

Christian Citizenship

UPDATE FOR JANUARY, 2022:

As the Illinois state legislature's 2022 session begins, at least three issues bear watching.

One is an amendment to the state's Health Education Act. This was proposed but not adopted in 2021. It might be reintroduced during 2022. This amendment would have required all Illinois schools to teach contraception and to offer instruction concerning two drugs for treatment and prevention of HIV. These drugs can be obtained by prescription, but without parental notification. Note that this legislation, as it was introduced in 2021, would have affected both public schools and Lutheran (and other nonpublic) schools.

Another area to watch has particular importance for nonpublic schools. This would be potential changes to the state's school code, specifically regarding official Illinois recognition of nonpublic schools within the state. A change already made in 2021 effectively prevents these schools from prohibiting hairstyles that are associated with particular ethnicities. Going forward, the question arises: what other requirements could Illinois in effect force on nonpublic schools by threatening to refuse to recognize them? In 2021, for example, thought was given to removing such recognition if a nonpublic school had a policy that disallowed hairstyles associated with one gender or the other. That proposal may re-emerge in 2022. Others may restrict parochial schools from teaching and acting in accord with biblical teachings.

The most sweeping and fundamental changes could be proposed in the increasingly contested area of parental rights. The basic issue here is: who has the responsibility for the rearing of children? More and more in American society, the claim is being made that children belong not to their families but to the entire community, and that although parents are supposed to take care of their children, it is the role of the state – through professional educators in public schools – to shape them for the future. However, the Lutheran Confessions, recognizing the authority of parents as God's own representatives, hold that "all authority flows and is born from the authority of parents. Where a father is unable alone to educate his child, he uses a schoolmaster to teach the child. If he is too weak, he gets the help of his friends and neighbors. If he departs this life, he delegates and confers his authority and government upon others who are appointed for this purpose" (Large Catechism I 141; Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions [second ed., CPH, 2006], 375).

Christian citizens have a responsibility to inform themselves concerning not only legislation but also legislators. Do you know how your state representative or senator voted with respect to past legislation, for example, the 2021 removal from Illinois law of the requirement to notify parents if an abortion was to be performed on their minor child? If you write your state representative or senator concerning one or more of the issues noted above, you may well get a response that tells you where this person stands on that particular subject.

For help in getting contact information on those who represent you in the Illinois legislature, the “Contact your Rep” feature of the Illinois Policy Institute can be a handy tool. (This is a recommendation only of the tool, not necessarily anything else on the Illinois Policy Institute website.) The tool can be found at <https://www.illinoispolicy.org/maps/>