



Washington State Catholic Conference

The Public Policy Voice of the Bishops of Washington State

WSCC Newsletter for Catholic Schools

Spring 2024

As the public policy voice of the five bishops of Washington state, the Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) advocates for policies that serve the common good and recognize the dignity of every human person. Our advocacy is guided by Catholic Social Teaching, and supporting Catholic schools and education is a key goal of our mission.

State Legislative Session Concludes

The 2024 state legislative session began on January 8 and came to a close on March 7. During the session the WSCC advocated for Catholic schools and monitored education-related bills. Thank you to advocates who took action by reading our [Catholic Advocacy Bulletin](#) and responding to action alerts. Catholic schools are one of the [WSCC's legislative priorities](#), alongside other priorities related to Catholic Social Teaching.



Click on links below for more detail on bills the WSCC worked on this session:

- [Bills the WSCC advocated for/against that were passed by the Legislature](#)
- A more expansive list of [bills the WSCC took a position on](#)
- [Bill descriptions](#) of legislation the WSCC supported or opposed that made significant movement during the session

Bill Spotlights: Legislation Impacting Catholic Schools

- [Senate Bill 5180](#) (SB 5180) **Licensure and Employment of Out-of-State Teachers** **PASSED** – This bill establishes a compact that will create a streamlined pathway for out-of-state teachers to be licensed in Washington. The WSCC supported SB 5180, as it may make it easier to hire qualified teachers for Catholic Schools.
- [House Bill 1377](#) (HB 1377) **Posting of Approved Courses and Providers of Continuing Education** **PASSED** – Administrators and teachers must obtain specified training hours for continuing education. In addition to the entities already authorized in statute to provide

continuing education for administrators and teachers focused on equity-based school practice and the National Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL), HB 1377 allows the Professional Education Standards Board to approve other providers to offer this continuing education. Increasing providers is advantageous to Catholic schools because it broadens who can provide training. The WSCC supported HB 1377.

- In addition to the bills above, the WSCC monitored these [education-related bills](#) during the legislative session. For some of these bills, the WSCC submitted written testimony to legislators, pointing out the need to include Catholic and private schools, or using the bill as a vehicle for advocating for Catholic schools.

Initiative 2081 Passed Into Law

[Initiative 2081](#) is an example of the intersection of education and Catholic Social Teaching. Pertaining to public schools, I-2081 names parents as the primary stakeholders in their children's upbringing, as is consistent with Catholic teaching. It also reiterates or establishes numerous parents' rights within the public school system. The full text of the law may be found [here](#).

I-2081 was passed into law via the initiative process. Over 450,000 signatures were collected in support of I-2081. At the end of the legislative session, the House and Senate passed the initiative into law, effective June 5, 2024. An initiative does not require the signature of the governor to be enacted into law.



Highlights of Additional Legislative Priorities

In addition to advocating for Catholic schools, the WSCC has a number of other [legislative priorities](#) that also promote Catholic Social Teaching. Below are examples of other legislative priorities or bills the WSCC worked on.

- **Religious Liberty** - The WSCC worked to **protect both children and the seal of the confessional**. In its original form, [SB 6298](#) would have made priests mandatory reporters of child abuse and neglect, with the exception of when information was obtained solely during the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This bill ultimately did not pass, as the House committee that heard the bill preferred to remove the clergy penitent privilege entirely. A version of this bill is expected to be introduced in the 2025 session, which will begin in January. Join us in advocating to protect children and the Sacrament of Reconciliation.
- **Health Care** – The WSCC supported [SB 5580](#), **improving maternal health outcomes**. This bill was signed into law and will increase eligibility for Apple Health, the state's Medicaid program. SB 5580 also directs the Health Care Authority (HCA) to create a post-delivery and transitional care program for people with substance use disorder at the time of delivery to allow for extended post-delivery hospital care. Additionally, the Maternity Support Services (MSS) program will be updated to address perinatal outcomes and increase equity and

healthier birth outcomes. SB 5280 is in line with the bishops' health care, respect life, and children/families legislative priorities.

- **Care for Creation** – The WSCC supported [HB 1368](#), **zero emission school buses**. With the passage of this bill, the Department of Ecology will administer a zero-emission school bus grant program for public schools and prioritize grants to overburdened communities and school districts with buses manufactured prior to 2007. Forty million dollars have been designated in the state budget for these grants. Additionally, the bill also calls for a survey of public school districts regarding the adoption of zero emission buses. With a statewide fleet of 10,000 buses, moving toward electric school buses will reduce pollution and adverse health effects resulting from diesel buses. HB 1368 is in line with the bishops' legislative priority to care for God's creation.



- **Children and Families/Affordable Housing** – The WSCC supported [SB 5908](#), which will **improve the extended foster care program**. Youth who age out of the foster system face substantial challenges. The extended foster care program for youth ages 18-21 has proven impactful: 41% of youth who age out of the foster care system at age 18 experience homelessness or housing instability, compared to only 23% of those using the extended foster care program. SB 5908 improves the extended foster care program by allowing youth to enter or exit the program at any time when they are aged 18-21, increasing awareness of the program among foster youth, improving eligibility, and creating a housing and maintenance subsidy for participants. This bill aligns with the bishops' children/families and affordable housing/homelessness legislative priorities.



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