

## **First Presbyterian Church of Howard County Guidelines for Conveying Public Policy Advocacy Positions and Carrying Out Public Policy Advocacy Opportunities**

PC(USA) Context (copied from the Office of Public Witness website):

“Reformed theology teaches that because a sovereign God is at work in all the world, the church and Christian citizens should be concerned about public policy. In addition, Presbyterian forefather John Calvin wrote, “Civil magistracy is a calling not only holy and legitimate, but by far the most sacred and honorable in human life.”

“Ministry in Washington offers a chance to translate the church’s deep convictions about justice, peace and freedom from words into reality. The political process is where decisions are made that help or harm people; decisions that help to make the kind of world God intends...

“By adopting a study entitled, “Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness”, the 205th General Assembly (1993) emphasized the importance of the church’s social witness policies and programs. Along with affirming that God alone is Lord of the conscience, the study affirms “the responsibility and authority of the church to make a social witness policy which guides that witness. The church, if it is to remain true to its biblical roots, theological heritage, and contemporary practice, must not fall silent. It must speak faithfully, truthfully, persuasively, humbly, boldly and urgently.”

<https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/washington/>

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As FPCHC takes public positions on public policy issues, it is important that these actions be consistent with the PC(USA) positions and statements in order to provide substantive and theological foundation for these actions. It is also important to have guidance on how to decide on and carry out public policy actions consistent with church policy and federal and state rules.

- This work would be overseen by the Session through the Mission Ministry Area (Mission). Superseding all the guidelines below, FPCHC will only convey support for and act on policies that are consistent with positions or statements advocated for or adopted by the PC (USA).

- FPCHC members may forward to the congregation, through the Mission Ministry Area and subject to its approval, a reasonable number of advocacy requests from outside organizations, such as Bridges for Housing Stability, Grassroots Crisis Intervention Center, Luminus, etc.
- Any statements or public actions on behalf of FPCHC must be approved by Session.
- Any public statements approved by Session should be posted on the church's website.
- Individuals who express advocacy positions and identify themselves as members of FPCHC can only state positions approved by Session, unless they state that their positions are personal opinions and don't necessarily represent FPCHC.
- Unless pre-arranged, all FPCHC members' advocacy expenses (travel, conference registration, etc) are their own responsibility.
- Note that IRS rules require that nonprofits, including churches, not engage in more than an "insubstantial" amount of lobbying activity, estimated at about 3-5% of overall activity. (Note that not all advocacy activity counts as lobbying.) Nonprofits also cannot engage in *any* electioneering activity (supporting or opposing candidates for public office). Helpful information is here:
  - <https://www.irs.gov/charities-non-profits/lobbying>
  - [https://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Lobbying Rules for Houses of Worship.pdf](https://bolderadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Lobbying_Rules_for_Houses_of_Worship.pdf)
  - [www.bolderadvocacy.org](http://www.bolderadvocacy.org)
- Maryland state rules cover the amount of lobbying that would trigger the requirement to register as a lobbyist (in brief, current figures are \$500 in organizational direct expenses, \$2,500 in compensation). Definition is here: <https://ethics.maryland.gov/lobbyists/>
- FPCHC never intends to meet or exceed the IRS or Maryland limits.

Approved by Session, May 23, 2023