



DIOCESE OF ARLINGTON · DIOCESE OF RICHMOND
Representing the Virginia Catholic Bishops in Public Policy Matters

April 11, 2016

On Life and Liberty: Virginia Bishops' Statement on Actions by Governor and General Assembly

Bishop Francis X. DiLorenzo, Diocese of Richmond, and Bishop Paul S. Loverde, Diocese of Arlington, today issued the following joint statement:

Over the past two weeks, Governor Terry McAuliffe made three decisions that contradict life and liberty at their core. We are dismayed and deeply disappointed that he sided with the abortion industry over real health care centers, vetoed legislation that would have protected the right of religious organizations to follow their faith, and, instead of vetoing expanded use of the electric chair, inserted language that would shroud in secrecy the execution process.

We laid out our strong and clear stances in these matters in a letter to the governor dated March 18. He arrived at opposite decisions, however, despite our appeal and despite intensive advocacy throughout many months by the Virginia Catholic Conference and thousands of Catholic Virginians and other people of goodwill throughout the state, as well as certain dedicated legislators, to whom we are most grateful.

Governor McAuliffe chose a veto ceremony at a Planned Parenthood abortion center – where the lives of countless unborn children are snuffed out each year - to boast that he was “proud” to “smack down” legislation that would have diverted tax dollars away from the billion-dollar life-draining abortion industry and instead would have applied Virginia taxpayers’ hard-earned dollars toward life-affirming community health centers that provide a broad range of real health care for women and their families. We are disappointed by the governor’s comments and decision, but we are deeply grateful to all legislators who supported this life-affirming measure, particularly Delegate Ben Cline, the bill’s patron.

Only a day later, the governor also vetoed – live on WTOP radio – legislation that simply would have protected the right of *religious* organizations to follow their *religious* beliefs regarding marriage, applying the exact principles the founders of our Commonwealth and our country intended. The governor alleged the bill was “nothing more than an attempt to stigmatize” – an unfounded and completely erroneous charge. Our Catholic agencies each year educate tens of thousands of Virginia’s children; serve the poor and vulnerable through food banks, homeless shelters, mental health counseling and job training; and offer assistance to refugees and immigrants. We do not “stigmatize”; we serve. Though we certainly regret the governor’s action, we thank all who stood with us with their votes, even in the face of heated adversity and unfair and false rhetoric. We thank especially Senator Bill Carrico and Delegate Todd Gilbert for their leadership and persistent determination at each stage of the bill’s consideration by the General Assembly.

Finally, last night, the governor refused to veto legislation patroned by Delegate Jackson Miller that would force the electric chair on those sentenced to death if the state says lethal injection drugs are “not available” after “reasonable efforts.” Instead the governor inserted language from legislation rejected by the General Assembly last year that would shroud in secrecy the execution process. Gov. McAuliffe’s amendment would allow the state to special-order the drugs from compounding pharmacies while keeping the identities of those pharmacies and other information secret. We argued against similar legislation last year because it would hide from the public details about how the state exacts the ultimate punishment. This action by the governor – and the General Assembly – ignores a very public plea Pope Francis made earlier this year that government leaders carry out no executions in this Year of Mercy and abolish the death penalty throughout the world. As we lament this action, we also express our gratitude to all who voted against this bill, especially Senator Scott Surovell, a death penalty opponent, whose work against it was tireless.

We are profoundly disappointed with Governor McAuliffe’s actions on these vital issues. Yet we will persist as people of faith in our efforts – in parishes and the public square - to ensure we protect life at the beginning, life at the end and religious liberty for all who serve to make life better for people in need.

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Contact: Diana Sims Snider, diana@vacatholic.org; 804.539-3231