



Christian Life Commission Final Report: 83rd Regular Legislative Session

During each legislative session, the Christian Life Commission (CLC) works to promote sound public policy on a variety of fronts important to Texas residents. The following is a list of bills the CLC actively followed, supported and, in some cases, opposed during the 83rd Session of the Texas Legislature.

Predatory Lending

In the 83rd Legislative Session, the CLC continued its work in opposition to the predatory lending practices employed by payday and auto-title lenders across the state. Last session, the CLC helped pass bills that brought the predatory lending industry under new regulations, but these lenders continue to charge desperate Texans high fees on small dollar loans. There is more work to be done to ensure these lenders are held to a truly fair standard.

SB 1247 by Sen. John Carona: CLC staff members were involved in negotiations with industry members and staff members for Sen. Carona regarding this bill since before the session began. As filed the bill was very much a product of compromise. However, substantial changes were made prior to the bill being passed out of committee which caused us to oppose the bill. Just before consideration on the Senate floor, Senator Carona agreed to accept several amendments representing substantial improvements. Based on his commitment to maintain these improvements throughout the remainder of the bill process, the CLC withdrew its opposition to SB 1247. All of the amendments of importance to the CLC were added to the bill on the Senate floor. Surprisingly, several more amendments were added that strengthened the bill far beyond what was contemplated even by consumer advocates.

Chairman Mike Villarreal became the House sponsor and the bill was then heard in the House Investments and Financial Services Committee. A committee substitute was offered that weakened the bill even beyond the amendments that Sen. Carona agreed to accept. The CLC testified “on” or neutrally on the content of the bill, but urged members to vote the bill out of committee and let the process move forward. Members of the industry came out in full force to oppose the bill even in its weakened state. Due to such strong industry opposition in a very industry friendly committee, the bill died having never received a vote.

HB 2019 by Rep. Tom Craddick: This bill would cap the fees payday and auto-title lenders can charge, bringing them back in line with existing Texas lending laws. The CLC supported this legislation, since its provisions would create meaningful change in payday and auto-title lending practices in Texas. HB 2019 was heard in the Investments and Financial Services Committee and several Texas Baptists came to speak in support. Jeff Johnson, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Commerce; Randy Wallace, Pastor of First Baptist Church, Killeen; Chad Chaddick, Pastor of Northeast Baptist Church in San Antonio; and Bryan Richardson and Charlie Wedge, Associate Pastors of First Baptist Church, San Antonio all came to give testimony in support of serious payday lending reform. However, HB 2019 died in committee having never received a vote.



Although a positive reform bill did not pass, Texas cities retain the authority to pass local ordinances addressing this problem, as many have already done. Additionally, the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has authority to regulate such lenders nationwide. The CLC is committed to continuing our work on this issue at the local, state and federal level.

Food Policy

SB 376 by Sen. Eddie Lucio II, sponsored by Eddie Rodriguez in the House: This bill created a targeted expansion of School Breakfast Programs so that all students in schools with at least 80% of students on free and reduced lunch can eat breakfast for free. The expansion will be federally funded, and will *significantly reduce child hunger* in addition to increasing academic achievement and boosting student health. Over 700,000 hungry children that were not receiving a breakfast will now have the opportunity to start their school day with a healthy meal at over 1,000 campuses in Texas. SB 376 passed out of the House and was signed by the Governor on May 24th. This bill was “finally passed” by a vote in the House on the same day that 210 3rd through 5th graders rallied on the front steps of the Capitol to fight childhood hunger—a very powerful moment.

HB 749 by Rep. Richard Raymond: The CLC supported this bill, which charged Texas Hunger Initiative and the Texas Department of Agriculture to work together on a five year plan to increase participation in summer food programs, targeting specifically rural areas. The CLC, along with THI staff testified in favor of this bill in the Government Organization committee. Sen. Judith Zaffirini, Chair of the committee, credited the testimonies with winning the bill a unanimous vote where several members had previously indicated that they would oppose the bill. HB 749 was passed and signed by Governor Perry.

Gambling/Texas Lottery

Throughout its history, the CLC has opposed state-sponsored gambling, including the Texas Lottery. The CLC holds that gambling has a disproportionate and negative effect on the wellbeing of all Texans, especially the poor. Furthermore, the casino industry’s promises to generate considerable revenue for the state, much like those given by proponents of the Texas Lottery in the early 1990s, have proven hollow both in Texas and other states around the country. Fortunately, no major gambling expansion bill even made it out of committee this session.

HB 2197 by Rep. Rafael Anchia : During the recent interim the Lottery underwent the sunset review process. For the first time the CLC publically called on the legislature to let the lottery expire. The lottery has never delivered on its promises, and costs Texas communities too much. It has failed the State of Texas and it is time to end this regressive tax. In the House committee hearing the CLC testified against this bill which would continue lottery operations and asked representatives to vote no on the bill.

The initial vote on the House floor of this "sunset bill" failed and the House therefore declined to reauthorize the lottery. A few hours later however the House reconsidered the vote and the bill passed. The next day, the House considered the bill on "Third Reading." They then debated and added several good amendments. The bill then passed the Senate with relatively little fanfare or debate and was signed by the Governor. The final version included an amendment that calls for the establishment of a



special joint committee of House and Senate members to study eliminating the lottery and charitable bingo in the state including to what extent charitable bingo proceeds further charitable purposes.

SJR 64 by Sen. Corona: The CLC opposed SJR 64, which proposed a constitutional amendment providing immediate additional revenue for the state budget by creating the Texas Gaming Commission, and which would authorize and regulate the operation of casino games and slot machines by a limited number of licensed operators and certain Indian tribes. This constitutional amendment never received a vote in committee.

SB 433 by Sen. Dan Patrick/HB 1127 by Rep. Wayne Smith: The CLC supported these bills, which would regulate game rooms in certain counties and provide penalties and fees. Harris County law enforcement also supported this legislation because it would help rid the community of eight line gaming machines. HB 1127 passed both chambers and was sent to the Governor where it became law without his signature.

SJR 43 by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte/HJR 141 by Rep. John Kuempel: The CLC opposed these bills, which propose a constitutional amendment to authorize online poker gaming regulated under federal law.

SB 282 by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte/HB 394 by Rep. Senfronia Thompson: The CLC opposed these bills, which relate to limits on prizes for bingo games and would exempt prizes under \$50 in value from the existing statutory ceiling. HB 394 passed and was signed by the Governor.

Human Trafficking

HB 2268 by Rep. John Frullo/SB 1052 by Sen. John Carona: These identical bills, which the CLC supported, streamline the investigations of Texas law enforcement officers into aspects of human trafficking taking place on the internet. Previous limitations on search warrants in Texas hindered the ability of law enforcement to fully investigate human trafficking based online; this bill created a new ability to obtain search warrants for information transmitted electronically, but physically held on servers in other states. HB 2268 was passed in both chambers, and was signed in the House on May 27th.

SB 92 by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte: The CLC supported this bill, which creates a diversion court program for victims of human trafficking. In particular, the bill helps recognize victims of human trafficking as victims, not criminals, particularly in situations involving allegations of prostitution (many victims are minors and cannot legally consent to sex—this bill treats them accordingly). SB 92 was signed by the Governor on May 25th.

HB 2725 by Rep. Senfronia Thompson: This bill creates parameters to help ensure the confidentiality of human trafficking shelters and their occupants. The CLC supported this legislation, and HB 2725 passed unanimously in both chambers and was sent to the Governor's office on May 22nd.

Public Education

In public education, the CLC focused primarily on bills which aimed to establish a tax credit for donations given for private school scholarships. The CLC sees these tax credits as vouchers, and opposes



them chiefly on grounds of maintaining church/state separation. Most private education is religious in nature and mission and, therefore, should be supported strictly by voluntary monies-- not state funding. The CLC has long affirmed the right of every Texas child, regardless of economic station, to receive a quality public education, and opposes any legislation that threatens this right.

SB 1 and Public Education Funding: The 83rd Texas Legislature began the task of partially restoring cuts to public education made last session. The supplemental appropriations bill increased funding for the current biennium, which schools districts will see this year. This legislature, unlike the last, has agreed to fund enrollment growth. The final budget for 2014-2015 signed by Governor Perry included an additional \$3.4 billion for public education. These increases are a good start, but do not yet fully restore funding to pre-2011 levels when funding was cut by roughly \$5.4 billion. Those cuts lead to a lawsuit in which a state district court judge ruled that the state did not appropriate the amount of funding needed to satisfy the public education requirements under the Texas Constitution. The judge has now set a new trial to begin in January of 2014 to review the constitutionality of public school funding in light of the increases made this session.

Amendment 95 to SB 1 (state budget) by Rep. Abel Herrero: The CLC was pleased to see Rep. Abel Herrero's amendment to the state budget bill pass overwhelmingly. The amendment helped prevent public funding of private schools in the form of school vouchers and tax credits.

Adult Education

SB 307 by Sen. Joan Huffman: This bill passed the House and Senate and was signed by the Governor on May 18th. It will move the adult education program from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to ensure that training for job skills is an integral part of the program. The final bill also included the development of family literacy as a purpose of the program, to encourage parents to be involved in their children's education.

SB 441 by Sen. Brian Birdwell: This bill passed and became effective immediately. It requires TWC to work with community colleges and technical schools to establish a fast-track program for post-secondary certification in high-demand occupations. The program will be competency-based, so a student can move to the next part of a program when a subject is mastered, focusing on veterans and current workers needing re-training.

Immigration

The CLC tracked many bills dealing with immigration. We support comprehensive immigration reform at the national level including a path to citizenship. In Texas, the CLC is working toward immigration policies that are consistent with humanitarian values and allow the appropriate authorities to enforce the law and implement federal immigration policy. Finally, the CLC continues to support the DREAM Act, as children should not be punished for the decisions of their parents, and an uneducated Texas is a losing proposition.



HB 3206 by Rep. Roberto Alonzo: In 2001, the legislature voted to require proof of citizenship to renew a driver's license. An unintended consequence of this law is that illegal immigrants that initially obtained a driver's license legally now cannot renew that license, cannot secure insurance, but continue to drive on Texas roads. HB 3206 allows the issuance of a driver's permit to this population within certain parameters, including: passage of a driving test, proof of Texas residency, a full set of fingerprints, a criminal history background check, an application fee of about \$150.

These permits appear substantially different from a Texas Driver's License and ID and are not a federally recognized form of identification. The permit will allow permit-holders to obtain motor vehicle insurance and vehicle registration in Texas.

The bill remained in the Calendars Committee and was not heard on the floor before the deadline for the House to pass bills. Efforts late in the session to amend this bill to another bill were unsuccessful.

Advance Directives

Advance directives deal with end of life care and decisions, and attempt to provide protections to all those involved in the associated processes, including family, caregivers, doctors and other medical providers.

SB 303 by Sen. Deuell: The CLC supported this bill as an effort to update and reform existing advance directive laws. It attempted to balance the interests of the wishes of the patient in question, the families of those patients, and the doctors and hospitals caring for them. The bill would have extended the time families have to find an alternative treatment location for the patient from ten days to twenty one days, among other positive provisions. SB 303 passed out of the Senate with a strong bipartisan vote of 24 -6. The bill was referred to the House Public Health Committee where it received a public hearing. The CLC testified in favor of the bill in a hearing that lasted until 2:30am. Unfortunately, conflict between members and a few of the outside organizations that opposed the bill caused it to die in the House Committee without a vote.