



Good News

A publication of the Missouri Catholic Conference - The 2024 Legislative Session

DID YOU READ IT OR...
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Help Us Keep
You Informed

Public Policy
Priorities

What to
Expect this
Legislative
Session

New Wave
Feminists
Podcast

Pro-abortion
Initiative
Petitions

New Website



The Abortion Initiative Petition

A NEW Good News!

Welcome to our new look and revised publication schedule. In order to give you the best in-depth coverage and be good stewards of our resources, the Good News will now be published twice a year.

Our first issue will be at the beginning of the legislative session. In this issue we will cover our Public Policy Priorities for the year and what to expect during the legislative session, i.e. what bills have been filed, which ones may pass and what is the tone of the House and Senate.

Our second issue will be published at the end of the legislative session. This issue will contain voting records, a recap of the legislative session and what to expect moving forward.

Good News will also be available in Spanish on our website. For printed copies in Spanish please contact communications@mocatholic.org.

Help Us Keep You Informed!

Dear Good News reader,

I hope you are enjoying the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) semiannual newsletter, Good News, and the other communications we issue, such as the MCC Messenger, which appears in the diocesan papers on a quarterly basis. We try our best to keep you informed about developing issues that pose great moral questions for our state and nation and alert you when action is needed. We encourage you to check out our podcast, MCC from the Capitol (available on our website, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and Google Podcasts) in which we take a closer look at public policy issues and how they impact the Church.

With your help over the last several years, we have passed historic pro-life laws – including the trigger law that outlawed nearly all abortions in Missouri after the *Dobbs* decision – along with the Missouri Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program that allows qualifying students to apply for a scholarship to Catholic or other qualifying schools. In 2024, the MCC will continue its work on a number of important public policy issues, including providing women facing crisis pregnancies with Alternatives to Abortion, repealing the death penalty, ensuring adequate social services and healthcare for the poor, and promoting educational opportunities for all school children, including those attending Catholic schools.

The MCC will not succeed in any of these efforts without the involvement of committed Catholics like you. Without your help, the needs of the most vulnerable among us are likely to be forgotten in the halls of Congress and in our State Capitol. That is why the MCC wants to stay in contact with you—so you know what is going on and can respond by contacting your elected officials when critical legislation is pending.

You currently receive our communications for free. At this time, I am asking you to consider a donation to help the MCC. If you can afford to give \$20, \$30, \$40, \$50, or more, your donation will help us to continue providing you with our MCC publications. To make a donation, please use the envelope provided, or visit our website (www.mocatholic.org) to donate by credit card. If you cannot give a donation at this time, you will still continue to receive Good News at no charge. If you would prefer to receive our information electronically, please contact us with your email address.

Thank you and God bless!

Sincerely,



Jamie Morris
Executive Director and General Counsel

2024 Public Policy Priorities

In faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) seeks through education and advocacy to create a culture that respects the sanctity and dignity of all human life, especially the most vulnerable among us. In the light of the moral teaching of the Catholic Church, the MCC and the Missouri bishops call government officials, legislators and all citizens to a respectful discourse about the challenges facing our state and nation. This agenda does not reflect all of the MCC's concerns, but those calling for action at this time.



immigration reform, and provision and funding for refugee resettlement. "Every stranger who knocks at our door is an opportunity for an encounter with Jesus Christ, who identifies with the welcomed and rejected strangers of every age." (Pope Francis, 2017 Message for World Day of Migrants and Refugees)

Advance Social and Economic Justice for All

Pope Francis calls for all people to hear the cry of the poor and to reform "unjust social structures" that deny basic necessities and opportunities for social and economic advancement.

The MCC will support adequate funding for Medicaid and mental health services, protection of social programs that benefit the poor, care for creation and the environment, and stronger consumer protections, including payday lending reform.

The MCC will also support healing of racial and cultural divisions while working to build vibrant communities

that serve the common good. "Certainly, it is the proper function of authority to arbitrate, in the name of the common good, between various particular interests; but it should make accessible to each what is needed to lead a truly human life: food, clothing, health, work, education and culture, suitable information, the right to establish a family, and so on." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 1908)

Uphold and Strengthen Marriage and Family

Family is the basic cell of human society and the foundation of civilized life. Presently, the institutions of marriage and family are threatened by a culture that no longer values authentic marriage and stable families.

The MCC will support legislation and funding for programs that encourage two-parent families and provide assistance to single

Continued on Page 4

Protect Human Life

Recognizing the right to life is the foundation for all other human rights, the MCC will defend against violent attacks on human life, such as abortion, euthanasia, experiments involving the destruction of human embryos or the use of aborted fetal remains, and the death penalty.



The MCC will support a culture of life that provides alternatives to abortion for mothers who choose life for their children, and alternatives to the death penalty, such as incarceration that protects the public. "It is impossible to further the common good without acknowledging and defending the right to life, upon which all the other inalienable rights of individuals are founded and from which they develop." (Saint John Paul II, Gospel of Life, No. 101)



Welcome and Accompany Immigrants and Refugees

The MCC will bear witness to the God-given human dignity of all immigrants and refugees, including the undocumented and those displaced by war, persecution, and natural disasters, reminding lawmakers of the right of people to migrate to other countries.

The MCC will urge Congress to enact the DREAM Act,



parents and their children; promote responsible parenthood; assist victims of domestic violence; and, help families who are poor or have children with health problems or disabilities. "The importance of the family for the life and well-being of society entails a particular responsibility for society to support and strengthen marriage and the family." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2210)

Defend Religious Liberty

The Catholic Church at the Second Vatican Council proclaimed that the freedom to exercise one's religious faith without threat of coercion is grounded in the dignity of the human person and that no person should be forced to act in a manner "contrary to his conscience," (Dignitas Humanae, par. 3).

The MCC will oppose unjust discrimination against people of faith, including the targeting or registering of any particular faith, and will support religious liberty protections in all human rights laws. "[T]he right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself." (Declaration on Religious Freedom, No. 2)

Support Educational Opportunities

All parents have the right, and should have opportunities to receive

assistance when necessary, to choose the schooling most beneficial for their children and which stands in accord with their moral and religious convictions.

The MCC will support educational opportunities for all children in all school settings, be they public, private, or religious. The MCC will support financial assistance so families can meet their children's educational needs, and repeal of Constitutional provisions, such as Missouri's Blaine Amendments, that discriminate against children who attend private and religious schools. "As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions." (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 2229)

Reform Criminal Justice

The Catholic Church supports a criminal justice system in which the offender is held accountable, the victim receives support, and the community assists the offender in successfully re-entering society.

The MCC will support meaningful reforms, such as allowing greater judicial discretion in criminal sentencing, along with reasonable possibilities for parole, and ensuring offenders have realistic opportunities for employment upon their release. "We believe that both victims and

offender[s] are children of God. Despite their very different claims on society, their lives and dignity should be protected and respected. We seek justice, not vengeance." (U.S. Bishops, A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice, Nov. 2000)

Promote Civility and Faith in the Democratic Process

Saint John Paul II said that Democracy needs wisdom and virtue if it is to flourish. Pope Francis told Congress that the chief aim of politics is the common good.

The MCC will encourage civility and bipartisan cooperation among elected officials, strong ethical standards for those in public office, respect for the rule of law, and measures that allow citizens to more fully participate in their government. "[R]esponsible authority also means authority exercised with those virtues that make it possible to put power into practice as service (patience, modesty, moderation, charity, efforts to share), an authority exercised by persons who are able to accept the common good, and not prestige or the gaining of personal advantages, as the true goal of their work." (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, No. 410)

Latest Podcast: **New Wave Feminists**




a pro-(all) Life feminist organization

Consistent non-violence from the womb to the tomb



New MCC Website to be unveiled in March!

2024 Legislative Session



The 2024 legislative session picked up much where it left off in 2023, as disagreements between two Republican factions in the Missouri Senate brought the chamber's work to an early standstill. Members of the newly formed Freedom Caucus spent the first day of the 2024 legislative session airing their frustrations with Senate Republican leadership. The senators—who previously aligned under the name “Conservative Caucus”—complained that Senate leadership had failed to advance Republican priorities in recent years.

The disagreement came to a head in the third week of session, as Freedom Caucus members engaged in an hours-long filibuster to block a slate of statewide appointments made by Governor Mike Parson. Members of the Freedom Caucus claimed that the filibuster was meant to pressure Senate leadership to move more quickly on one of the GOP's top priorities, initiative petition (IP) reform. The procedural move led Senate President Pro Tem Caleb Rowden to strip four members of the Freedom Caucus

of their committee chairs. While both factions of Republicans seem to agree on their top priorities—IP reform, school choice, and defunding Planned Parenthood—it is not clear if they will be able to put aside their personal differences long enough to pass any of their priorities.

Meanwhile, Governor Parson outlined his legislative agenda for his final year as Governor. He once again called for child care tax credits to help address the child care availability and affordability crisis in the state. Parson also called for a cost of living increase for all state employees, for raising the baseline teacher pay, and for expanding funding for pre-kindergarten and K-12 programs. In addition, Governor Parson announced a federal grant of over \$90 million for his plan to expand I-70.

The session started off quickly for the MCC staff as they testified on legislation to address the lack of access to affordable child care, to expand the state's non-public school scholarship program, and to defund Planned Parenthood. The House

quickly moved to pass HB 1488, sponsored by Rep. Brenda Shields, which would create tax incentives to help expand child care in Missouri. Senate committees also moved quickly to advance MCC priority bills; however, Senate gridlock has prevented most pieces of legislation from hitting the floor for debate.

Concerns with Missouri's death penalty law were also at the forefront of the start of session, as several Republican legislators filed bills calling for the controversial criminal sentencing act to be abolished. In collaboration with Missourians for the Abolition of the Death Penalty and the Missouri Catholic Conference, Conservatives Concerned About the Death Penalty (CCADP) held a press conference in January at the Missouri Capitol featuring several Republican sponsors of anti-death penalty bills. While abolition of the death penalty remains unlikely in Missouri, these bills provide hope that the necessity of the practice will continue to be debated in future years.

DID YOU READ IT OR...

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PRO-ABORTION INITIATIVE PETITIONS

On March 8, 2023, Dr. Anna Fitz-James filed eleven initiative petitions with the secretary of state's office to add abortion rights to the state constitution. The proposals, filed by a political action committee called Missourians for Constitutional Freedom, amend the constitution to declare that the government "shall not infringe upon a person's fundamental right to reproductive freedom, which is the right to make and carry out decisions about all matters related to reproductive health care, including but not limited to prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, birth control, abortion care, miscarriage care, and respectful birthing conditions." Each proposal states that there must be "a compelling governmental interest" for abortion restrictions to be put in place; however, each differs as to the specifics of what is allowable.

Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft certified the official ballot titles for the 11 initiatives, all of which included this language:

Do you want to amend the Missouri Constitution to:

- allow for dangerous, unregulated, and unrestricted abortions, from conception to live birth, without requiring a medical license or potentially being subject to medical malpractice;
- nullify longstanding Missouri law protecting the right to life, including but not limited to partial-birth abortion;
- require the government not to discriminate against persons providing or obtaining an abortion, potentially including tax-payer funding?

Dr. Fitz-James, represented by the ACLU of Missouri, challenged the ballot summary language drafted by

the secretary of state's office for six of the initiatives, claiming that the summary was misleading. Assistant Attorney General Jason Krol Lewis, representing Secretary of State Ashcroft, argued that the petitions accurately "convey to voters the massive loopholes in the initiative petition that would bring access to effectively unregulated and unrestricted abortion in Missouri." In addition, three pro-life advocates—Rep. Hannah Kelly (R-Mountain Grove), Sen. Mary Elizabeth Coleman (R-Arnold), and Kathy Forck—filed suit against the state auditor, claiming that his fiscal summary ignores potential costs, including a possible loss of federal Medicaid funding and future tax revenue.

Cole County Circuit Judge Jon Beetem ruled that certain phrases included in the secretary of state's summary statements were "problematic" because they were "either argumentative or do not fairly

describe the purposes or probably effect of the initiative,” including:

- “without requiring a medical license”
- “the right to life”
- “unborn child”
- “including a minor”
- “end the life”
- “at any time”

Judge Beetem also ruled that while the proposals would immediately impact abortion, the summaries should have also included references to “reproductive health care beyond abortion.” As a result, Beetem rewrote the six summary statements as had been requested by the plaintiff in the case. Judge Beetem also ruled against plaintiffs who had challenged the fiscal note summary of the initiatives. The Western District Court of Appeals upheld Beetem’s decision and the Missouri Supreme Court declined to hear Ashcroft’s appeal.

Six new pro-abortion initiative petitions were filed on August 30, 2023 by Jamie Corley, representing the Missouri Women and Family Research Fund. All six petitions add exceptions to the state’s abortion ban and, in three versions, explicitly legalize abortion in the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, all of the versions state that abortion is a “fundamental right” when there is a risk to a woman’s “health or safety.” While supporters of the proposals claim they offer a middle ground, vague language in the petitions would seemingly allow abortions for any reason and at any time. Specifically “health” and “safety” are not defined in any proposal, and there is no discussion as to who makes the determination of when either are at risk.

The secretary of state’s office released its summary for the six petitions in October. Corley quickly filed suit, claiming that Ashcroft used false and biased statements in his summaries. That suit is ongoing at the time of publication.

CURRENT STATUS OF ABORTION INITIATIVE PETITIONS

In January, Missourians for Constitutional Freedom announced which of its 11 filed petitions it was seeking to place on the November 2024 ballot. The proposed amendment, 2024-086, states that the government “shall not infringe upon a person’s fundamental right to reproductive freedom, which is the right to make and carry out decisions about all matters related to reproductive health care, including but not limited to prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, birth control, abortion care, miscarriage care, and respectful birthing conditions.”

The proposal states that the legislature may regulate abortion after fetal viability. However, it goes on to say that “under no circumstance shall the Government deny, interfere with, delay, or otherwise restrict an abortion that in the good faith judgment of a treating health care professional is needed to protect the life or physical or **mental health** of the pregnant person.” (emphasis added)

This means that a late-term abortion can still occur as long as a health care provider is willing to state that the abortion is necessary for the woman’s mental health, which can be defined broadly to include such things as “emotional, psychological, [and] familial” concerns.¹

Missourians for Constitutional Freedom also announced that it has the support of Abortion Action Missouri, the ACLU of Missouri, and Planned Parenthood affiliates in Kansas City and St. Louis. The group stated that it had already raised more than \$2 million in donations in its first week of launch. The group began collecting signatures around the state in early February.

MISSOURI STANDS WITH WOMEN

While pro-abortion groups were announcing their intent to place abortion rights on the ballot, a pro-life coalition announced its intent to fight these ballot initiatives. The group, called [Missouri Stands with Women](#), was formed to “protect Missouri’s laws respecting the dignity of life, the safety of women and parental rights.”

“Out-of-state extremists pushing Big Abortion’s agenda are intent on using the initiative petition process to reverse all the pro-life work our state has undertaken to protect the dignity of life, safety of women and parental rights”, said Stephanie Bell, a spokeswoman for Missouri Stands with Women. “We are united in our efforts to ensure these out-of-state extremists are not allowed to tear the fabric of our constitution by placing unregulated, taxpayer-funded abortions up to the moment of birth, effectively overriding all Missouri’s pro-life laws.”

The MCC will continue to partner with Missouri Stands with Women and other pro-life and pro-woman advocates to fight this abortion initiative and will continue to provide updates on the campaign.

At this time, the MCC is asking individuals to not sign any petition to put this amendment on the ballot.

The Bishops of Missouri remind the faithful to remain alert and to continue to do what they can to safeguard the fundamental principles of the right to life. This means being active and informed citizens, guided by well-formed consciences.

¹ *Doe v. Bolton*, 410 U.S. 179 (1972)



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Members of the Public Policy Committee visited the Capitol on February 20, 2024 to meet with legislators and discuss bills and issues of interest to Missouri Catholics and received a tour of the Senate Chamber.



Rep. Jonathan Patterson, (R-Lee's Summit)
Majority Floor Leader.



Lt. Governor Mike Kehoe (R-Jefferson City)
and members of the Public Policy Committee.



Members of the Public Policy Committee were given a tour of the Senate Chamber. Pictured from left, Jill Burkett, Curtis Wichmer, Deacon Chris Ast, Deb Sheppard, Nicolette Gibson, Deacon Mark Kiblinger, Jamie Morris, Craig Dennis, Deacon Gary Steffes, Deacon Jorge Perez.