



DC Catholic Conference

Advancing Gospel values in the District of Columbia

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Committee of the Whole: “No Shots, No School” for School Year 2022-2023 Public Roundtable October 11, 2022

During consideration of Bill 24-423, the D.C. Catholic Conference provided the Council with an outline of the experience of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington (ADW) and its schools in both encouraging vaccination against COVID and in providing safe in-person instruction since September 2020, long before the vaccines were even developed. We also shared in the concerns expressed by others regarding the potential adverse disparate impact that compulsory COVID vaccination would have on disadvantaged youth, including a disproportionate effect on students of color, specifically the denial of enrollment to those students who continued to have COVID vaccine hesitancy.

Now nearly one year later, it appears that those concerns were justified. Even after enforcement of the mandate was delayed, a large number of District students, including approximately 40 percent of African-American students, remain unvaccinated against COVID.

Many parents have provided feedback to ADW Catholic Schools stating that they would prefer that any COVID vaccine be voluntary and not compulsory as a condition of receiving an education. Also, other local jurisdictions do not require COVID vaccination to attend school, and some parents might simply move their children to schools across the District line to avoid it.

Certainly, there must be a better way to maintain healthy schools than denying a school education to a child. To be sure, ADW schools have already demonstrated that schools can mitigate the spread of COVID and safely operate without involuntary vaccination.

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The D.C. Catholic Conference advocates for the public policy interests of The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Washington in the District of Columbia and encourages Catholics to actively participate in the public square. We work primarily with local government, advocacy groups, and other religious organizations to advocate for those in need and promote the common good. Our priorities reflect our experience as the region's largest non-governmental social service provider and single largest faith community.