



**Albany
UPDATE**

NEW YORKERS FOR CONSTITUTIONAL FREEDOMS

The 2017 Legislative Session In Review

New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms exists to influence legislation and legislators for the Lord Jesus Christ. We are New York's statewide evangelical Christian lobbying organization. We want New York to become a state where God is honored, where religious freedom flourishes, where families thrive, and where life is cherished.

When it comes to legislation, NYCF works toward four different specific goals: Protecting human life, promoting strong families, preserving religious liberty, and proclaiming justice and mercy. Now that the 2017 state legislative session has come to an end, we have prepared this update for our friends and supporters to inform them on the status of our efforts in Albany this year.

Protecting Human Life

When it comes to the protection of innocent human life, New York has much room for improvement. Sadly, our state has some of the most permissive abortion policies in the country. The liberal, pro-abortion stranglehold on the New York State Assembly would make it a near-impossibility for any abortion-limiting legislation to pass in that chamber. In the near term, our pro-life efforts focus on preventing Gov. Andrew Cuomo and the Legislature from doing further damage.

Despite the challenges we face in Albany, 2017 was a good year for pro-life advocates. Pro-abortion advocates' chief legislative priority, the Reproductive Health Act (RHA), was completely ignored in the Republican-led State Senate after it passed the Assembly in January. This year's version of the RHA (Bill S.2796-Krueger/A.1748-Glick) would have expanded abortion access in

New York by empowering non-physicians to perform surgical abortions, including third-trimester abortions. The RHA would also allow dangerous late-term abortions under a broad "health" exception, and would withdraw legal protection from



viable infants born alive following attempted abortions. Blocking abortion expansion has been a top priority for NYCF and other pro-life allies for 10 years. Considering the fact that abortion expansion legislation came perilously close to passing the Senate in 2013, it is encouraging that there was no momentum behind the bill in the Senate this year.

Back in January, the Assembly passed an anti-life bill known as the Comprehensive Contraception Coverage Act (CCCA) (Bill S.3668-Bonacic/A.1378-Cahill). The CCCA would require all group insurance policies to cover abortion-causing drugs and all other FDA-approved contraceptive devices without restrictions, copays, or cost sharing. Research demonstrates that so-called

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“emergency contraception” does not always function in the way that its name would indicate; rather, it sometimes causes the death of an embryo. Following opposition from NYCF, the CCCA—like the RHA—made no progress in the Senate.

New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms is deeply grateful to report that physician-assisted suicide legislation (Bill S.3151-Savino/A.2383-Paulin) was dealt a legislative setback in 2017. While the bill was approved by the Assembly Health Committee last year, the bill was not approved by any committee in either house of the State Legislature this year. This is a major victory for NYCF and for the other organizations that make up the New York Alliance Against Assisted Suicide.

Other pro-life victories include the lack of progress made by the Indigent Funding for Planned Parenthood Bill (Bill S.159-Rivera/A.3693-Glick), which failed to pass either house; the Insurance Coverage of In Vitro Fertilization Bill (Bill S.3148-A-Savino/A.2646-A-Simotas), which passed the Assembly only; and the Pregnancy Center

Disclosures bills (Bills S.102-Hoylman and A.5911-Glick), which failed to pass either house.

Pro-life bills that were introduced this year include the Butler Amendment (Bill A.3007-B-Motion A-1-Crespo), a NYCF-supported annual budget amendment that would block taxpayer funding for elective abortions; bills that would require parental notification before an abortion can be performed on a minor (Bills A.3620-Murray and A.4305-Lawrence); and the Unborn Victims of Violence Act (Bill S.3830-Ritchie/A.3579-Cusick). These bills did not advance in 2017, but NYCF hopes to make progress on them in the future. In addition, the Baby Box Bill (Bill S.3867-A-Hannon/A.6044-A-Simotas), which would establish a newborn health and safe sleep pilot program to help lower infant mortality rates, passed both the Senate and the Assembly and awaits action by Gov. Cuomo. While NYCF did not actively lobby in support of this legislation, we support it and hope that the Governor will sign it.

Promoting Strong Families



On the family front, NYCF made progress in Albany in 2017. That progress consisted of the introduction of a pro-adoption bill that passed both houses of the State Legislature.

This year, New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms drafted legislation that would require the the State of New York to prepare a report on the impact of a proposed special needs adoption tax deduction. The bill was revised and introduced by Sen. Marty Golden (R-Brooklyn), and was later introduced in the Assembly by



Asm. Latoya Joyner (D-Bronx). It is hoped that a state report on this important issue would help build the case for the eventual passage of a special needs adoption tax deduction bill; the purpose of such a deduction would be to provide tax relief to adoptive parents of special needs children and to encourage other parents to consider adopting special needs children. We are pleased to report that the special needs adoption tax credit report bill (Bill S.4492-Golden/A.6800-Joyner) passed both houses of the State Legislature. The bill now awaits action by Gov. Andrew Cuomo.

In June, each house passed legislation (S.4407-B-Lanza/A.5524-B-Paulin) that would raise the age of consent to marriage in the State of New York. Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed the bill into law on June 20, 2017. The new law continues to allow adults over 18 to marry of their own free will; however, it prohibits youths under the age of 17 from marrying. In addition, the law allows 17-year-olds to marry only with the consent of both parents and the consent of a judge. This law was designed to help prevent minors from being forced into marriage. While NYCF did not lobby extensively on this legislation, and while we would have preferred that the age of consent to sexual behavior be raised to 18 to match the age of consent to marriage, we are pleased that this bill became law.

Anti-family bills that were bottled up in Albany this year include the Child-Parent Security Act (Bill S.17-A-Hoylman/A.6959-A-Paulin), an LGBT agenda item that would allow women to be paid to act as surrogate mothers, and the Healthy Teens Act (Bill S.1070-Rivera/A.2705-Gottfried), which would provide a fund-

ing stream for Planned Parenthood to conduct its brand of sex education in public schools. NYCF has lobbied against these bills for several years. To our disappointment, each bill advanced through a Senate committee. However, NYCF was successful in blocking both bills from moving any further in either legislative chamber.

Preserving Religious Liberty

This year's legislative session did not result in major gains or major losses on religious liberty issues.

As usual, several pieces of legislation that are hostile to religious liberty were introduced in Albany in 2017. One such bill—the Counselor Coercion Bill (Bill S.263-Hoylman/A.3977-Glick), which would ban mental health professionals from assisting minor clients in overcoming unwanted same-sex attraction—passed the Assembly this year and advanced in the Senate committee process. NYCF has made it a priority to lobby against the Counselor Coercion Bill for several years. Despite the fact that other states passed similar bills this year, the Counselor Coercion Bill did not receive a floor vote in the Senate. This is a victory.

The Boss Bill (Bill S.3791-A-Krueger/A.566-A-Jaffee), a NYCF-opposed bill that would prevent pro-life organizations from adopting employee conduct policies consistent with their beliefs, passed the Assembly this year and advanced in the Senate committee process; thankfully, the bill did not pass the Senate. In addition, the Contraceptive Insurance Notification Mandate (Bill S.4758-Stavisky/A.6144-Seawright) failed to pass the Assembly, while a bill that would require churches and nonprofits to pay fire district taxes (Bill A.235-Gunther) was defeated in the Assembly Real Property Taxation Committee.

One NYCF-supported bill, the Moment of Silence Bill (S.895-Amedore), would require public school students to observe a one-minute period of silent reflection at the start of each school day. It is hoped that this period of reflection would prompt some students to pray at the beginning of the school day. While the Moment of Silence Bill did not advance in 2017, NYCF hopes to move the bill forward next year.

NYCF lobbied extensively in support of a bill that would make life easier for small churches. Bill S.2935-Gallivan/A.3765-Dinowitz, the Church Real Estate Bill, would al-



low churches and other faith communities to use an expedited process when selling real property valued at less than \$200,000. Currently, the Religious Corporations Law requires churches to seek a court's approval to sell or mortgage real property. In some situations, religious corporations are also required to seek the approval of the New York State Attorney General. The primary purpose of these requirements is to protect churches against exploitation and mismanagement; however, they can sometimes complicate church real estate matters. The Church Real Estate Bill would help churches conduct small real estate transactions without undue expenses and procedural hurdles. This year, the bill passed the State Senate for the first time since 2008. In 2018, NYCF intends to work with Members of the Assembly to advance the bill there.



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Proclaiming Justice and Mercy



Regarding justice and mercy issues, NYCF was able to help prevent most damaging legislation from advancing in 2017.

On two separate occasions during the month of June, an ill-conceived bill (Bill S.5377-Bonacic) that would have allowed gambling casinos to lend money to their patrons made its way to the Senate Active List. (Bills on the Active List are bills that can be voted on at any time.) On each occasion, NYCF was able to work with the Senate Majority to block the bill before it received a floor vote. We are pleased that this unnecessary and predatory legislation did not pass the Senate.

The notorious Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act (GENDA) (S.502-Squadron/A.3358-Gottfried), also known as the Bathroom Bill, passed the Assembly for the tenth time in 2017; however, following opposition from NYCF, the bill was defeated in the Senate Investigations and Government Operations Committee. Other bills of concern that failed to become law in 2017 include the Online Poker Bill (Bill S.3898-Bonacic/A.5250-Pretlow), which passed the Senate but failed to pass the Assembly, and the Smokable Medical Marijuana Bill (Bill S.1087-Rivera/A.6009-Gottfried).

NYCF is pleased to report that the Homeschool Equal Access Bill (Bill S.5131-A-Robach/A.1196-A-Simanowitz) passed the State Senate for the second consecutive



year. This legislation would require fair practices by colleges and universities in regard to the admission of homeschooled high school graduates and graduates of non-public schools. NYCF is thankful for the efforts of the Loving Education At Home (LEAH) organization to advance this bill. NYCF anticipates working closely with the Assembly to make progress on this legislation in 2018.

By NYCF's standards, this year was a relatively peaceful one in Albany. Because no major pieces of socially liberal legislation were in serious danger of becoming law, NYCF made progress on promoting helpful bills. We look forward to building on this momentum in the State Legislature next year.

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