



January 14, 2016

Indiana Catholic Conference (ICC) is the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops in Indiana regarding state and national matters.

The 2016 General Assembly is off to a fast beginning. Short Sessions always are in a hurry (must end by or on March 14th). Bills must clear the initial chamber by the beginning of February; this year February 3rd. Committees have only 4 weeks to hear and move bills to the floor. Consequently, many bills are not given consideration in part due to time. Although the number of bills is reduced, we are playing catch up as bills are introduced and committees may hear them without much warning or time to read and understand the implications of the bill. This week all bills are now available.

ICC has tagged roughly 100+ bills; however, most will not get hearings. Some, such as raising minimum wage and driving certificates for immigrants, are statements by the authors but have little or no chance of getting a hearing. Others are also unlikely given the time crunch, even though they may have some support within the majority caucuses. The number of bills that will move and we will watch is approximately 35+.

The most prominent topic this session for the Church is the protected class for sexual orientation and gender identity. The Church's response to this topic begins with the affirmation of the dignity of all persons and the opposition of all unjust discrimination. However, while the **dignity of every person must always be respected as sacred, this does not extend to approval of any type of conduct or behavior that is deemed to be immoral or sinful.** There is a difference between status and behavior. A difference between treating all with respect and dignity and being forced to participate in activities contrary to one's conscience.

Rooted in the dignity of the human person the Catholic Church affirms and defends **religious freedom for all persons and all institutions** as a **fundamental God given right.** Exercising religious freedom is not confined to the four walls of a church building or only an opportunity to worship God publicly. **Religious freedom requires the opportunity to live and conduct one's private and public life in accord with one's conscience and Faith.**

Hence, there are serious concerns regarding the proposed SOGI (sexual orientation and gender identity) bills offered this session and ICC is not supporting any of them. The mantra of four words and a comma is too simplistic for such a complex issue. Moreover, the bills offered by Senate leadership also do not provide for full protection of rights of conscience. Whether for faith communities or individuals, religious liberty demands more than a mere "exemption" in the law. **Also, the terms sexual orientation and gender identity are ambiguous and often include behavior in contrast to status and therefore problematic in application and enforcement.** In addition, there are concerns that our ministries and institutions may be at risk of not being able to maintain their integrity and mission. **Our disapproval of one's conduct should not cause us to shutter our institutions or ministries.** Difference of opinion is not the same as discrimination.

It is assured that the bills that do not provide for exemptions for religious institutions will not be heard. **SB 100 and SB 344, the Senate leadership bills, are likely to get a hearing before the end of the month.** Yet the outcome is much in doubt. There is no consensus about how best to reconcile the divide on the issue. While businesses want it to be addressed to avoid the firestorm that erupted last spring, and advocates are demanding that these classes be added, many legislators are finding it difficult to find a way to provide what advocates want and protect religious liberties of Hoosiers. Last year's "fix" set this up with expectation that it would be addressed this session. Delivering it will be difficult.

Your involvement will be critical for a positive resolution of this matter. Contacting your Senator to express your view is important. You can locate/contact him or her simply by inserting your zipcode under "Find Officials" located [here](#) and then your street address.

In addition to the Update, one can obtain more detailed information regarding the bills, as well as detailed information about the legislative process and the Indiana General Assembly by clicking [here](#). You can also access the archived I-CAN Updates, ICC positions and other background information at the ICC website www.indianacc.org