylord

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Diocese of Grand Rapids

December 2014

Religious freedom bill promotes tolerance, diversity

11:16 p.m. EST December 13, 2014



(Photo: DAILY PRESS & ARGUS)

Last month, as Thanksgiving approached, national attention fell upon Fort Lauderdale, Florida, when two pastors and a 90-year old friend were charged and arrested for feeding the town's homeless. The two, the police alleged, violated the town ordinance that effectively prohibited their act of charity. The previous month, in Houston, a group of ministers were told by the City Council they would have their sermons subpoenaed to ensure their language would not violate a recently passed ordinance. Several years ago, tragedy struck in Clinton County when a young man died in a car accident. The family, Jewish Orthodox, was outraged when the county medical examiner performed an autopsy despite the religious objections of the family.

These examples of religious infringement in Michigan and elsewhere indicate, regrettably, how citizens are witnessing their First Amendment civil-liberty rights eroded by some sectors of society and government. In Michigan, an effort is underway to pass legislation that would address the problem. The measure, called the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, is modeled after a federal bill sponsored by U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, passed by Congress nearly unanimously, and signed into law by former President Bill Clinton in 1993. Some 19 states have gone on to pass similar versions after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the policy did not apply to the states. Since that time, the court has ruled on at least two occasions that the federal RFRA is constitutional.

When the federal law was passed in 1993, it was supported by a wide breadth of religious and civil-liberty organizations, including the American Jewish Congress and the American Civil Liberties Union. Today, the ACLU is citing RFRA in its defense of a Sikh man in New York who was told he could not join the university ROTC unless he shaved his beard. The intent of the RFRA policy is to ensure constitutional religious-liberty rights are not violated. The federal law, and similar state versions, forbid government from placing a substantial burden on someone's sincerely held religious beliefs unless there is a compelling governmental reason to do so.

Yet despite more than 20 years of federal statute, and numerous years of similar state laws, opponents of the proposed Michigan law have sought to mock the legislation by presenting wild hypotheticals and misinformation of how RFRA could deny services or emergency care to classes of people. Federal law is clear: Emergency care cannot be denied to any person. These efforts are clearly intended to thwart religious diversity and railroad the proposed law from a public relations perspective. One would be hard-pressed to find a case where a defendant was allowed to break local, state or federal criminal laws citing RFRA as a defense.

Over the past year-and-a-half, the world has watched as Pope Francis has exemplified, par excellence, Christian teaching about selflessness and helping others, especially those on the peripheries and most in need. These works of mercy and charity, taught by the Catholic church for centuries, mandates Christians take their faith outside the walls of their church and serve others. A Michigan Religious Freedom Restoration Act protects these acts, regardless of religious tradition, it upholds religious tolerance and diversity, and it protects minority religions in ways that were not previously possible. House Bill 5958 deserves to be signed into law.

Tom Hickson

Vice president, public policy and advocacy, Michigan Catholic Conference

Read or Share this story: <http://www.livingstondaily.com/story/opinion/readers/2014/12/13/religious-freedom-bill-promotes-tolerance-diversity/20386681/>

Immigrant children deserve security and compassion (guest column)

By Paul A. Long Detroit Free Press guest writer Filed Under Opinion Commentary
July 18, 2014 |

freep.com

This summer, Americans are witnessing a humanitarian crisis within the United States. Tens of thousands of Mexican and Central American children are fleeing rampant violence and misery in their home countries. To find peace, these children have placed their lives in great danger by attempting to navigate the treacherous American border. Now, photos of over-capacity holding cells, small children arriving without a mother or a father, and trains carrying hoards of people illustrate the immediate need for safety and compassion.

Regrettably, the possible arrival of these immigrant children to a small Michigan community and elsewhere in the country has been met with protests and hints of xenophobia. Lost in the public outcry is a recognition of the reality of migrants. Third-world poverty, suffering and ever-present drug and gang violence permeates the day-to-day lives of the many unaccompanied young persons who have arrived. Along with a lack of clean water, electricity and stable housing, it is fathomable, yet heart-wrenching, to consider a parent allowing their small child to migrate to a distant land.

Frustration over failed immigration policy is understandable, but this is not the time to hold children accountable for a failed American border policy or a foreign country's economic and political problems. Regardless of their citizenship, every human person, especially a child, is deserving of dignity. International attention and compassion has percolated in recent weeks, and the crisis taking place at the border has prompted Pope Francis to address the matter.

In a [recent message](#) delivered to a Mexican gathering on human migration and development, Pope Francis stated that "a change of attitude toward migrants and refugees is needed on the part of everyone, moving away from attitudes of defensiveness and fear, indifference and marginalization — all typical of a throwaway culture — towards attitudes based on a culture of encounter, the only culture capable of building a better, more just and fraternal world."

Pope Francis is no stranger to addressing concern for vulnerable immigrants who have undertaken perilous journeys. In his first trip outside of Italy, the Holy Father recognized at the Sicilian island of Lampedusa the death of thousands of migrants seeking safety in Europe. Are Americans equally willing to recognize and condemn the fatality that occurs for those, including children, who have washed up on the shores of this country?

Perhaps policy change should begin with a collective change of national heart, with people of good will expressing themselves in a manner that is civil and respectful, recognizing the horrors and dangers that immigrants experience, and avoiding [acts and threats of violence](#). A change of heart also involves seeing the immigrant as a person, a human being with God-given rights to live in peace without the daily threat of violence and suffering that afflicts both community and family.

Regardless of the manner by which they arrived, scores of children are now in desperate need of help. In addition to basic material items such as clothing and shoes, Catholic institutions and volunteers near the border are [answering the call](#) by providing shelter, hygienic goods and medicine to starving and injured children, some of whom are only days and weeks old.

This is a summer of conscience for the United States. How will the nation respond?

Paul A. Long is President and CEO of the Michigan Catholic Conference, the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state.



Guest column: Marriage is and can only be the union of one man and one woman

Guest writer By Guest writer

on March 26, 2014 at 9:00 AM, updated March 26, 2014 at 9:14 AM

Rebecca Mastee is a policy advocate for the Michigan Catholic Conference.

By Rebecca Mastee

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit has issued a ruling that will allow the state to appeal the decision of a federal district judge to redefine marriage. Last week, U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman overturned the will of 2.7 million Michigan voters who went to the statewide ballot in 2004 to protect marriage between one man and one woman.

Immediately following the judge's decision, the Catholic bishops in Michigan said the ruling "advances a misunderstanding of marriage, and mistakenly proposes that marriage is an emotional arrangement that can simply be redefined to accommodate the dictates of culture and the wants of adults."

The bishops went on to state clearly that the Church would be supporting legal efforts to defend marriage and the state's Constitutional amendment. We are appreciative of the attorney general's office for upholding its constitutional duty. Attorneys general in other states, regrettably, have pursued a different path, choosing not to enforce state laws with which they personally disagree.

Consider the consequences for a democratic state, should its chief attorney personally decide which laws he or she will choose to defend. Pressure that is now being applied by elected officials and advocacy groups for the state to abandon its defense is irresponsible.

The state defending marriage does not demean the dignity of the persons who seek its redefinition. As the bishops wrote after Judge Friedman's ruling, "it is necessary to state clearly that persons with same-sex attraction should not be judged, but rather accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity."

Defending marriage does recognize the biological realities of male and female and the complementarity they each bring to marriage, which turns the conversation to children. Every child has the right to both a mother and a father, and each child does have lineage to both. Not all children are able to be raised in this environment, which is why single mothers and fathers deserve constant support and encouragement.



Rebecca Mastee

Advocates of marriage redefinition have lost sight of the fact that marriage is more than just an institution for the fulfillment of adults. The drive to redefine marriage also ignores that additional parameters of natural marriage may be at stake. Should marriage be redefined, do three (or four, or five) people who love each other and want to marry have a discrimination suit on their hands? If the "anti-discrimination" train of thought that has been applied to marriage redefinition is followed, perhaps the next chapter of the marriage "equality" story is not far behind.

Religion did not create marriage, neither did the government, nor did an appointed judge or an elected official. Those who seek to redefine marriage appear to claim a right to which they have no authority. Marriage is and can only be the union of one man and one woman. As the bishops wrote last week, "nature, the very essence of humanity as understood through historical experience and reason, is the arbiter of marriage, and we uphold this truth for the sake of the common good."

*Do you have a guest column on a statewide topic to share? Email statewide community engagement director **Jen Eyer** at jeyer@mlive.com.*

© 2014 MLive.com. All rights reserved.



March 21, 2014

Statement from Catholic Bishops Regarding U.S. Judge's Decision Overturning Michigan's Voter Approved Marriage Amendment

Marriage is and can only ever be a unique relationship solely between one man and one woman, regardless of the decision of a judge or future electoral vote. Nature itself, not society, religion or government, created marriage. Nature, the very essence of humanity as understood through historical experience and reason, is the arbiter of marriage, and we uphold this truth for the sake of the common good. The biological realities of male and female and the complementarity they each bring to marriage uniquely allows for the procreation of children.

Every child has the right to both a mother and a father and, indeed, every child does have lineage to both. We recognize not every child has the opportunity to grow in this environment, and we pray for those single mothers and fathers who labor each day to care for their children at times amid great challenges and difficulties. They deserve our constant support and encouragement.

Today's decision from federal district court Judge Bernard Friedman to redefine the institution of marriage by declaring Michigan's Marriage Amendment unconstitutional strikes at the very essence of family, community and human nature. In effect, this decision advances a misunderstanding of marriage, and mistakenly proposes that marriage is an emotional arrangement that can simply be redefined to accommodate the dictates of culture and the wants of adults. Judge Friedman's ruling that also finds unconstitutional the state's adoption law is equally of grave concern.

As this case will likely move forward through the courts, it is necessary to state clearly that persons with same-sex attraction should not be judged, but rather accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity. We rejoice with those brothers and sisters in Christ living with same sex attraction who have found great freedom through Jesus' call to chastity communicated through the Church. We equally encourage those who are struggling in good conscience to live in harmony with the Church's teaching about sexuality, along with their families, to continue praying and to continue seeking the Lord with the help and guidance of the Church.

Going forward, we, the Catholic bishops of this state, working through the Michigan Catholic Conference, will collaborate with those who are upholding Michigan's Marriage Amendment and adoption statute and will assist to the greatest extent possible efforts to appeal Judge Friedman's most regrettable ruling.

Most Reverend Allen H. Vigneron
Archbishop of Detroit

Most Reverend Paul J. Bradley
Bishop of Kalamazoo

Most Reverend Earl A. Boyea
Bishop of Lansing

Most Reverend Joseph R. Cistone
Bishop of Saginaw

Most Reverend John F. Doerfler
Bishop of Marquette

Msgr. Francis J. Murphy
Diocesan Administrator, Gaylord

Most Reverend David J. Walkowiak
Bishop of Grand Rapids

Michigan Catholic Conference: Traditional marriage unites children with a mother, a father

By Rebecca Mastee Detroit Free Press guest writer Filed Under Opinion Commentary
Feb. 24

freep.com

“It is one of the great social tragedies of our time that marriage is flourishing among the most advantaged and self-actualized groups in our society and waning among those who could most benefit from its economic and child-rearing partnership.”

So stated the 2010 State of Our Unions Report on the status of marriage, produced by the Institute for American Values and the University of Virginia’s National Marriage project, describing the consequences of the precipitous decline of marriage spreading into middle America.

Today, more than half the births to women younger than 30 are outside of marriage. Sociologists, both liberal and conservative, are ringing the alarm bells as more children are living in poverty as a result and the devastating consequences of fatherlessness are better understood. The fact that 85% of children that show behavioral problems are from fatherless homes headed by single mothers, and that fatherless children in single-parent households are three times more likely to land in jail by age 30, are just two examples of this human tragedy.

When society should be focusing on how to promote men and women marrying before having children, marriage and a decision reached by the voters of Michigan are about to go on trial in federal district court in Detroit. Did voters have a rational reason for preserving marriage between a man and a woman in the state constitution in order “to secure and preserve the benefits of marriage for our society and for future generations of children,” as the Michigan Constitution now reads? Or was the vote an act of bigotry against same-sex couples, as some federal courts have found and those who purport to promote tolerance claim?

Opposing view: [Court battle is not about a gay agenda, it’s about our family](#)

When society and the state recognize marriage between a man and a woman, an institution specifically geared to unite children with both their mom and their dad is established. By disconnecting marriage from the interests of children, marriage laws become vehicles to achieve objectives never connected with marriage, such as public recognition of committed relationships, or broader access to tax benefits.

In the upcoming trial, two women claim that marriage should be redefined to allow them to cross adopt each other’s adopted children. Essentially, the case seeks to redefine an institution known by nature, reason and experience, and pursues a solution that our Holy Father Pope Francis has referred to as “anthropological regression.”

If marriage is redefined by the court to disconnect it from the foundation of the family of common ancestry, it will make laws related to marriage essentially a vehicle to serve adult interests. Serious consequences will result. How can young people be taught the importance of a child’s father and mother being united in marriage without appearing discriminatory, when the law sanctions marriage as a vehicle for creating motherless or fatherless families, as in the case of same-sex couples?

Perhaps the central question about the trial over Michigan's marriage amendment should be: Is it constitutional to have a privileged civil institution that is specifically geared to unite children with their moms and dads, and to promote the norm of men and women marrying before having children?

Rebecca Mastee is a policy advocate with the Michigan Catholic Conference.



For Immediate Release
Friday, January 24, 2014

Call for Renewed Charity in All Things Political

(Lansing) – Michigan Catholic Conference released the following statement this afternoon in an effort to bring the voice of the Catholic community to ongoing conversations related to civility and tolerance within the public sphere in the State of Michigan:

“The role of the Michigan Catholic Conference is to advocate on behalf of public policies that promote the common good for the State of Michigan. The Catholic Conference does so by working with elected officials on both sides of the political aisle as well as the Executive branch of state government. Michigan Catholic Conference does not seek to interfere with intra party discussions related to administration or partisan activity. In recent weeks, regrettable comments relating to personal classification, documented status and religion have become the source of public conversation. It is important to convey during this period that every human person is made in the image and likeness of God.

“In the course of political debate there exists the opportunity for policy issues to divide and cause acrimony among those with differing perspectives. Too often in the past have some issues allowed for disdain to overshadow legitimate differences of opinion held by good-natured, well-meaning individuals. The very nature of a representative democracy cradles hope for civilized debate, one in which varying and reasoned opinions come forth that, in the end, shape an outcome. This is the ideal, the expectation of citizens, the very responsibility of elected officials and those who lead political communities. Sadly, it has become common for those with positions of responsibility in the public square to drive derision rather than promote tolerance and civility. *In all things political, in present times, there must be a renewed focus on charity.*

“Charity is predicated upon accepting and practicing the principle that every human being deserves respect based upon their God-given inherent right to human dignity. If society demands that citizens treat each other with respect, it must begin with those who have the significant responsibility of shaping policy and leading others. Too often, and more recently, there has been an abdication of this responsibility. This must change. Policy disagreements will naturally exist among sensible and reasonable people; yet it is unreasonable to bully those who promote charity to adopt positions contrary to their faith and conscience. *In the days that are to come, let there be a renewed focus on charity that relies upon respect and dignity that must be afforded to all persons.*”

Michigan Catholic Conference is the official public policy voice of the Catholic Church in this state.

####

JANUARY 2, 2014

Mich. Catholic Conference 'pleased' injunction granted on contraception mandate

KIM KOZLOWSKI THE DETROIT NEWS

The Michigan Catholic Conference hopes a federal court injunction this week could lead to the church being exempt from the Affordable Care Act's mandated contraception coverage in health insurance policies.

A three-judge panel of the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals this week granted a temporary injunction against the federal law that requires the Catholic Conference to provide birth control coverage to more than 10,000 of its employees by Wednesday or risk steep fines.

The church is morally opposed to the federal health law's insurance mandate that includes contraception, sterilization and drugs the church views as inducing an abortion such as the morning-after pill.

The panel handed down the temporary injunction Tuesday, and it will be in effect until arguments can be heard by the appeals court, likely in February, and a decision is made.

"This is a burdensome mandate that forces Catholic employers to violate their constitutional right to religious liberty," said Dave Maluchnik, spokesman for the Michigan Catholic Conference. "We're pleased the appellate court has acted in our favor."

The injunction came after attorneys sought an emergency injunction before the federal law went into effect. Similar injunctions were issued to Catholic organizations in Washington, D.C.; Tennessee; Indiana; Texas and Pennsylvania, according to attorneys involved in the lawsuits.

The president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, Archbishop Joseph Kurtz of Louisville, Ky., this week also asked President Barack Obama to exempt religious organizations from fines until legal issues are settled. Failure to provide coverage would result in \$100 a day per employee, or \$36,500 a year per employee.

The Michigan Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the state's Catholic Church, provides health insurance to employees in seven dioceses in the state, along with employees of more than 825 Catholic organizations including charities, schools, cemeteries and homes for the elderly. Their benefits cover 10,500 people and their dependents.

Faith-based organizations have opposed the Affordable Care Act's requirement of contraception coverage, arguing it encroached on their religious freedoms. But supporters countered the requirement provides gender equity in health care coverage.

Earlier this year, the Obama administration created a compromise that tried to separate religious organizations from paying for contraception benefits while still offering them to employees by requiring private insurers to pay for the coverage.

DECEMBER 1, 2013

Preserve flexibility in health plans

Neither Obama administration nor Right to Life should dictate what specific coverage employers offer

No matter how much the Obama administration would like Americans to be happy with the new health care law, the pushback isn't going away. A challenge to one of Obamacare's mandates is headed to the Supreme Court, and it's a good example of why government shouldn't dictate what individuals and individual employers must do — especially when it comes to their religious liberty.

The issue of how birth control and abortion is covered by insurance policies is surfacing both nationally and in Michigan.

Last week, the Supreme Court agreed to take up two cases involving whether businesses can get out of the insurance requirement to cover birth control because of the company management's religious objections. Obamacare requires most employers that offer health insurance to provide a range of preventive health services for women, including contraception and sterilization.

The Becket Fund for Religious Liberty tracks the number of lawsuits against the mandates, and so far there have been more than 80 filed — 44 from for-profit companies and 40 from nonprofits.

One of the cases the court will look at is the suit from Oklahoma-based Hobby Lobby. The craft store chain, owned by a Christian family, has prevailed in the lower courts in its claim that the contraception mandate violates its religious freedom.

Sarah Torre, a policy analyst with the Heritage Foundation, says a significant number of these cases have had rulings in favor of preserving the religious rights of the people behind the businesses or organizations.

"It's a serious trampling on religious freedom," Torre says.

The White House feels like it has conceded enough to religious groups by exempting churches and offering some accommodations to faith-based nonprofits. But that has not satisfied all the religious groups.

The Michigan Catholic Conference recently filed a suit similar to Hobby Lobby's in federal court against the Department of Health and Human Services.

"The complaint challenges the HHS mandate on the grounds that it violates longstanding religious liberty protections by forcing religious employers to facilitate coverage of morally objectionable services," according to a Catholic Conference press release.

A handful of Michigan businesses, including Domino's Farms, have also filed suits.

The Obamacare mandates do not apply to "religious employers," as defined by the federal government.

Yet while the Catholic Conference meets that standard, the Catholic Charities Diocese of Kalamazoo, for example, does not — the same goes for many other nonprofit employers around the state.

The government shouldn't be in the business of deciding what violates religious conscience. Many see this as a direct affront to their faith and their First Amendment rights. As Attorney General Bill Schuette stated, "Any rule, regulation or law that forces private job-creators to violate their free exercise of religion is a flat-out violation of the Constitution."

Similarly, government shouldn't interfere if an employer *wants* to provide specific coverage to its employees.

Right to Life of Michigan has collected enough signatures to push a citizen-initiated bill before the Legislature that would prohibit abortion coverage as a standard option in insurance policies.

Lawmakers could vote on it before the end of the year.

The proposal would make abortion coverage a separate rider on all private and public health insurance plans.

If lawmakers don't take up the proposal, it would go before voters on the statewide ballot in 2014.

Gov. Rick Snyder rightly vetoed a similar bill last year in part because he thought it interfered in the private marketplace. It was a good call.

Employers should enjoy flexibility in the insurance options they offer.

They should neither be forced to or prevented from covering specific treatments and procedures.

Preserve religious freedom in adoptions

1:12 am

detroitnews.com

Thousands of Michigan children are in need of a family, and nonprofit organizations — specifically faith-based groups — have played a pioneering role in finding these young people homes.

To preserve the presence of these agencies, the Michigan Catholic Conference is strongly urging state lawmakers to pass several bills that would protect the religious liberties of faith-based groups when placing children in either a foster family or a permanent home.

Roughly 14,000 children are in foster care at any given time and some 3,000 of these kids are available for adoption, according to Michigan's Department of Human Services.

Catholic agencies oversee about 10 percent of the adoptions in Michigan. And the Catholic Conference estimates that 45 percent of foster care placement is handled by nonprofit groups and around half that number are specifically faith-based groups.

Two bills introduced in the House late last month would prevent situations where these religious nonprofits would be forced to place children in homes that clash with their beliefs. This is largely a pre-emptive move in case the state ever legalizes gay marriage or civil unions. Reps. Andrea LaFontaine, R-Columbus Township, and Ken Kurtz, R-Coldwater, are the main sponsors of the bills.

The legislation would offer legal protection for agencies to abide by their religious missions, according to the Catholic Conference. Catholic agencies in Illinois, Massachusetts and San Francisco, for example, have chosen to close rather than breach their beliefs.

That's a loss to the children and families who benefit from the wide array of services such groups provide.

"Faith-based adoption and foster care agencies, Catholic Charities for example, are prevalent in communities throughout the state," said Tom Hickson, vice president of public policy and advocacy with the Michigan Catholic Conference, in a statement. "It is imperative that the state continues to maintain and strengthen diversity in child placement."

Some critics of the legislation claim it would unfairly target gays interested in adopting. But the bills don't prohibit other agencies from placing children in these homes, and the majority of adoptions are handled by secular agencies. The law simply offers security to faith-based groups to continue providing a valuable service.

These bills are similar to another that's been sitting in the Senate the past few months. This legislation, sponsored by Sen. John Moolenaar, R-Midland, would shield health care workers and hospitals from violating their conscience.

Michigan already has a law that prevents health care facilities and employees from having to participate in abortions. This bill would expand protections to other elective services, including selling contraceptives.

Our country has traditionally placed great value on individual liberty, and state lawmakers ought to do what they can to preserve those freedoms.



MICHIGAN
CATHOLIC
CONFERENCE

THE MICHIGAN
HEALTH MINISTRIES OF
ASCENSION
HEALTH

OSF
ST. FRANCIS HOSPITAL
& MEDICAL GROUP

TRINITY HEALTH
Livonia, Michigan

STATEMENT OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MEDICAID REFORM

May 14, 2013

We, the undersigned, speaking on behalf of the Catholic bishops in Michigan and the largest network of health care providers in the state, respectfully offer our guiding principles for policies that seek to reform the state's Medicaid program. The specific provision of the federal policy to fund the state's effort presents a welcome opportunity for policymakers to extend access and to strengthen protection for those who lack care.

For decades the Catholic Church has consistently insisted that access to decent health care is a basic safeguard of human life and an affirmation of human dignity from conception until natural death. As the Michigan Legislature begins debate on Medicaid reform, we believe that any proposal must be crafted in a manner that:

- Is truly universal,
- Does not deny care to those in need, and
- Respects the life and conscience of every person

These goals can be accomplished through the present, unique opportunity to reform a Medicaid program that, at its core, is designed to protect the vulnerable.

As leaders of our respective institutions, individually guided by the directive to uphold and protect the sanctity and dignity of human life, we believe reforming Medicaid - in a manner that is acceptable - follows a moral track that will lead to sound public policy and an increased standard of living in our state. Reforming the "path to access" for those who are currently excluded from health care is a noble endeavor by which future generations of Michigan workers, families and children stand to benefit.

Medicaid reform offers an effective solution by reducing costly emergency room trips while increasing primary care visits. Reform will also have a significant impact on reducing the number of uninsured persons in the state. Extending health care access to approximately 450,000 adults, thereby decreasing the number of uninsured by 46 percent, is a rare chance to improve substantially the health and lives of Michigan residents. We support this socially just goal and the impact legislation could have on strengthening the structural framework of the state budget.

Reforming Medicaid will also provide an economic stimulus to the state, in addition to the moral certainty of providing greater health care access to vulnerable persons. Since the federal government will cover expenses for which Michigan pays today, the state's General Fund is expected to save \$206 million in 2014 alone. According to estimates, Michigan will realize a savings of \$320 million in uncompensated care costs by 2022. Additionally, over \$20 billion in new federal dollars received between 2014 and 2023 will generate millions of new dollars in the state's economy.

For the reasons identified above, we believe Michigan will better position itself for the future by accepting federal funds to reform the state's Medicaid program. As leaders of Michigan's largest religious community and network of health care providers, we proudly offer our support to the chorus of voices urging the Michigan Legislature to pass genuine Medicaid reform.



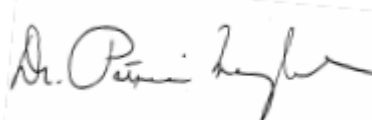
Paul A. Long
President and CEO
Michigan Catholic Conference



David Lord
President and CEO
OSF St. Francis Hospital & Medical Group



Roger Spoelman
Regional Executive
Trinity Health West Michigan



Patricia Maryland, Dr. P.H.
Ministry Market Leader
Ascension Health Michigan



Garry C. Faja
Regional President and CEO
St. Joseph Mercy Health System
Trinity Health Southeast Michigan



April 30, 2013

Annie Garnett: Human trafficking must end

Annie Garnett is communications and outreach associate with the Michigan Catholic Conference.

When Americans hear the word slavery they think of the horrible racial injustice of the past. Most do not realize that human slavery continues in full force today. In fact, more people are enslaved now than during any other period of human history, and the numbers are still growing.

Modern slavery, also known as human trafficking, is one of the fastest growing criminal industries in the world. According to International Labour Organization estimates, at any time there are 20.9 million victims of human slavery worldwide. Children (ages 17 and below) make up an estimated 26 percent of the victims, roughly 5.5 million.

Traffickers use force, fraud, or coercion to exploit individuals for sex or labor, continually taking advantage of human beings for their own financial gain. The act of using trafficked individuals as a source of profit violates basic human rights and the dignity of the human person, and it must be stopped.

Traffickers often target vulnerable populations when choosing victims — the abused, runaway or homeless youth, undocumented or temporary workers and the economically vulnerable — but are not limited to victims of a specific citizenship, gender, age, or social class. They often lure individuals with false promises, offering opportunities to receive a good education, a job or even love. Traffickers abuse and threaten the victims, and confiscate identification documents to keep them in the horrific situation.

Michigan cannot ignore this affront to human dignity. Positioned on an international border, this state is especially susceptible to human trafficking. Each month, an estimated 150 girls under the age of 18 are sold into trafficking. Sex and labor trafficking takes place across all industries, and can even be present in private homes. Trafficking is difficult to address because most victims do not self-identify. Every community needs assistance recognizing the signs, such as unwillingness to speak in front of others, lack of control over finances or keeping unusual hours.

Michigan elected officials are currently examining human trafficking and its legislative solutions. In March, Attorney General Bill Schuette announced the formation of the Michigan Commission on Human Trafficking, a bipartisan group that brings together elected officials, agency heads, law enforcement, and legal experts to discuss the problem. The commission will release its report with recommendations in the fall.

In addition to the statewide commission, four Michigan Senators, Judy Emmons (R-Sheridan), Minority Leader Gretchen Whitmer (D-East Lansing), Tonya Schuitmaker (R-Lawton) and Rebekah Warren (D-Ann Arbor), have come together in a bipartisan manner to address the topic. On Thursday, May 2, this bipartisan group will host a Human Trafficking Day at the Capitol to raise awareness about the problem.

In order to make strides against this form of hidden slavery, Michigan citizens can work to educate themselves and each other to help the state combat human trafficking. Every person is deserving of respect and human dignity, and has the right to live free from abuse, wherever it takes place. To report suspected cases, call the National Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888.

APRIL 15, 2013

Editorial: Rights of conscience must be preserved

Lawmakers offer bill to protect health care workers from being forced to violate their moral and religious beliefs

Michigan lawmakers worried that the Obama administration is brushing over concerns that its health care law will trample religious freedoms have crafted an appropriate bill to shield workers and hospitals from being coerced into violating their conscience.

Sen. John Moolenaar, R-Midland, introduced legislation that would offer conscience protections to individuals and institutions in the health care field.

"The HHS mandate brought this to the forefront," Moolenaar says, referring to regulations from the federal Health and Human Services department requiring all insurance plans to provide coverage of abortions and contraceptives. "As a state, we need to protect the religious liberty and conscience of citizens."

The bill recently passed out of the Senate Health Policy Committee and will now be taken up by the full Senate.

And while a state law can't override federal contraceptive dictates, it would prevent similar mandates from occurring at the state level and would protect hospitals and workers from having to engage in activities they object to on moral or religious grounds.

Other states, including Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky, have similar laws, according to the Michigan Catholic Conference, which is backing Moolenaar's bill.

Michigan already has a 30-year-old law on the books allowing health care workers and health care facilities to refuse participating in abortions.

This bill would expand protections to other non-life-threatening, elective services, including selling contraceptives and participating in sterilization procedures.

The legislation would also shield health care providers and institutions from firing, liability or discrimination because of objections to certain services.

But the bill, along with existing federal law, excludes religious objections in life-threatening situations. The bill would also limit objections in parts of Michigan where health care services are limited.

At a time when the White House has decided enacting its health care bill is more important than respecting civil liberties, the state must offer its citizens what protections it can.



April 15, 2013

Rebecca Mastee: Protect rights for health workers

Rebecca Mastee is a policy advocate for the Michigan Catholic Conference.

A recent viewpoint column regarding Michigan Senate Bill 136, the Religious Liberty and Conscience Protection Act, proved a disservice to the LSJ and its readers. The column was factually inaccurate and relied on scare tactics by highlighting a case in Ireland which, of course, has different laws than the United States. Let's set the record straight about SB 136.

The purpose of the bill is to maintain civil liberties and conscience rights that our nation has cherished for over 200 years. Unfortunately, these constitutional rights are slowly eroding as government mandates are forcing individuals and institutions to act contrary to their religious teachings.

SB 136 seeks to protect conscience rights by providing legal protections for those in the health care field. Many of these protections already exist under federal law, but are lacking in state law. Specifically, the bill would allow health care professionals to assert a conscience right regarding elective, non-emergency procedures. It would allow employers to offer their employees a benefit plan consistent with its institutional beliefs. And it would ensure that under no circumstance will a patient or prospective patient's care be compromised.

It is important to note that SB 136 further protects patients by strengthening laws already in place. Currently, if a hospital accepts government funding, as virtually every hospital in the country does, that facility is federally prohibited from denying emergency care to anyone. SB 136 strengthens those protections.

The bill also protects the status quo by mirroring civil rights laws. Several federal policies, such as the Church Amendment, the Hyde Amendment, the Weldon Amendment and others, ensure the federal government does not discriminate against those who assert their conscience rights in health care. Numerous presidents and Congresses, of both parties, have consistently passed and signed appropriations legislation upholding these rights.

In essence, SB 136 strikes a balance between health care employers and their patients' needs while upholding employee religious liberty rights. The legislation allows an employer to craft an employee accommodation policy in advance of any elective, non-emergency procedure or service that an employee may find objectionable, such as distributing abortion-inducing drugs or services that impact end of life care.

To alleviate concerns about discrimination, the legislation specifically forbids an accommodation based on a patient or any patient's ability to pay for a service. SB 136 is about protecting individuals and institutions in Michigan *from* discrimination, as federal law already provides.

For over 30 years Michigan has protected conscience rights related to abortion procedures. This policy has worked well, just as Senate Bill 136 will accomplish for other elective procedures. In fact, measures similar to SB 136 have been in place in other states for several years. In Illinois, legislation has protected conscience rights for over a decade without compromising patient care or employer needs. So let's join together as Michigan citizens, with appreciation for our differences, and say yes to Senate Bill 136. Let's say yes to conscience rights. And let's say yes to protecting civil and religious liberties.



MICHIGAN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

Michigan Catholic Conference
510 South Capitol Avenue
Lansing, Michigan 48933

Visit us on the web at micatholic.org
Like us on [facebook.com/MichiganCatholicConference](https://www.facebook.com/MichiganCatholicConference)
Follow us on twitter.com/MiCatholicConf
Watch us on [youtube.com/micatholicconf](https://www.youtube.com/micatholicconf)

©2015 Michigan Catholic Conference