



Department of Social Concerns Update for the Week of June 5, 2017

Reminder:

Our next Social Concerns Department Meeting is on June 29, 2017 at the Harrisburg Diocesan Office. Our meeting packet is being finalized and will be sent out in the very near future. The Catholic Charities Directors will again have an opportunity to meet the day before the full Department meeting on June 28, 2017 at 5:00 p.m. After the meeting, as is customary, everyone will have the opportunity to gather together for dinner. Any questions, just give me a shout.

Legislative Overview:

It was a busy session week with the Senate coming in for an unusual Sunday evening session and the House coming in Monday through Thursday. The hot topics this week were pension reform and gaming expansion.

The pension bill, **SB 1** by Senator Jake Corman (R-Centre), is now on its way to the Governor where we expect it to be signed into law early next week. It contains three different options including two side-by-side hybrid defined benefit-defined contribution plans and a straight defined contribution plan for employees beginning in 2019.

The House also passed a greatly expanded gaming bill on Wednesday. It includes legalization of video gaming terminals, iGaming, fantasy sports regulation, airport gaming tablets, legalized sports betting, off track betting slots, and casino simulcasting. It is now in the Senate where it will likely face opposition.

Next week we should receive the latest financial report on state revenues and discussions on the budget will begin to take center stage.

Update on Key Legislative Issues:

Drug and Alcohol Recovery Houses

Two bills seeking to license drug and alcohol recovery houses saw action this week. **SB 446** by Senator Thomas McGarrigle (R-Delaware) was reported out of Senate Urban Affairs with an amendment giving providers 180 days to comply with new regulations. It next went through first consideration on the Senate floor on Monday. **HB 119**, by Rep. Aaron Kaufer (R-Luzerne), passed the House unanimously on Wednesday.

Poverty

Rep. Tarah Toohil's (R-Luzerne) bill relating to distribution of SNAP benefits (**HB 877**) passed through second consideration in the House this week with one amendment and is now in House Appropriations. The amendment gives the department six months to develop a plan for distribution of benefits on a 25 day schedule but also allows for a tiered distribution schedule to deter hardships.

Meanwhile, the bill by Rep. Rich Irvin (R-Huntingdon) to extend CHIP through the end of 2019, **HB 1388**, unanimously passed the House on Wednesday.

Safe Harbor

As expected, Rep. Joseph Petrarca, (D-Westmoreland) who is Minority Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, issued a co-sponsor memo, **HCO 2192**, soliciting support for a safe harbor bill that redirects child victims of human trafficking from the criminal justice system to child protective services. Senator Greenleaf's (R-Montgomery) safe harbor bill (**SB 554**) is currently stuck in the House Judiciary Committee.

Budget

Auditor General Eugene DePasquale and Treasurer Joe Torsella gave more bad news on the budget this week. On Wednesday, both warned the General Assembly that absent significant reform, borrowing from the treasury to ensure the General Fund does not fall into a negative balance may not be possible. They worried that "next fiscal year's borrowing needs may exceed the fund's lending capacity and compel the Commonwealth to seek more-costly public market alternatives as early as July or August 2017."

Over the last several fiscal years, the state has become increasingly reliant on borrowing from the Treasury's long-term investment fund to ensure the General Fund does not fall into a negative balance. For the current fiscal year, the Treasury extended the General Fund a \$2.5 billion credit line at a 0.75 percent interest rate that was utilized several times throughout the fiscal year to pay for General Fund obligations when revenues did not come in at the pace needed to meet expenditures.

Legislators are working to finalize this year's budget with an anticipated deficit of around \$3 billion and close the balance on the current fiscal year's spending plan, which has a deficit of around \$1 billion.

Immigration

Rep. Doyle Heffley's (R-Carbon) **HB 1095** passed out of the House State Government on Wednesday, went through first consideration, and is now in House Rules. It requires proof of lawful presence in the U.S. as a prerequisite for public benefits. Last session we took an Oppose C – position on similar legislation.

HB 28 by Rep. Martina White (R-Philadelphia) has been scheduled for a meeting in House State Government on June 13, 2017. This sanctuary municipality bill states a municipality could be liable for damages resulting from criminal activity committed by an unauthorized alien. While the Department did not take a position on similar legislation last session, this bill is seen by many as a preferred solution to **SB 10** by Senator Guy Reschenthaler (R-Allegheny). SB 10 would halt state funding to sanctuary municipalities and, if passed, could result in the loss of state funds for some Catholic Charities.

Health Care

Rep. Stephen Bloom's (R-Cumberland) **HB 211**, which creates a grant program to fund a statewide 2-1-1 system to deliver health and human service information, passed the House 193-2.

There are two concerns with this bill: 1) the requirement that Catholic Charities market the 2-1-1 service could indirectly promote services that conflict with the teachings of the Church; and 2) the "conscience protection" language does not appear to adequately protect Catholic Charities from the nondiscrimination prohibition provision of the Master Agreement.

Politics

Word is that Senator Daylin Leach (D-Delaware) will make an announcement on July 6th on whether he plans to run for the U.S. Congressional seat held by Congressman Pat Meehan (R-Delaware). Senator Leach has authored multiple bills this session that we are following including **SB 238** (assisted suicide) and **SB 703** (abolishment of the death penalty).

Pro Life

We witnessed a mixed week on the pro-life front. After receiving a letter from Senators Joe Scarnati (R-Jefferson), Bob Mensch (R-Montgomery) and John DiSanto (R-Dauphin) the Department of Health revoked the license for Hillcrest Abortion clinic in Harrisburg. They have been cited for numerous violations in the past.

Later that day we received word that Planned Parenthood and AccessMatters is pushing to run what amounts to a clinic in the Reading high school to provide contraceptives AND abortion referrals for the students there. The schoolboard is scheduled to vote on this issue June 28, 2017. We are actively working this issue now for fear that if successful; it could be a model they attempt to impose elsewhere.