



Pennsylvania Council of Churches

Legislative Priorities 2013-2014 Legislative Session

November 2012

The following 2013-2014 Legislative Priorities have been established by the Council's Commission on Public Witness (CPW), guided by the Council's *Principles for Public Advocacy*. In establishing these priorities, the CPW considered: (1) the issues that have traditionally been important for Council advocacy; (2) issues that have dominated our state and national policy agenda that are in need of significant change in order to truly benefit the common good; and (3) staff time and resources available to carry out the work. While only two broad issues are named as priorities for the 2013-2014 session, there is significant latitude for some level of work on issues that are addressed in the *Principles for Public Advocacy* on an as-needed basis. See appendix A to read about other issues that may be addressed based on determination of the need to respond.

To learn more about the Council's vision with respect public witness, please view the *Principles for Public Advocacy* (adopted 10/23/12) at http://www.pachurchesadvocacy.org/index_files/web_attachments/Principles.pdf.

1. Human Needs*

In order to promote a vision of a society where everyone respects the dignity of their fellow human beings, regardless of any demographic characteristics that might apply, the Council will work to support legislation and policies that ensure access to income security, safe and adequate shelter, nutrition, health care, and education for all persons, with an emphasis on the most vulnerable. Areas that may be addressed include:

- Employment and living wages
- Housing
- Hunger
- Health care
- Equitable/adequate education
- Legislation/policies with the potential for harming low income/poor persons and families

Advocacy efforts will be undertaken most often in coordination with other faith advocacy organizations, the Coalition for Low Income Pennsylvanians (CLIP) and related organizations at the state level, and the Coalition on Human Needs, Half in Ten and related organizations at the federal level. Efforts will also be made to renew promoting the Council's poverty study guide for use in congregations.

2. Environment*

Given our belief that we are called to be faithful stewards of God's creation, the Council will use sustainability—the capacity to endure—as a measure in supporting legislation and policies that protect God's creation. Areas that may be addressed include:

- Climate change/global warming
- Oil/gas drilling
- Clean water
- Toxic materials

Most environmental advocacy efforts will be undertaken in coordination with organizations such as PennFuture at the state level, and the National Council of Churches Eco-Justice Program at the national level.

*Bulleted are provided as examples of issues that may be addressed. Actual education and advocacy actions will be dictated by advocacy campaigns on important issues (proactive), and proposed legislation and policies (reactive).

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Appendix A: Pennsylvania Council of Churches 2013-2014 Legislative Priorities

These issues are expected to be addressed in the 2013-2014 session. While of interest to the Council and addressed in the Council's *Principles for Public Advocacy*, as second tier issues, they will be addressed **on an as-needed basis**, mostly supporting the first tier efforts of other groups. Available time and resources and/or anticipation of legislative activity that could result in severe or significant negative impacts to vulnerable populations will dictate actual levels of effort.

Included under each issue are possible areas of concern based on experience in previous sessions.

1. Public Education¹

Continuing injustices in our public education system; school taxation issues; diversion of public money to the detriment of public schools.

2. Economic Justice²

Minimum/living wages at the federal and state levels; tax policy; Social Security.

3. Immigration³

Comprehensive and compassionate immigration reform that includes: paths to permanent residency and citizenship; compassionate policies to reduce waiting times and keep families united; just, legal avenues for immigrant workers; protection of rights for all immigrants, regardless of status; humane border protection policies.

4. Torture and Hate Crimes⁴

Investigations into past torture policies and practices and for holding violators accountable for their actions; U.S. participation in international agreements concerning torture; humane treatment of inmates in U.S. prisons, particularly with regard to use of long-term solitary confinement.

5. Government Reform/Accountability⁵

The outsized role of money in our political system; government activity and funding transparency; protecting access to and the integrity of the vote; competitive elections.

6. Criminal Justice⁶

Use of the death penalty in Pennsylvania; racially/ethnically biased and other wrongful incarceration; "second chance" legislation protecting released prisoners; treatment of child and youth offenders.

7. Peacemaking and Global Security⁷

Strengthening U.S. investments in the non-military tools of global development and diplomacy.

8. Gun Violence⁸

Reporting of lost and stolen handguns; reducing "straw purchase" of handguns for illegal distribution

9. Responsibility of Christians in the Public Arena

Continued education concerning responsibility to engage in non-partisan public advocacy efforts⁹

¹ Organizations the Council works with in partnership include, but are not limited to, the following: the Education Policy and Leadership Center and the Education Law Project.

² Organizations the Council works with in partnership include, but are not limited to, the following: Pennsylvania Budget and Policy Center, Coalition on Human Needs, Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign.

³ Organizations the Council works with in partnership include, but are not limited to, the Pennsylvania Immigration and Citizenship Coalition, the Interfaith Justice Coalition, and Church World Service.

⁴ Organizations the Council works with in partnership include, but are not limited to, the National Religious Campaign Against Torture; for hate crimes, the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission.

⁵ Organizations the Council works with in partnership include, but are not limited to, the following: the League of Women Voters, Common Cause, Democracy Rising PA.

⁶ Organizations the Council works with in partnership include, but are not limited to, the following: the Pennsylvanians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty, the American Civil Liberties Union-PA.

⁷ The Council partners with the Center for U.S. Global Engagement on this issue.

⁸ The Council partners with Heeding God's Call and Cease Fire PA on this issue.

⁹ This is an effort to help the Council's constituents (at the judicatory level and in congregations) to understand the critical role they play in the Council's advocacy efforts, and to encourage greater direct participation in advocacy efforts.