



# **Addendum**

## **Advocacy Priorities**

### **2019-2020 Legislative Session**

#### **Recognizing Connections Among the 2019-20 Priorities**

The main document lists the following as priorities for the Council's Ministry of Public Witness during the 2019-20 legislative session:

- 1) The Council will still provide opportunities for people of faith to act on specific legislation and policies through individual action alerts and updates.
- 2) Continued focus will be given to educating people of faith about the issues of racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, biases against disabled persons, and prejudices against anyone who may be considered different or "other."
- 3) The highest priority issues will be those most affected by the attitudes named in (2) above, including, but not limited to environment, education, criminal justice, immigration policy, gun violence, and wages and welfare policies.
- 4) We will continue to focus on changing the political system itself, including reforming Pennsylvania's redistricting system to place power in the hands of an independent commission, seeking expanded opportunities for voting (such as early voting, no excuse absentee voting, and automatic registration), and limiting the influence of money in elections and lobbying.

The Ministry of Public Witness recognizes that the largest and most visible part of its work is to engage regularly with the Council's advocacy network, encouraging learning and action. This will continue through holding learning events, initiating action alerts, and maintaining the (almost) weekly News and Action Update that has been a mainstay of this ministry for a number of years.

However, we need to—actually, must—do more to enhance understanding about the connections/interactions between "othering" (e.g., racism) and issues (e.g., criminal justice), and how our political system affects whether or not our concerns can be heard, much less acted upon, because none of these factors exist in a vacuum. We also wish to seek better ways to educate our network regarding how legislation and policies that are part of our advocacy efforts work to resolve or avoid negative outcomes, and why it is important that we engage in this work.

One example of a negative connection has to do with how othering affects legislation and policies, and how they are implemented and enforced. We know, for example, that the number of persons of color incarcerated in our criminal justice system is clearly out of proportion to numbers in the general population. What we don't always know is the factors behind the disparity. Research suggests, for example, that racial profiling—target and arrest of persons of color—is a factor. We also believe that sentencing guidelines, and how they are applied to different crimes, come into play. Lack of education or employment—often higher among persons of color (though also among poor white populations)—may result in actions where the consequence is incarceration. The disparity should be resolvable, but it typically requires a lot of education and efforts on multiple fronts. It also requires creating the political will to make it happen. We have found that this is harder than we might have thought it should be, which leads us to another negative connection.

The ideal view of how government works is that we support and vote for candidates we believe will carry out the work that we see as important. Recently, we have seen that a majority supports positions that we have held and worked for. Let's use the example of redistricting. After the 2010 Census and election, Pennsylvania found itself

with a majority of one political party dominating the General Assembly, with the same party holding the Governor's office. This led to a process where that party controlled the process of redrawing the lines of Congressional and state level districts—doing so in a way that was designed to cement their majority for the foreseeable future. A poll earlier in 2018 indicated that just over two-thirds of Pennsylvanians supported an independent redistricting commission,<sup>1</sup> something that would lead to a fairer, less partisan redistricting process. Despite this overwhelming support and the formidable and sustained work of advocates, both chambers managed to thwart the obvious will of the people. While campaign finance and lobbying by those with seemingly unlimited funds have an impact on legislation as well, the make-up of our General Assembly—dictated by the way the lines are drawn—makes a difference.

Voter registration numbers for November 2018 show that the party that dominates the Pennsylvania General Assembly has approximately 840,500 fewer voters than the other major party. This can only happen when lines are strategically drawn to favor one side over another. We witnessed what happened in 2018 after Pennsylvania's Supreme Court found Congressional districts to be illegally gerrymandered to favor one party. Throughout much of the decade, the Pennsylvania delegation has been 13-5, with the party with fewer registered voters dominating. After the 2018 mid-term election, that balance moved to 9-9. How districts are drawn makes a difference.

Another negative interaction is often less obvious, which may make it more insidious. We see this kind of interaction more often as it relates to legislation, policy, and development and their impacts on the environment. Pennsylvania has seen a dramatic expansion in natural gas development with the hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, boom over the last decade. Much of the development happens in areas that have lived through the boom and bust cycles of previous extraction industries (forestry, coal, etc.), and where the fracking industry promises jobs and boosts in local economies—many rural and lower income. We see a similar situation with the development of new pipelines, though these may also affect more urban areas and typically displace or affect those least able to resist such development. Unfortunately, these industries have all brought negative consequences as well—many that outweigh the benefits they promise, such as damage to the environment and to local infrastructure such as roads, destruction of wells and water supplies, and emissions that affect the health of those living near the wells or pipelines. Legislators (at all levels) have often viewed temporary revenues generated by the industry as more important than protecting the environment and our citizens, so they frequently fail to enact strong legislation and policies or adequate funding for enforcement measures designed to protect us—both during the active stage and after the boom cycle winds down. The result, time and again, is that entire communities are left in economic straits without resources to do remedial work that may be required.

### **Recognizing Connections Among the Issues**

As noted in the list in the previous section: “The highest priority issues will be those most affected by the attitudes named in (2) above, including, but not limited to environment, education, criminal justice, immigration policy, gun violence, and wages and welfare policies.”

Just as described in the previous section, none of these issues stand alone. Let's address the environment first.

The environment affects everyone. Climate change, with rising heat levels, negatively affects many of our most vulnerable populations—children, seniors, and those with health concerns. As temperatures rise and higher temperatures move farther north (or south), many native species of plants, animals and insects are affected. Overwintering of some insects that would have died in previous winters has resulted in a public health problem—a rise in the number of cases of diseases such as Lyme and West Nile. In Pennsylvania, recreational opportunities such as skiing are threatened, and may disappear, and fish are being affected by disease and lesions which many

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.politicspa.com/majority-of-pennsylvanians-support-independent-commission-for-district-lines-poll/87358/>

attribute to warmer water. Warming oceans have created more severe storms because warmer water provides more energy for storms like hurricanes. In some cases, such as Harvey in 2017, it also causes them stall and act differently than in the past, resulting in greater devastation for many living near our coasts. Rising ocean levels brought about by melting ice in the polar regions damages habitat for species that rely on the ice cover, and the rising waters are beginning to inundate low-lying coastal regions and islands, which drives migration of people—including many of the world's poorest and most vulnerable—to safer and higher areas.

Climate change has affected weather patterns as well. While much of Pennsylvania has experienced rising levels of precipitation, creating flooding and strain on our water management systems, other areas are experiencing devastating drought. Drought affects farmers and crop production, but it also creates the conditions for wild fires that have plagued the west for a number of years. These fires destroy many of our forest resources and create hazardous conditions that may cause erosion and landslides when rains do come. However, as we've seen in more recent years, these fires have begun to encroach on more populated areas, destroying homes and businesses and resulting in greater loss of life—and often, the release of dangerous substances into our air and water.

Education is another concern that crosses many lines. When we fail to provide adequate and equitable funding to support an education system that serves all children well, we create invisible barriers for those who are underserved—perhaps for the rest of their lives. Children who don't have the resources necessary to learn, grow, and thrive throughout their early years and high school are less likely to go on for higher education, and more likely to be unemployed or working for significantly lower wages—often in jobs that don't provide health care benefits or any kind of paid leave. Individuals and families that don't receive health care benefits through employers and can't afford comprehensive coverage are more likely to ignore health problems until they become very sick, and tend to rely on costly options such as emergency rooms to obtain care when they need it. Many will enter the “school-to-prison-pipeline,” meaning they will end up in situations that cause them to become caught up in our criminal justice system. Their children are often destined to enter the same cycle, ending up in poverty, low wage jobs, or prison.

As a nation, for many years these same people have been viewed as lazy or unwilling to work, but the welfare system we have established often creates perverse incentives that make accepting more hours, higher wages, or advancements untenable. For example, affordable child care is not readily available for many working parents. Increased income can quickly drive working parents to a level where child care benefits are no longer available, and the cost of other child care options may be greater than these families can afford. This leaves parents to choose between fewer hours or less pay, or placing their children in what may be unsafe situations. Lack of affordable housing means that low income families are spending significantly more than the 30 percent recommended ceiling (no more than 30 percent of income) and having to make tough choices between food and medicine, or medicine and heat. For some, the only affordable housing is substandard housing where children are exposed to lead or vectors such as insects or rodents. Either way, living under such conditions certainly affects the health and welfare of these individuals and families.

Finally, those living on the margins are most likely to be victims of gun violence and racial profiling, and significantly more likely to become enmeshed in the criminal justice system. Many of our children and younger populations are injured or killed by guns. People of color are more likely to be targeted as perpetrators of crimes. Those who are convicted and serve time in the criminal justice system face even greater barriers after release, and these barriers often result in greater recidivism rates. The problem of gun violence has grown so dramatically that it even affects our level of life expectancy, which is actually falling.

## So How Does This Affect Our Advocacy Efforts?

Recognizing that the world of issues we face is a web, and cannot be compartmentalized, helps us to determine how to go about our efforts. It seems that there are three distinct areas that merit much of our attention:

- Environment (particularly around climate)
- Education
- Government reform

Addressing the problems in these three areas—which are at the core of many of the problems we face—should, over the longer term, begin to resolve many of the other issues we have recognized. However, as we address these areas, we must be cognizant of the role of “othering” as well, because our “fixes” must ensure that all people and parts of our creation—not just those deemed “worthy”—benefit.

### Environment

While the environment has always been part of the Council’s advocacy agenda, we have reached a point where we must act with regard to our changing climate. Some scientists say we have already crossed a tipping point, but others believe that a rapid, robust, and sustained response can walk us back from the brink. The Council can play a significant role in addressing climate concerns by focusing on three areas:

- Reducing energy usage
- Energy efficiency
- Advocating to move from non-renewable to renewable energy sources

There have been efforts in all three of these areas, but we need to “up our game.” In 2018, we started to do that in our work with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to introduce the faith community to the ENERGY STAR® for Congregations resources. This is work that must continue, reaching more congregations across Pennsylvania and urging them to be better stewards of the energy they use—and maybe even achieve savings that can be used for mission opportunities or other priorities.

We also, through a webinar, introduced congregations and people of faith to community solar. Community solar is a concept that permits houses of worship, homes, and other facilities that are unable to convert to solar to buy into a community-based solar array. Pennsylvania needs enabling legislation to make this opportunity available, and partners that participated in promoting the webinar have suggested that they are ready to work together with the Council to advocate for the legislation.

We now are aware that the cost of renewable energy options has come down considerably over the last few years, creating the possibility of converting from our fossil fuel based system to a system where most, if not all, of our energy comes from sources like solar, wind, and geothermal. One legislator introduced a bill in 2018 that would require “100 by 50”—that is, for Pennsylvania to reach a goal of having 100 percent of its energy produced by renewable resources by 2050. This goal is ambitious, and achieving it may be impossible, but taking it seriously means that significant progress can be attained. The Council is committed to working to shift Pennsylvania to a renewable energy economy, and is also committed to working with other faith partners to promote this at a joint learning and advocacy event in 2019.

Success in these areas would not prevent some of the long-term damage from past climate policies and failure to protect our environment, but will move us in a more positive direction in the hope of alleviating some of the impacts that threaten humankind and our environment.

### Education

From the Council’s *Principles for Public Advocacy*:

We believe “The health and strength of our nation depends on the ability of its citizens to understand issues and to treat each other with respect.”<sup>2</sup> This is made possible by the availability of comprehensive, fair, and effective education. A just education system prepares persons for gainful employment that enables them to support themselves and their families, and provides them with an adequate understanding of their responsibilities as members of communities and our society as a whole.

This is a perennial issue for the Council and for people of faith. The Council’s Public Witness Ministry has been working with various partners and coalitions to promote a fair and equitable system, with adequate funding to ensure its success. Most recently, efforts have focused on three things: (1) addressing racism and the effects on funding public schools in Pennsylvania; (2) understanding the school-to-prison pipeline; and (3) seeking greater funding for public education and advocating that 100 percent of education funding be subject to Pennsylvania’s school funding formula.<sup>3</sup> We have been participating in advocacy with our partners and have held events aimed at educating our constituency. This work will continue.

### Government Reform

Government reform has long been on the agenda of the Council’s Public Witness Ministry as well. It may seem like an odd choice, but ensuring a fair system where all voices can be heard is integral to the success of our advocacy efforts. Throughout the years, the specific focus has shifted somewhat, but the issues remain the same—primarily campaign finance, lobbying and gifts, and fair districting.

Redistricting has heavily dominated work in this area for the last few years. People of faith have begun to realize that the way districts have been drawn has taken power away from many citizens, as districts are drawn to gain partisan advantage. This was described earlier. Having fairer districts—not gerrymandered to the advantage of a single political party—will ensure more competitive elections and, we believe, greater likelihood that our voices will be heard.

Most of the Council’s work has involved educating constituents, primarily by promoting the work of Fair Districts PA and its educational efforts, as well as encouraging advocacy for bills aimed at creating an independent redistricting commission. Given that this change requires amending the Pennsylvania Constitution—which means passage of the exact same legislation in two consecutive sessions, and its failure to pass in 2017-18—creation of such a commission will not be possible for the redistricting process following the 2020 Census.

We will continue to work on educating the faith community, and in promoting a new effort called Draw the Lines PA that provides a fun and creative means of educating citizens. Draw the Lines provides a tool that allows citizens to draw and submit their own maps into a statewide competition, with prizes available to those who submit maps that best represent the ideal for what Pennsylvania’s maps should look like. The Council’s Director of Advocacy and Ecumenical Outreach was invited to co-chair a central Pennsylvania Steering Committee of the group, and will be involved in that work for the foreseeable future.

We also expect to ramp up efforts to make voting more accessible in Pennsylvania by promoting such reforms as early voting, no excuse absentee voting, and same day registration, and to ensure the integrity of our elections.

---

<sup>2</sup> Laura Sadler Olin, Executive Director of the Lancaster Foundation for Educational Enrichment.

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania’s school funding formula takes into account levels of poverty and other factors that increase the cost to educate children, ensuring that districts facing greater challenges are able to receive a greater share of funds. Currently, only new funding is subject to the formula—a very small percentage of the total funds.