



2026
Legislative
Session

Update on
Amendment 3

2026 Public
Policy Priorities

Citizen
Recognition
Awards



Request a Speaker

The staff of the Missouri Catholic Conference is available to discuss with your parish, organization or group about what is happening at the Missouri Capitol, legislation, or the Catholic Church's position on numerous topics. Contact our office at (573) 635-7239 or visit our website at mocatholic.org to schedule a speaker.



Jamie Morris, Executive Director
and General Counsel

*Topics: Pro-Life Issues, Faithful
Citizenship, Religious Liberty, Family,
Education, and Legislation*



Curtis Wichmer,
Legislative Counsel

*Topics: Criminal Justice, the
Death Penalty, Social Programs,
Pornography Regulations, and
Catholic Social Teaching*



Guillermo Villa-Trueba, PhD,
Hispanic Outreach Manager
*Topics: Immigration, Refugees,
Catholic Social Teaching, and
Religious Liberty (talks can be given
in Spanish or English)*

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 publications 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 school choice legislation, including a statewide expansion of the Empowerment Scholarship Accounts program that allows qualifying students to apply for a scholarship to Catholic or other qualifying schools. In 2026, 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. In addition, we will continue to work with other pro-life groups to protect the well-being and dignity of pregnant mothers and their unborn children by working to pass the “new” Amendment 3 this year.

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 can be a more informed and active citizen.

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

2026 Legislative Session

The 2026 legislative session is now underway, and legislators have wasted no time working on their priorities for the year. By the end of the first month of session, more than 2,000 pieces of legislation had been filed. This meant that the session also started off quickly for the MCC staff as they testified on legislation to reform aspects of the state's criminal justice system, to provide legal protections for children who survive abortions, and to eliminate state sales tax on groceries.

A proposal to phase out the state's income tax—a priority of Gov. Mike Kehoe—is expected to be a focal point of the Republican majority this year. The General Assembly is also expected to try once again to address the lack of affordable childcare in the state.

However, the legislature will have to work with a much tighter budget than in previous years. During the annual State of the State address, Gov. Kehoe highlighted his budget recommendations, which includes nearly \$600 million in spending cuts. These cuts are in response to declining revenues and in the depletion of the federal COVID relief funds that had been used to substitute for general revenue in prior budgets.

Lingering tensions from the last legislative session are complicating things in the Senate. Senate Democrats, upset at their Republican counterparts for using a procedural maneuver to end debate at the end of the regular session and in the special session to pass their priorities, have pledged to hold up the Senate this year. Those plans began early, as Democrats filibustered the governor's slate of appointees, preventing them from going forward.

Also hanging over this legislative session is the upcoming campaign

to restore pro-life protections in Missouri. In 2024, voters narrowly approved a ballot initiative to enshrine a broad right to abortion in the State

Constitution. This November, Missourians will be asked to vote on the "new" Amendment 3. The proposed amendment will, among other things, limit the number of abortions in the state, require abortion clinics to meet high standards for safety and cleanliness, ensure parental consent for minors, prohibit gender-altering procedures for minors, and limit public funding for abortion services.

The MCC continues to work with its pro-life partners to educate individuals about the amendment and to encourage Missourians to **vote YES on Amendment 3**.

During his State of the State address, Gov. Kehoe clearly affirmed his support for Amendment 3, stating the proposal "reflects Missouri's long-standing commitment to life and standing with women." As part of their commitment to passing Amendment 3, Gov. and First Lady Kehoe are helping to lead *Her Health, Her Future*, which describes itself as a "statewide coalition of pro-life families, individuals, community leaders, and organizations committed to protecting women's health, safeguarding our children, and restoring protections for the unborn".



UPDATE ON AMENDMENT 3

With the ballot language for Amendment 3 finalized, the MCC has been asked what the faithful need to know about the amendment and what they can do now to help the campaign. Here are some actions that individuals can take now, while the campaign committee continues its planning and work behind the scenes.

- **Pray for the success of Amendment 3!**
- Talk to your circle of influence—family, friends, individuals in your Church group, etc.—about the amendment.
- Encourage others to join the Missouri Catholic Advocacy Network ("MOCAN") at mocatholic.org to stay up to date on the latest campaign news.
- Visit herhealthherfuture.com to make a donation or find other ways you can get involved in the campaign.

The MCC, in conjunction with each Missouri diocese and with our campaign coalition partners, will be developing materials that can be shared as the vote approaches. MCC staff members are also available to come speak to your parish regarding Amendment 3. Please visit mocatholic.org/speaker-request for more information.

Key talking points on Amendment 3:

- In Nov. 2024, Missouri narrowly passed a sweeping right to abortion in the State Constitution
- With that State Constitutional Amendment, Missouri's legislature lost the ability to set meaningful safeguards for the abortion industry, including:
 - Requirement that only doctors perform abortions
 - Requirement that parents be notified and give consent before their minor has an abortion
 - Requirement that abortion clinics be licensed and inspected
- In addition, because the amendment provided a broad and nearly absolute right to "reproductive health care," it likely opens the door to constitutional protection for surgical or medical gender transition on minors
- In Nov. 2026, Missourians will be asked to restore these protections in Amendment 3, which will:
 - Severely limit the number of abortions in the state
 - Require abortion clinics to meet high standards for safety and cleanliness
 - Ensure parental or judicial consent for minors
 - Prohibit gender-altering procedures for minors
 - Severely limit public funding for abortion services

2026 Public Policy Priorities

In faithfulness to the Good News of Jesus Christ, the Missouri Catholic Conference (MCC) seeks through education and advocacy to foster 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 upon government officials, legislators and all citizens to engage in a respectful dialogue 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.

PROTECT HUMAN LIFE



Models used for illustrative purposes only.

Recognizing that 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 promotes a culture of life by supporting

alternatives to abortion for mothers who choose life for their children, as well as 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 affirms the God-given human dignity of all immigrants and refugees, including the undocumented and those displaced by war, persecution, and natural disasters. The MCC reminds lawmakers of the right of people to migrate and urges Congress to enact comprehensive immigration reform, including adequate provisions 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 called 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 also works to heal racial and cultural divisions while fostering 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. Today, 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 strengthen

two-parent families; assist single parents and their children; promote responsible parenthood; support victims of domestic violence; and, provide aid to families experiencing poverty or raising children with health challenges 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



At the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church affirmed 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



Parents are the first educators of their children and have the right to choose the form of schooling that best serves their children's needs and reflects their moral and religious

convictions. When necessary, parents should also have access to assistance that enables them to exercise this right. The MCC will support educational opportunities for all children across all school settings: public, private, or religious. The MCC also advocates for financial assistance that helps families meet their children's educational needs and opposes policies 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 calls for a criminal justice system that holds the offender accountable, supports victims, and

engages the community in helping offenders successfully reintegrate into society. The MCC will support meaningful reforms, such as allowing greater judicial discretion in criminal sentencing, reasonable possibilities for parole, and policies that ensure individuals have realistic pathways to employment upon 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 primary purpose 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 enable 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 MCC from the Capitol Podcast

Jamie Morris, Executive Director and General Counsel, discusses what is happening this legislative session and the "new" Amendment 3 with Curt Wichmer, Legislative Counsel, and Dr. Guillermo Villa-Trueba, Hispanic Outreach Manager. Scan the QR code or visit mocatholic.org to listen.



Citizen Recognition Awards

Each year, the MCC recognizes a Catholic individual, couple, or group from each of the four dioceses who strives toward the same goal: giving of themselves to better the lives of others. These award recipients exemplify good citizenship in promoting Catholic values in the public policy arena and in their local communities and parishes. The 2025 winners from each diocese are as follows:



Amy Diemer has been recognized in the Archdiocese of St. Louis. Until her recent retirement, for the past 10 years, Amy has been the Director of Legal Services for St. Francis Community Services, Catholic Legal Assistance Ministry (CLAM), which is a ministry of Catholic Charities. In that role, she has worked tirelessly to ensure that the voices of those on the margins are heard in the courtroom. Her passion and dedication to the clients she serves have been exceptional. Her compassion and empathy are clearly evident in her work and in how she manages her staff. Under her leadership, the office annually represents over 1500 clients. She initiated

a program using volunteer attorneys to provide representation in legal guardianship matters to clients taking care of children or incapacitated adults. She sits on many boards, including the MO-AFCC (Association of Family and Conciliation Courts) Board and the BAMSL Pro-Bono Committee. Amy received her undergraduate and law degrees from St. Louis University. Among the many honors she has received, she was the 2023 recipient of the Missouri Lawyers Media Women’s Justice Award for Public Service and a 2024 recipient of an award from Friends of Birthright for her work educating and advocating for moms on issues of custody and child support. Her dedication and leadership make her a role model for all in the community.

Deacon John Weaver has been recognized in the Diocese of Jefferson City. Since his ordination as a deacon, Deacon Weaver has served selflessly in every assignment given – whether in an urban area like Columbia, or a rural area like Milan. He has been totally welcoming and accepting of every pastor, he has been cooperative and supportive of every Diocesan initiative, and he models true humility. Above all, he is a person of deep faith, willing to serve in areas that might be difficult or intimidating to others. Deacon Weaver has a big heart and presents himself well to the public, both in word and deed. He is a fine homilist, using his communication skills to both illuminate and educate. He has worked especially hard to be welcoming and a resource to those from other cultures who may be new to Missouri, and has worked well with the Hispanic community in Milan.





B.J. Atkinson has been recognized in the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. B.J. Atkinson is simply faith in action, seamlessly praying, worshiping, and helping to lead her faith community at St. Therese Little Flower Parish in Kansas City and the Blue Hills Neighborhood where she lives. Day in and day out for decades, B.J. has directed St. Therese's Community Services program. She is involved with many of the executive functions that go with extending and maintaining the vision: grant-writing, fundraising, budgeting, and recruiting and managing volunteers. B.J. remains personally involved with the people who come to St. Therese seeking assistance of various kinds. She knows many of them personally. She knows the variety of their strengths and challenges, and how to encourage personal responsibility as well as provide Christ's compassionate assistance with day-to-day necessities. B.J. also started an annual Christmas Basket program to assist the neighborhood. Those who receive a basket have a real need for the extra food, a new jacket and gloves, and gifts for family members to put under the tree. But more than anything, they need the love of Jesus and the Holy Family that B.J. makes sure they receive at St. Therese Little Flower.

John and Julie Clarke have been recognized in the Diocese of Springfield-Cape Girardeau. John and Julie exemplify servant leadership at the parish, regional, and state-wide levels. Their association with the Knights of Columbus has seen them actively involved in Special Olympics, Coats for Kids, Knights Wheelchair Program, Catholic Night at the Springfield Cardinals, and a myriad of programs in which they have taken leadership roles as well as hands-on participation. John and Julie are currently State Family Directors for the Knights of Columbus, responsible for nine state-wide programs. Despite their busy volunteer community efforts, John and Julie are serving their parish as leaders and workers serving on committees (new building/renovation, stewardship, ladies' auxiliary, youth, and more) and undertaking the "boots on the ground" mentality to roll up their sleeves to get the work done, whatever it takes. Their commitment to the community also extends to helping feed those in need. They regularly open their homes to host parish meetings, organize social activities, and are always asking how they can help. Simply put, if there is a need in the community or in the parish, they rush to fill that need in any way they can. You will always see them with a smile on their faces, having the most positive attitude of anyone in the room.



MISSOURI
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CONFERENCE



PO Box 1022
Jefferson City, MO 65102-1022

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@MOCatholic



mocatholic@mocatholic.org

MOCatholic.org

Phone: (573) 635-7239

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