



I-CANUpdate

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January 12, 2017

INDIANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE CELEBRATES 50 YEARS (1967-2017)

As proposed legislation is filed, we find more and more bills of interest. **Thus far with approximately 750 bills released, we are following approximately 100.** Another 500+ are expected in the coming days. Many of the bills are repetitious as more than one legislator will file bills on a similar topic. Some of the bills we follow may only require monitoring; to be sure nothing is added that would cause a concern. Others require more than monitoring; we are actively engaged in promoting or opposing them.

Positive legislation

SB 155, Capital punishment and severe mental illness, authored by Senator Jim Merritt (R – Indianapolis) is one that ICC hopes to see pass this year because it addresses an issue the Indiana Catholic Conference has long supported. **While it does not eliminate the use of the death penalty, it does restrict its use and correct an injustice in its application.** Hence, ICC supports the bill.

The Catholic Church has long taught that an individual must have maturity and consciously choose an action for one to be morally responsible. Indiana no longer executes the intellectually handicapped or children because they may not be fully responsible for their actions. Those with severe mental illness have an impediment that limits their culpability regarding their actions also.

This bill would prohibit imposition of the death penalty if the defendant is found to have active symptoms of a serious mental illness that significantly impaired him or her at the time of the crime. It would narrowly define serious mental illness, and would provide a mechanism for determining whether a defendant should be exempt from the death penalty due to serious mental illness, without the expense of a capital jury trial or years of appeals.

This bill **would not exempt a defendant from being found guilty** of the crime of murder or mean that the defendant would not be punished if found guilty. For example, a defendant with serious mental illness could still receive a prison sentence of life without parole. It also would not exempt defendants who claim to have mental health conditions that are not seriously impairing or were not present at the time of their crime.

SB 155 is a positive step in reducing the application of the death penalty and thus prevents the mistakes and harm that an execution does not allow to be corrected. **The bill is before the Senate Judiciary Committee**, chaired by Senator Rod Bray (R – Martinsville). **We are hopeful it will get a hearing in the coming weeks.**

Another positive bill authored by Senator Merritt is **SB 9, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and drug convictions**. This bill has been introduced in years past but has not made it to the end. **Federal law prohibits persons convicted of a certain drug offense from being eligible for SNAP benefits even after serving their punishment and remaining clear of drugs. States are free to exempt their citizens from this restriction. This bill specifies that Indiana elects to opt out of the federal law.** Often persons released from prison are not able to get work or substantive employment; the SNAP benefit makes a huge difference in helping individuals care for themselves and family. **ICC supports the bill.**

Two bills are problematic.

SB 273, End of life options, authored by Senator Lonnie Randolph (D – East Chicago), **would provide for doctor assisted suicide. The bill is in the Senate Judiciary Committee**, chaired by Senator Rod Bray. **ICC is asking Senator Bray to not give the bill a hearing; we hope to know his decision next week.**

Its proponents claim that there are safeguards and that it is a way to reduce pain and suffering. The reality, in states where it is legal, is that fear of losing autonomy, fear about becoming a burden, and fear of losing control over one's body are the reasons given for suicide. **These persons need care and support - not pills to die.**

SB 273 is bad for all Hoosiers, but especially for the aged and vulnerable. While this law's alleged intent is to create a right to take one's own life, as it is written, it rather provides a safe harbor for physicians to kill their patients. **ICC opposes the bill.**

SB 245, Long term small loans, authored by Senator Travis Holdman (R – Markle), is a topic that we saw last year. The title is somewhat misleading. **SB 245 extends payday loans by increasing the amount that can be borrowed and extending the time of the loan.** Current payday loans are limited to \$600 or less; SB 245 would increase loans up to \$2500 at 20% interest for up to 24 months. **ICC opposes this bill.**

The practice of payday lending tends to trap persons in debt while charging exorbitant interest and fees. The majority of loans are to cover everyday expenses. An employed borrowers' pay is not enough to make ends meet; so desperate they seek out resources to provide for needs. Hence, they end up extending and rolling the debt and stay in debt for months because paycheck is not enough for living expenses plus high interest and fees.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church points out that exploiting people is unjust. Forcing prices up by taking advantage of the hardship of another violates the seventh commandment. (#2409) **The bill is before the Senate Insurance and Financial Institution Committee. We expect the bill to be heard next month.**

In addition to the Update, you 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