



# *South Carolina* **CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

VOLUME 2 | JULY 2024

## **SESSION IN REVIEW**

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*A closer look into the  
2023-2024 Catholic  
advocacy work in the  
Palmetto State*



Photo by Doug Deas

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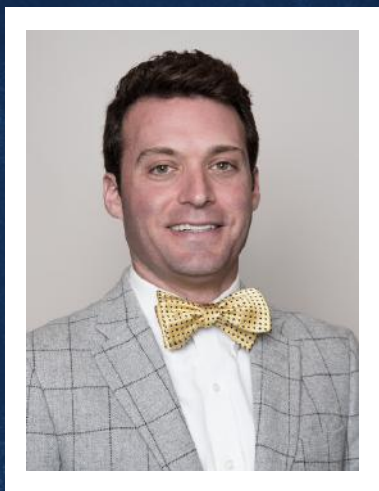
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*This report is dedicated to  
Our Lady, Seat of Wisdom.  
May she guide the work of the  
South Carolina Catholic Conference.*



# A MESSAGE FROM OUR LEADERSHIP

*Dear friends in Christ,*

This legislative session, we witnessed several historic pro-Catholic wins in our state, and we have great cause for hope. The state legislature passed the Heartbeat Bill to protect children in the womb; the Education Scholarship Trust Fund program, to allow parents the best educational choices for their families, was made into law; and bills to protect children from harmful gender procedures and from explicit online content were both passed. So much good was accomplished for the people of South Carolina.

Even with major victories, we continue working toward our broader goals as Catholic Christians. We are necessarily engaged in the affairs of the world and must keep at the forefront why we labor and for whom we fight. We do not argue to win arguments – we aim to win souls for Christ Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. We can have perfect confidence in God even when our world seems to have lost its way, or when good legislation is not advanced. As we have learned from sacred Scripture, “Nothing is new under the sun ... even the thing of which we say, ‘See, this is new!’ has already existed in the ages that preceded us” (Eccl 1:9-10). So, let us never live in fear because the Lord has conquered this world, and his victory is assured.

All of us can be a force for change and uphold the common good no matter who we are. Truly, it starts in our homes. If we are committed to making a difference, we must learn and become knowledgeable about current issues to understand what and why we believe so that we can defend and support it. Then, we share the truth with our children, friends, parents, neighbors and friends. Finally, we pray for our legislators, especially fellow Catholics, that they promote the kingship of Christ in their work at the State House.

We give our works to the Lord in service and sacrifice, entrusting our lives and all that we are to his gracious care.

Sincerely in Christ,

**Michael F. Aquilano, J.D., Director**  
*South Carolina Catholic Conference*



## SC CATHOLIC CONFERENCE: WHAT WE DO

*The public policy advocate for the Catholic faithful in the Palmetto State*

The South Carolina Catholic Conference was founded in 2013 by Bishop *emeritus* Robert E. Guglielmone, DD. Today, it serves as liaison to state and federal government officials on matters of concern to the Church. The Catholic Conference acts as a nonpartisan public policy voice for the faithful in the Palmetto State.

The Catholic Conference is guided in its policy judgments by the social doctrine of the Catholic Church: unchanging teachings that have been developed over time by the Magisterium. These teachings are not of an arbitrary ideology specific to the fads and ethical trends of the world. Instead they are deeply rooted in Scripture and Tradition.

The SCCC, focusing on the core tenants of Catholic social teaching, works on issues pertaining to the protection of human life at all stages, respecting the

dignity of every human person, the rights of the poor and vulnerable, and the common good more broadly.

The Gospel is the foundation and motivation for the work of the Catholic Conference to assist policy makers and public officials in prioritizing legislation in alignment with the moral theology of the Church. It provides opportunities for Catholic faithful to engage in the political sphere.

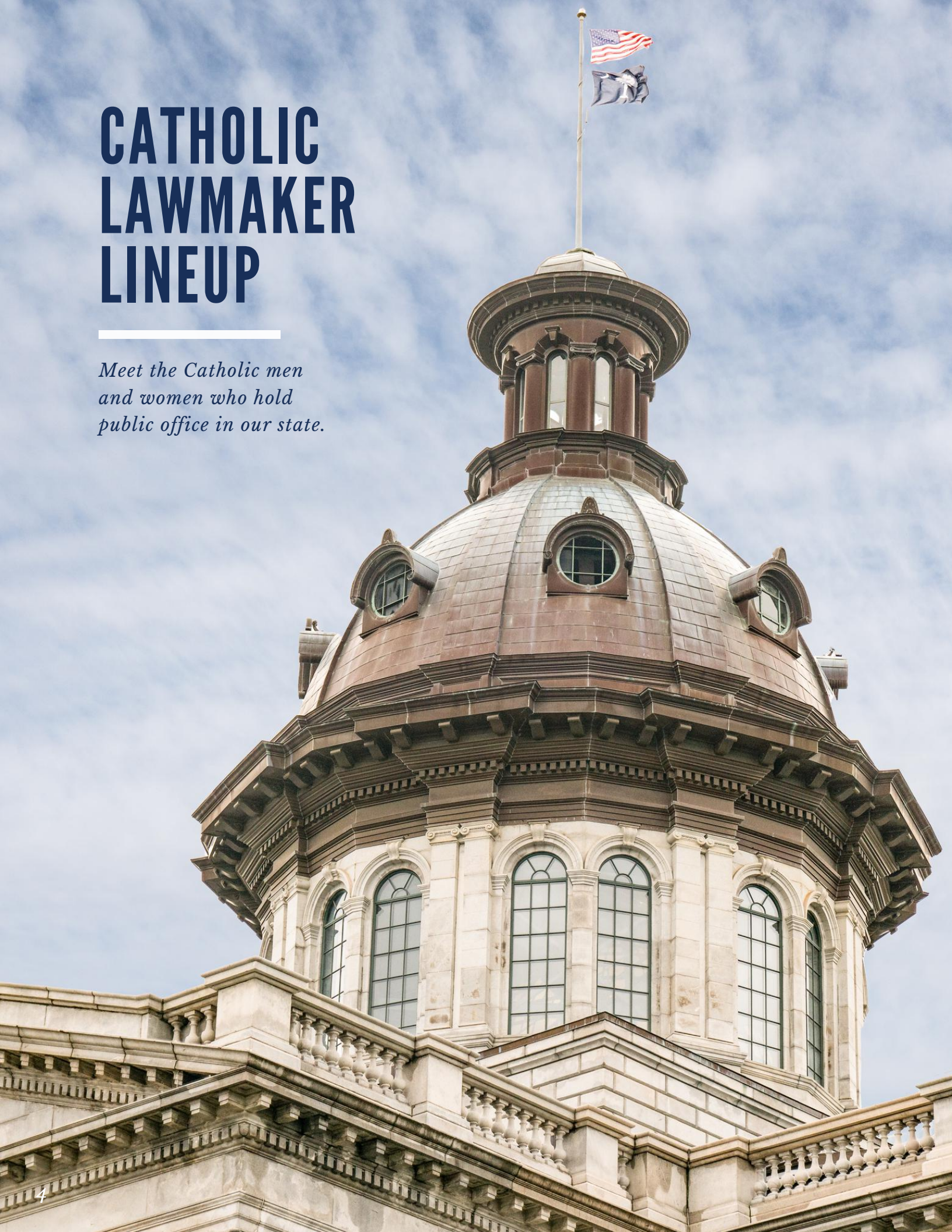
*“The Church’s social doctrine ‘belongs to the field, not of ideology, but of theology and particularly of moral theology’. It cannot be defined according to socio-economic parameters. It is not an ideological or pragmatic system intended to define and generate economic, political and social relationships, but is a category unto itself.”*

Compendium of Social Doctrine, 72

# CATHOLIC LAWMAKER LINEUP

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*Meet the Catholic men  
and women who hold  
public office in our state.*





**Pamela Evette**, *Lieutenant Governor*  
Prince of Peace Church, Taylors



Scan the QR code for our Q&A with the lieutenant governor published in *The Catholic Miscellany*.



**Sean Bennett**, *Senator*  
St. John the Beloved Church,  
Summerville



**Tom Davis**, *Senator*  
St. Peter Church, Beaufort



**Shannon Erickson**, *Representative*  
St. Peter Church, Beaufort



**Joe Bustos**, *Representative*  
Stella Maris Church, Mt. Pleasant



**Bill Herbkersman**, *Representative*  
St. Gregory the Great Church, Beaufort



**Mark Smith**, *Representative*  
St. Clare of Assisi Church, Daniel Island

# LEGISLATION

## Pro-Catholic Law

### RESPECT FOR LIFE

- S. 474, Fetal Heartbeat:** Protects the preborn from abortion upon detection of the baby's heartbeat.
- H. 4159: Telehealth and Telemedicine Modernization Act:** Provides safeguards for telehealth and telemedicine practices in the state and protects prohibitions of prescribing abortion drugs via telemedicine.

### HUMAN DIGNITY

- H. 4624, Help, Not Harm:** Protects minors from harmful gender transition procedures and drugs, including puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and transition surgeries.
- Budget Proviso:** Protects the privacy of students from having to share bathrooms, locker rooms, and changing areas with people of the opposite sex.
- H. 3424, Child Online Safety Act:** Protects minors from explicit content online by requiring online pornographic websites to verify the ages of their patrons.

### EDUCATION

- S. 39, Educational Scholarship Trust Fund:** Gives qualifying families appropriate funding to select the best institution of learning for their child's individual needs.
- H. 3360, Center for School Safety and Targeted Violence:** Establishes a division within the S.C. Law Enforcement Division to train law enforcement, teachers, administrators, school personnel and parents on school safety to identify and prevent future threats.
- H. 4023, First Steps:** Restructures First Steps – free private school 4-yr old kindergarten program – to increase access to education to more communities.



# LIVE WINS

## Wins of the Session

### PRO-FAMILY

- **H. 3553, Adoption:** Cuts bureaucratic red-tape and eliminates the 90-day waiting period to finalize adoption.
- **H. 3908, Paid Family Leave:** Provides six weeks of paid family leave for public school teachers and other full-time district employees.

### CRIMINAL JUSTICE

- **H. 3605, Occupational License Reform:** Expands employment and “second chance” opportunities for individuals with criminal records.
- **H. 3503, Trafficking in Fentanyl:** Further strengthens criminal penalties for trafficking fentanyl.
- **H. 4617, Xylazine:** Criminalizes the production, distribution and possession of the drug xylazine and add it to the list of Schedule III drugs.

### POOR & VULNERABLE

- **S. 164, State Health Facility Licensure Act:** Repeals and amends the state’s Certificate of Need law, which monopolized the hospital system and limited healthcare access to rural communities.
- **S. 142, Safe Harbor for Exploited Minors:** Protects minors who have been coerced or forced into the sex trafficking industry. Provides affirmative defense of and expungement for victims.
- **S. 445, Recovery Housing:** Allows for housing to be established for those recovering from drug addiction.
- **Budget Proviso:** The General Assembly allocated funding to Catholic Charities of South Carolina for *Next Level Services* and *Getting Ahead*.

# PROTECTION OF THE UNBORN

## *Pro-Life Action of the Session*

As Catholics, the most fundamental issue is life and the protection of all human life from conception to natural death. We vote for life primarily, because without life there are no other rights. Here are the top pro-life wins from the 2023-2024 legislative session.

### **The Fetal Heartbeat and Human Life Protection Act**

In the 2021-2022 legislative session, the S.C. Fetal Heartbeat Protection from Abortion Act (S. 1), sponsored by Sen. Larry Grooms, was passed. Planned Parenthood sued over this law, arguing that it was unconstitutional. At that time, *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that ruled abortion was a constitutional right, had yet to be

overturned by the ruling on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*. So, the South Carolina Supreme Court struck down the Heartbeat Bill.

Our legislature rushed to pass a new law — one that would be found constitutional by the court. The 2023-2024 session began with a strong effort on H. 3552, the Human Life Protection Act. It would have banned nearly all abortions in the state with exceptions for medical necessity, rape, incest or severe fatal fetal abnormality. The bill died in the Senate.

The Catholic Conference pivoted to support S. 474, also known as the Fetal Heartbeat and Protection from Abortion Act. The House passed the bill, after grueling sessions of debate on



May 16, 2023, by a vote of 82-33. The Senate passed it a week later by a vote of 27-19. Gov. Henry McMaster signed the bill into law May 25, 2023, surrounded by the bill's sponsors and advocates.

"Today is a victory for human life in the Palmetto State," Michael F. Acquilano, director of the Catholic Conference, said in a statement. "We thank our pro-life senators for standing strong to pass the Fetal Heartbeat Act and protecting preborn children and their mothers."

This is the strongest pro-life legislation that has been passed in South Carolina, and its passage marks an historic victory. As expected, abortion providers quickly acted against this life-affirming legislation. The bill was quickly enjoined and not able to take effect. The case eventually went to the South Carolina Supreme Court, which determined that the bill was constitutional; the bill has since saved many lives.

However, our pro-life work is far from over, and in many ways, this is the beginning. It is essential that we continue to work in offering loving and supportive assistance to mothers, fathers and babies in need. We must build up a culture of life in our state, one in which no one is left behind, and we work to make abortion unthinkable.

The Catholic Conference thanks the General Assembly and Gov. Henry McMaster for their passage of this life-saving bill. More beloved children of God will be and are already being born because of this action.

The greatest destroyer of peace is abortion because if a mother can kill her own child, what is left for me to kill you and you to kill me? There is nothing between.

*St. Teresa of Calcutta*

### Are you interested in getting involved with the pro-life movement?

As Our Lord says, "The harvest is abundant, but the laborers are few" (Mt 9:37). We need you and your unique gifts to save the preborn.

The South Carolina Catholic Conference and the Diocese of Charleston are dedicated to caring for the unborn and their moms. Please visit [www.bornforthis.life](http://www.bornforthis.life) or scan the QR code below for pro-life resources and connect with us!



# EDUCATION & SCHOOL CHOICE

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## *Promoting Freedom to Choose in Education*

In May 2023, Gov. Henry McMaster signed into law the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) Act (S. 39). This program is like others across the country that provide scholarships to families, allowing parents to cover the costs of the education they want for their children. It includes private school tuition and fees, textbooks and supplies, tutors and many other services and tools that are approved by the state's Department of Education. The scholarship is \$6,000 per year.

Parents are the primary educators of their children. As such, they must have the power to allocate funding, which is already set aside for their child's education, for whatever type of schooling that best fits the needs of their unique child. In fact, the funds from the ESTF can even be used for private tutors and occupational therapists. Currently, the program is open to families that have a household income of less than

200% of the federal poverty line. In 2025, that will increase to 300% and in 2026 to 400%.

Catholic Conference director, Michael F. Aquilano, said in a statement that, "The Catholic Church has always taught that parents have the right and responsibility to serve as the first and primary educators of their children. The Church has advanced parental choice as a fundamental part of its mission in written word and lived witness. Quality and equal educational opportunities are the birthright of every child, no matter their race, religion, zip code or socioeconomic status."

During the second half of the legislative session, Chairwoman Shannon Erickson sponsored H. 5164 which if passed, will make all South Carolina families eligible for the program, regardless of socioeconomic status. The bill passed the House of

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## H. 4023

### *First Steps*

Restructures First Steps - free private 4K program - to increase access for more communities.

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## H. 3360

### *Center for School Safety and Targeted Violence*

Establishes a division within the S.C. Law Enforcement Division to train law enforcement, teachers, administrators, school personnel and parents on school safety to identify and prevent future threats.

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## S. 39

### *Educational Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF)*

Gives qualifying families appropriate funding to select the best institution of learning for their child's individual needs (See the right panel for more information).

Representatives but failed the move in the Senate. The Catholic Conference hopes the bill will become the law of the land in the near future.

## SCHOOL SAFETY

Another bill passed this session is the Center for School Safety and Targeted Violence Act (H. 3360). Sponsored by Speaker Pro Tempore Tommy Pope This law will establish a new group within the S.C. Law Enforcement Division (SLED) to provide extensive training, education and expertise in school safety. Law enforcement, teachers, administrators, bus drivers and other school staff should be equipped with the knowledge they need to avoid and de-escalate violence in schools if we are to make our schools safer for our children.

## FIRST STEPS

The governor signed H. 4023 into law in June 2023. The bill, sponsored by Rep. Stewart Jones, restructures the *First Steps* program in South Carolina so that it can be accessible to more families.

*First Steps* is a kindergarten program that aims to improve student school-readiness. The first few years of a child's life are vital when it comes to academic development. Young children will be set up to succeed later in life when we ensure they get the academic support they need in these early years.



# EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP TRUST FUND (ESTF) APPLICATION DATA

The applications for the Education Scholarship Trust Fund (ESTF) are now closed. Despite the strict eligibility requirements for applicants in this first year, the state Dept. of Education received enthusiastic interest from South Carolina families with over 7,900 applications. Eligible applicants for 2024-2025 must have either attended a public school the prior year or be entering kindergarten this coming year. They must also have a household income at or below 200% of the federal poverty guideline.

According to Palmetto Promise Institute, applications came from all 46 counties in South Carolina. Families of all races, ethnicities, grade levels and economic groups applied for this program. Additionally, 5,900 applications

were from Medicaid-eligible families and 602 from military families. It is overwhelmingly clear that parents in South Carolina from many backgrounds want to be able to direct the education of their children toward the type of school that best suits their individual needs.

The South Carolina Catholic Conference is delighted that so many families are taking ownership of their children's education.

**Need more information about the ESTF program?**  
SCAN THE QR CODE!



# UPHOLDING HUMAN DIGNITY

*Legislative action to protect the human person,  
created in God's image and likeness*

## Protecting Minors from Gender Procedures and Medications

Over the past few years, we have witnessed a global spike in teenagers and young children identifying as transgender, meaning they believe that their gender identity does not match their sex. This self-identification, if persistent, is called gender dysphoria. Gender dysphoria is defined as “a marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and natal gender” (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5*).

People who suffer from gender dysphoria deserve our utmost love and respect. We must continue to support them because of the inherent dignity bestowed on them by a loving God, who made all humanity in his image and likeness.

Attempting to change one’s sex does not ease these sufferings. Children and teens are

undergoing procedures even as debate continues on the ethics of sex-change procedures and medications as a course of treatment. Minors with gender dysphoria are given drugs to stop them from going through puberty, a natural and healthy process.

In 2023, S. 627 was introduced in the Senate by Sens. Danny Verdin and Richard Cash to prohibit minors from receiving gender procedures or medications such as puberty blockers or cross-sex hormones. The bill was stalled in Senate Medical Affairs and did not make it to the Senate floor.

H. 4624, also known as the “Help, Not Harm bill,” was pre-filed in November 2023 in the House by Rep. David Hiott. Similarly to the Senate legislation, this bill would stop minors in South Carolina from receiving “gender-affirming care,” such as puberty blocking drugs or cross-sex hormones.

The bill passed the House by 82-23 and moved to the Senate. Public testimony was heard, and the bill was debated extensively by the Senate Medical Affairs committee before being found favorable. “Help, Not Harm” moved to the Senate floor, where it was contested but quickly moved for special order. The bill was finally passed in the Senate by 28-8 on May 2, 2024. The House concurred with the Senate’s amendments and sent the bill to Gov. McMaster for signature. It was signed into law May 21.

This bill’s passage means that minors will be allowed to grow and develop the way that God intended and designed. The Catholic Conference thanks state lawmakers for the passage of this important legislation and the governor for his support in this issue.





## Protecting Children Online and Taking on Digital Pornography

The internet, smartphones and portable devices have meant that pornography is easier to access than ever before. It's progression is always to become darker and more violent. The average age that a child is exposed to pornographic material is now just 11 years old.

According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "Pornography consists in removing real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties ... it does grave injury to the dignity of its participants (actors, venders, the public), since each one becomes an object of base pleasure and illicit profit for others" (2354).

Pornography has disastrous consequences on the mind, body and soul. It is a leading factor in divorces, destroys relationships and marriages, easily becomes an addiction, and it extinguishes motivation, self-esteem and actual connection to others. Furthermore, it constitutes people using each other as objects, contributes to sex trafficking, child exploitation, violence and other human abuses. When children are exposed, the consequences are even more acute. These images affect them mentally by altering the

structure and development of their brains, damaging the prefrontal cortex. Pornography robs children of their childhood, and they are regularly and quickly exposed without them needing to seek the content.

The Age Verification Act (H. 3424) was introduced by Rep. Travis Moore, and it requires online sites that host sexually explicit material to verify the age of their patrons. The bill passed the House on Feb. 1 by a vote of 113-1, then passed the Senate without opposition on May 8. The governor signed the bill into law on May 21.

Companies must ensure the use of effective verification tools to avoid lawsuits. While the bill does not protect people from pornography and its grave psychological and spiritual harms, it is a much-needed action. The innocence of many children will be protected because of its passage.

“Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.

*Matthew 18:6*

# PROMOTING THE FAMILY

## *In Defense of Society's Most Basic Unit, the Domestic Church*

The most fundamental unit of society is the family. No other institution precedes it. The *Catechism* states, "It is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life. Authority, stability, and a life of relationships within the family constitute the foundations for freedom, security, and fraternity within society" (2207).

### **CULTURE OF LIFE IN THE WORKPLACE**

Thanks to the efforts of Rep. Neal Collins and others, paid family leave is available to all eligible school district employees, as of May 12, 2023. The Paid Family Leave Act (H. 3908) provides six weeks of paid family leave for public school teachers and other school district employees.

St. John Paul II said we are called to live in radical solidarity with mothers and their babies, and this means promoting a culture of life in the workplace. We begin to build up a culture that values and respects motherhood and the sacredness of new human life by making it possible for working women to take family leave to care for their infants.

### **ADOPTION: ACTING IN LOVE**

Pope Francis said in *Amoris Laetitia* (Joy of Love) that adopting a child is "an act of love, offering the gift of a family to someone who has none." When a couple accepts a child into their home, they give that child a place to grow in love and wholeness.

South Carolina's adoption laws can be difficult to navigate. However, the Adoption Reform bill (H. 3553), sponsored by Speaker Murrell Smith Jr., was passed in May 2023 and signed into law May 19, 2023. It cuts bureaucratic red tape and eliminates the 90-day waiting period to finalize adoptions. This legislation will make it easier for couples to choose adoption to grow their family and to help children in need.

As the family goes, so goes the nation and so goes the whole world in which we live.

*St. John Paul II*







# POOR & VULNERABLE

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## *Protection of the “least of these brothers of mine”*

The *Catechism* teaches, “The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God” (CCC 2447).

It is a key priority of the Catholic Conference to protect the poor and vulnerable in South Carolina because of the Lord’s command to love our neighbor as ourselves and to love others in charity. This session, numerous actions were taken in the legislature to protect those in poverty and those who have been victimized by others.

## **BRINGING HEALTHCARE TO RURAL S.C.**

S. 164, State Health Facility Licensure Act, repeals the state’s “Certificate of Need” law that monopolized the hospital system and made it challenging for new healthcare providers to come into the state. The previous law meant people in rural areas had difficulty finding providers, with many having to travel long distances to reach a primary care physician or a hospital.

Breaking up this monopoly allows healthcare providers and hospitals to establish locations across the state and serve areas where they are needed most.

## **OFFERING A HELPING HAND TO DEFEAT THE DRUG EPIDEMIC**

Many states are facing drug epidemics, and South Carolina is no exception. The Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) reported that opioid-related overdose fatalities skyrocketed 59% from 2019 to 2020. Drug addiction enslaves human beings. All people must break free of the chains of addiction to be truly free and become who God wants them to be. The sad reality is that illegal drugs are flowing through our state and nation in unprecedented quantities. South Carolina took action to increase penalties for drug trafficking (*See page 19*) and needed to provide support to those in recovery.



# ENDING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN SC

S. 445, Recovery Housing, will establish housing specifically for people working to overcome addictions so they may find the stability and support they need to regain their freedom.

## GETTING AHEAD & NEXT LEVEL SERVICES

U.S. Census data found that the national poverty rate was 11.5% (in 2022). According to U.S. News, the poverty rate in South Carolina is 14.6%, landing our state in the top 10 of poverty-rated states.

Catholic Charities of South Carolina (CCSC) has taken action to address these needs. *Getting Ahead* is an intensive course that teaches networking, community building, financial literacy and other essential skills. It fights against the financial, psychological and social causes and ramifications of poverty. The program is for people who are working to break the cycle of generational poverty and homelessness.

The *Next Level Services* program, like *Getting Ahead*, assists individuals who are ready to leave homelessness and poverty. It helps clients access critical documents, safe housing, benefits, legal advice and support, transportation, financial literacy classes and to open bank accounts.

These CCSC programs benefit South Carolina by offering a way to end poverty cycles for citizens. Clients are often single mothers, recipients of public assistance, unemployed, homeless or belong to several of these categories.

The state General Assembly allocated funding to *Getting Ahead* and *Next Level Services* so they can help more people to improve their lives.

“Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

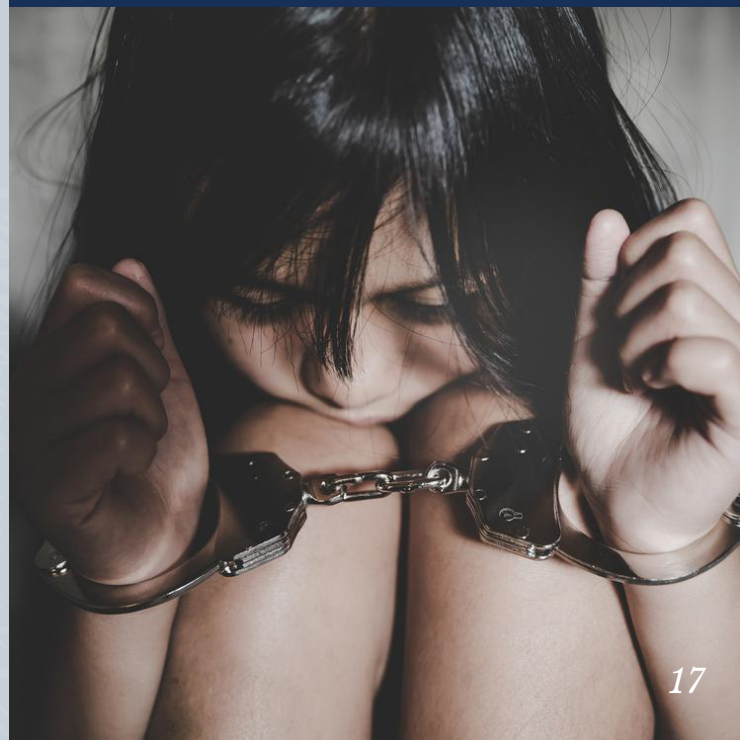
*Matthew 25:40*

S. 142, also known as the "Safe Harbor for Exploited Minors" bill, prevents victims of sex or human trafficking from being prosecuted for petty crimes committed while being trafficked. Victims often fear to report their abuse because of some crime they were forced to commit by their traffickers. Safe Harbor allows victims an affirmative defense and expungement of the records of abused minors.

This law will empower those who have been trafficked as children to come forward without fear of retribution for offenses and would bring survivors one step closer to regaining their freedom.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Christ warns, "See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven always look upon the face of my heavenly Father" (Mt 18:10).

We have a duty to protect the innocent children of our state from the horrors of trafficking and we must help victims to regain their freedom if it has been stolen.





# CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

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## *For Justice for All*

The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church* states, “In order to protect the common good, the lawful public authority must exercise the right and the duty to inflict punishments according to the seriousness of the crimes committed. The State has the twofold responsibility to discourage behavior that is harmful to human rights and the fundamental norms of civil life, and to repair, through the penal system, the disorder created by criminal activity” (402).

The state has a responsibility to protect citizens in a just way that upholds the common good.

### **A FRESH START**

It can be challenging to find a job after serving a prison sentence. A criminal record follows a person into every job interview. However, it is important that after a sentence has been served, a man or woman can begin to rebuild a better life. Finding meaningful work is necessary for all people because by work, we provide for ourselves temporally and spiritually.

Occupational licensing requirements were an unfortunate barrier for many people. The legislature made a stand for these individuals by passing the Earn and Learn Act of 2023 (H. 3605), sponsored by Speaker Murrell Smith Jr.

The bill makes it possible for those who have been through the justice system to emerge with a chance to find employment. The Catholic Conference commends the legislature for offering this second chance for our fellow South Carolinians who have paid the consequences for their mistakes.

As St. Paul says, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do" (Col 3:12-13).

### **FACING THE FENTANYL CRISIS**

According to a 2023 report from the S.C. DHEC, there has been a dramatic increase in drug overdose deaths over the last few years. The report states that from 2020 to 2021, the total number of drug overdose deaths in South Carolina increased by more than 25%.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* makes it clear that the "production of and trafficking in drugs ... constitutes direct cooperation in evil, since they encourage people to practices gravely contrary to the moral law" (2291).

Two laws were passed this year to address the crisis, Trafficking in Fentanyl (H. 3503), sponsored by Rep. Doug Gilliam, and Xylazine (H. 4617), sponsored by Rep. Sylleste Davis.

H. 3503 raises the penalties for trafficking fentanyl to deter this behavior more effectively and protect human life. Similarly, H. 4617 criminalizes the production, distribution and possession of the drug and adds it to the list of Schedule III drugs.

This compound is often found in the illegal drug supply and can cause an overdose when used with things like fentanyl. Xylazine is exacerbating the opioid crisis, and criminalizing the trafficking of it is an important step to protecting South Carolina citizens.

Our laws must punish those who recklessly put other's lives at risk for personal or financial gain, such as drug traffickers and manufacturers. The Catholic Conference commends lawmakers for their efforts to make South Carolina a safer place to live, work and worship God.



# 2025-2026 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

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## 01

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### Protection of Human Life

The most fundamental of all human rights is the right to life. Without life, no other rights exist. Therefore, our first priority is to protect human life from the moment of conception to natural death.

## 02

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### Human Dignity

We will advocate for the human person made in the image and likeness of God. The dignity of the human person is under attack by the accessibility of "sex-change" surgeries and hormonal regimens. In addition, the availability of pornographic material and usage is in direct opposition to our being made in the image and likeness of God.

## 03

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### Education

Parents are the primary caregivers of their children. As such, they should be empowered to guide and choose their children's education. The Catholic Conference is committed to promoting the teaching of truth, beauty and goodness in our schools.

## 04

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### Pro-Family

The family is the most basic unit of society. We will continue to advocate for the preservation of the institution of marriage, which is between a man and a woman for the creation and education of children. It will also advocate for parental rights to be defended so that parents will be empowered to make decisions for their families.

## 05

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### Immigration

The Catholic Conference is committed to ensuring that all people are treated as the children of God that they are, regardless of citizenship. Since we are all made in the image and likeness of God, it is essential that our society treat every human person with dignity and respect for the sake of the Father.

## 06

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### Poor & Vulnerable

We will continue to work to protect the vulnerable and impoverished by fighting against human trafficking, predatory lending, and for the expansion of social services that aid underserved people and communities.



*Connect  
with the*



SOUTH CAROLINA  
**CATHOLIC  
CONFERENCE**



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