

Colorado Catholic Conference 2022 Legislative Recap

On May 11, 2022, 73rd General Assembly adjourned. Over 650 bills were introduced this session, many bills upheld Catholic social teaching by protecting the most vulnerable members of our community and ensuring nonprofits, such as the Catholic Church, have resources to stop hate crimes, while other bills violated Church teaching by disregarding the sanctity of human life and encroaching on religious liberty.

The Colorado Catholic Conference (CCC), as the united voice of the four Colorado bishops, advocated for Catholic values at the State Capitol and ensured that the Church's voice was heard in the shaping of policy.

The 2022 Reproductive Health Equity Act (RHEA) was introduced in the Colorado General Assembly on March 3, 2022 and signed into law by Governor Jared Polis on April 4. The bill was rushed through the legislative process in order to suppress the voices of millions of Coloradans. Yet, within three weeks, nearly 600 Coloradans came to the hearing to testify against the bill, pro-life lawmakers filibustered in both houses, and nearly one thousand Coloradans rallied against the bill on the steps of the Capitol on March 12.

The Reproductive Health Equity Act (RHEA) was passed and enacted to ensure that Colorado remains an extreme abortion state, even if *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* (1992) are overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health*, anticipated for the end of June 2022. RHEA:

- Allows on-demand abortion for the full 40 weeks of pregnancy;
- Discriminates based on sex, race, or disability;
- Could remove of the parent notification requirement if their minor has an abortion;
- Enshrines in law that "a fertilized egg, embryo, or fetus does not have independent or derivative rights under" state law;
- Prohibits regulation of abortion based on the health of the woman or her baby.

Pro-abortion sponsors of RHEA also plan to push a [2024 ballot proposal that would allow Colorado tax-payer dollars to fund abortions](#) in an effort to make Colorado a "safe haven" for abortion for out-of-state women living in states that protect life.

In response to RHEA, 21 pro-life non-profits, including the Colorado Catholic Conference and diocesan Respect Life offices, joined together as the [Pro-Life Colorado coalition](#) to continue to fight RHEA, prepare for the 2024 ballot battle, and promote legislation that values the sanctity of life.

Although RHEA was by far the most important and disappointing legislation this session, the General Assembly also considered bills that were consistent with Catholic social teaching, including bills on public safety, affordable housing, and providing economic relief to Coloradans. Below is a recap of the CCC's 18 priority bills from the 2022 legislative session.

For regular updates and other information, please sign-up for the CCC legislative network [here](#).

Nine Bills the CCC Supported That Were Either Passed or Enacted

Note: Passed means the bill was approved by both chambers of the legislature and is pending the governor's signature as of May 17, 2022. Enacted means the bill was signed by the governor and became law.

1. HB22-1077 Colorado Nonprofit Security Grant Program – Passed

If enacted, the Colorado Nonprofit Security Grant Program will provide monetary support to religious and charitable organizations that are facing threats of violence and vandalism to increase their security infrastructure.

2. HB22-1083 Colorado Homeless Contribution Tax Credit – Passed

If enacted, this bill will expand a tax credit available for contributions to organizations that serve the population of individuals experiencing homelessness. This will assist these organizations, which include Catholic Charities in all three dioceses, with carrying out their mission of serving the poor and homeless across our state.

3. HB22-1289 Health Benefits for Colorado Children and Pregnant Persons – Passed

If enacted, 1289 will expand health care coverage for low-income undocumented pregnant women and children under Medicaid and the children's basic health plan for those who would otherwise be eligible for coverage if not for their immigration status. The Church did not support eliminating the reference to "women" and replacing it with "pregnant person," but the policy change to help women and children in need is consistent with Church teaching.

4. SB22-050 Work Opportunities for Offenders in Department of Correction – Enacted

As enacted, this bill promotes restorative justice by clarifying the ways by which offenders can participate in work opportunities that promote rehabilitation, reentry, and reintegration into the community.

5. SB22-053 Health Facility Visitation During Pandemic – Passed

If enacted, this bill will ensure that a hospital patient or a nursing or assisted living facility resident has at least one visitor during a pandemic. This includes "compassionate care visits," which can be clergy.

6. SB22-115 Clarifying Terms Related to Landowner Liability – Enacted

This bill clarified current law on the liability of land owners when a third-party causes harm on their property. This is an important clarification to ensure that landowners are not held liable when unforeseen criminal activity occurs on their property, which may be a concern for the Church if such activity happens on Church property.

7. SB22-139 Juneteenth New State Holiday – Enacted

SB 139 established Juneteenth as a state holiday after Congress made it a federal holiday in 2021. This is a necessary and overdue action to honor the day slavery ended in the United States of America. On June 19, 1865, Major General Gordon Granger issued a general order in Galveston, Texas to free all remaining slaves in the state, based on President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863.

8. SB22-145 Resources to Increase Community Safety – Passed

If enacted, SB 145 establishes three grant programs for law enforcement. Amid the rising tide of crime in Colorado, this bill is an important investment to promote law enforcement in our state.

9. **SB22-196 Health Needs Of Persons In Criminal Justice System – Passed**

If enacted, SB 196 will create the early intervention, deflection, and redirection from the criminal justice system grant program which will provide much-needed funding toward directing individuals struggling with mental and substance abuse disorders away from the criminal justice system and towards places where they can receive proper treatment.

Three Bills the CCC Opposed that Were Passed

1. **HB22-1008 Implementation of Fertility Coverage – Enacted**

HB 1008 requires large employers in Colorado to defray the costs of fertility services in their insurance policies. This bill carries religious liberty and sanctity of life concerns for both nonprofit and for-profit businesses and business owners. While there is a religious exemption clause, it does not protect private individuals for whom providing in vitro fertilization (IVF) coverage would violate their moral convictions regarding IVF.

2. **HB22-1269 Health-care Sharing Plan Reporting Requirements – Passed**

If enacted, this bill will require health-care sharing plans to report certain information to the state commissioner of insurance. While it does not directly impact the Catholic Church's insurance plans, the bill has religious liberty concerns for other Christian health sharing plans that provide coverage to individuals seeking a moral alternative to health insurance plans that cover procedures such as abortions or gender transition surgeries.

3. **HB22-1279 Reproductive Health Equity Act – Enacted**

HB22-1279 made Colorado one of the most extreme abortion states in the country. As enacted, it allows abortion up-to-the moment of birth for any reason and enshrines in law that “a fertilized egg, embryo, or fetus does not have independent or derivative rights under the laws” of Colorado. It was enacted to preemptively respond to the expected decision in the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, which is expected this summer.

Five Bills the CCC Supported That Failed

1. **HB22-1019 Modifications to Qualified State Tuition Programs – Failed**

HB 1019 would have allowed families to save for K-12 private school tuition using a tax-exempt 529 savings plan, currently used for college expenses. In 2018, the federal government enacted the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which allowed 529 account savings to be used for K-12 tuition, but because state policies and investment options are central components of 529 plans, states must revise their rules to allow parents to save and use 529 funds for K-12 education. Colorado lawmakers continue to block families from having this education opportunity for their children.

2. **HB22-1047 Protect Human Life at Conception – Failed**

HB 1047 would have prohibited terminating the life of an preborn child and made a violation a class 1 felony. By killing the bill, pro-abortion lawmakers denied the dignity of preborn children.

3. **HB22-1075 Induced Termination of Pregnancy State Registrar – Failed**

HB 1075 would have required providers that perform induced abortions, often late-term abortions, to report specified information to the state registrar and the registrar would then create a summary for the public. None of this information would violate the privacy of a woman seeking an abortion; it merely would provide Coloradans with accurate information about the prevalence of abortion in Colorado. According to the Guttmacher Institute (a policy organization formerly owned by Planned Parenthood), abortion figures for Colorado are 40 percent higher than data provided by the Colorado Department of Public Health. Yet, pro-abortion Colorado lawmakers defeat this crucial bill each year.

4. **HB22-1136 Ultrasound Video Demonstration in Sex Education – Failed**

HB 1136 would have added a requirement that a high-definition ultrasound video showing each stage of human development be shown as part of comprehensive human sexuality education.

5. **SB22-039 Funding for Educational Opportunities – Failed**

SB 39 would have created a Hope Scholarship Program to empower families with the ability to pursue the education options best suited for their childrens' individual learning needs and aspirations. The scholarship would have been delivered to eligible families through a state-supervised spending account with which families can fully customize their child's education. Think of this as an education-version of a Health Savings Account, where families are put in charge of some of the funds allocated for their child's public education through their family's tax dollars. With the Hope scholarship, families could have used their childrens' scholarship toward online learning, private tutoring, physical and occupational therapy, private school tuition, before and after school programs, summer school, and other allowable uses.

Other Significant Legislation from the Session

1. **HB22-1326 Fentanyl Accountability And Prevention – Passed**

To combat the fentanyl crisis that has spread across the state, lawmakers passed HB 1326 after considerable debate. The bill, among other things, makes the possession of one to four grams of a substance that contains any amount fentanyl, a felony. It also included appropriations to give authorities the necessary resources to combat the crisis and educate the public on the dangers of fentanyl.

While the legislature has adjourned the 2022 legislative session, there is still the possibility that they will reconvene later this year. To stay up-to-date on Colorado legislative issues and their impact on the Catholic Church in Colorado, be sure to sign up for the CCC legislative network [HERE](#).