

2009 Legislature Advocacy Agenda Summary

The New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops is the association of three Catholic dioceses of the State of New Mexico. The Conference includes the three Catholic bishops of New Mexico: Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan of the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez of the Diocese of Las Cruces, and Bishop Thomas Olmsted of the Diocese of Gallup with Allen Sanchez as the Director of the Conference and Deacon Steve Rangel as the Associate Director. The Conference is the public policy voice of the Catholic Bishops of New Mexico.

One of the major functions of the New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops is to review, discuss, and make recommendations concerning legislative bills that are being presented and considered during the legislative sessions held every year in Santa Fe. The Conference informs and educates the public and legislators about what the Catholic Church teaches on the moral and social justice issues facing the state and to encourage Catholic citizens to advocate for those issues.

New Mexico's 60 day legislative session begins January 20, 2009 and runs through March 21, 2009. Although there are numerous bills introduced each year, the Bishops will address a particular group of bills that are of great ethical concern and urgency. We invite you to join us as Catholic citizens to become informed about the issues and to make "our voices" heard as well as the voices of those who can't speak for themselves. Please write, call or visit your State senators and representatives and participate in the legislative process. Information about who your legislators are, how to contact them, which bills are being considered, and bill numbers can be found on the website of the New Mexico State Legislature at <http://legis.state.nm.us/lcs/>

You may also tune into Archbishop's Hour on Catholic Radio during the legislative session for daily updates from Allen Sanchez at the Roundhouse, or visit the Archbishop's page on the Archdiocese of Santa Fe web site for the latest updates, sample letters to legislators, etc: <http://archdiocesasantafe.org/ABSheehan/Bishops/AboutConf.html>

Proposed legislation that is SUPPORTED by the Bishops:

- ✓ Parental Notification for a minor to have an abortion (SB 121)
 - This bill would require anyone performing an abortion on a minor to notify her parent/guardian of her intention to have an abortion.
- ✓ Repeal of the Death Penalty and replace it with life in prison without parole and support of victim's families (HB 284 and HB 285)
- ✓ Sunset exemptions for minimum wage
 - The law today allows numerous industries not to be obligated to pay minimum wage. This bill would allow these exemptions to end.
- ✓ Increase eligibility (funding and access) for food stamps
- ✓ Increase eligibility (funding and access) for Medicaid (HB 222)
- ✓ Create a cap on new public school size
 - New Mexico has a dismal 48% High School drop out rate. Because of the urgent need to address this problem, a dramatic shift and change is needed in public school educational structure. Smaller schools help retain and support students.
- ✓ Tuition scholarship tax credit for poor children.
 - More school choice will create greater opportunities for parents and children. Taxpayers may claim a tax credit on contributions made to an accredited non-governmental school if funds are used to provide educational scholarships or grants to one or more students.
- ✓ Require workers compensation for farm workers (SB 9)
 - Recognizing the dignity of work and the rights of workers, all workers deserve financial and health security in their work.
- ✓ Creation of a Health Care Authority to address health care issues (HB 267)
 - The first step necessary in any health care reform is the creation of an independent authority that will address insurance coverage, access to services and cost of health care.
- ✓ Reform the TIDD law (Tax Increment Development District)

- This reform would stop the diversion of tax dollars to pay development costs for speculative real estate
- ✓ Joint Memorial that calls for a stop to anti-immigrant activities
- ✓ Support campaign finance reforms

Proposed legislation that is OPPOSED by the Bishops:

- ✓ State funding of Embryonic Stem Cell research (SB77)
 - The use of State monies to fund embryonic stem cell research that requires the killing of a human embryo is morally wrong. The Church rejects the killing of embryos for the harvesting of stem cells. There are many other sources for stem cells that do not take human life. Adult stem cells have been successfully used to treat a number of illnesses without taking human life.
- ✓ Freedom of Choice Act (state introduced legislation)
 - As in the Federal version of this legislation, FOCA at the state level would remove all state imposed limits to abortion.
- ✓ Domestic Partnership (SB 12 and HB 21)
 - With recent court rulings, ANY legal instrument that grants spousal rights is interpreted by the court as marriage.