

“Striving for Peace and Justice. Respecting the Dignity of Every Person.”
An interview with Deacon Kathy Shahinian, Diocesan Public Policy Advocate

How and when did you get started/involved in your work on Public Policy?

During the 1990’s I was the Legislative Director for a Maryland public employee union, representing employees/members during the legislative session with issues that addressed discrimination, wage equity, collective bargaining, workplace safety and other related initiatives before the General Assembly.

Why is this ministry important? What impact can it have or does it have?

I love what I do! The ministry of public policy is an exciting opportunity that permits our diocese to shape and influence critical societal issues. This is a ministry that functions not only during the 3 month legislative session but during the entire year. The Episcopal Church outlines priorities concerned with reconciliation, immigration, environment, healthcare and social justice (to name a few!) During the year we work with our state and local governments to improve the quality of people’s lives.

What makes this a particularly meaningful activity for you as a deacon? How does this connect to the Gospel mandate and your ordination vows to serve others?

Our Baptismal Covenant as well as our vows at ordination serve as a blueprint for our charge as deacons in how we are to follow and serve Christ. Our contract with God in the area of public policy is to strive for “peace and justice in the world” and “respect the dignity” of each and every person. Promoting legislation that improves the quality of life for people is what my ministry is all about.

What were the main issues this past legislative session? What were successes from your viewpoint? Any disappointments?

We had a great legislative session this year. It was successful on so many different levels. First let me share with you the wonderful legislative team we had working this session. Deacon John Martin+, Rev. Joanna White+, Deacon Michelle Duran+, Rev. Ken Phelps+, Deacon Mimi Mathews+, Jan Reid, Secretary Al Collins, Howard Buskirk, Mary Greczyn. These are the folks that were in the trenches and I am so humbled to be able to work with them. We met weekly before and during the legislative session, and researched, wrote testimony and testified before House and Senate Committees.

We also attended briefings, rallies, as well as supported our faith coalitions. Legislatively, I am very proud that we supported and helped pass bills concerned with Preventing Gun Violence (HB888, SB707) Health Care Providers – Opioid Prescriptions Benefits and Risks (SB522/HB653), Prescription Drug Costs Transparency (HB736/SB576), Grant Programs to Support the Public Safety and

Violence Prevention Act 2018 (HB432), and Morgan State University – Task Force on Reconciliation and Equity (SB350) to name a few.

I am also pleased that we testified against the bills that supported guns in church and schools (HB758 & HB760). It is good to get bills passed but it is also important to be watchdog during session and get damaging bills defeated.

I would like to see success next year for bills that are concerned with restricting solitary confinement (HB786/SB539), clean energy jobs (HB1453/Sb732), parole reform (SB249/HB846) and improving health care.

I am also excited to tell you about our 5th Episcopal Advocacy Day that was held in February. Both +Bishop Sutton and +Bishop Knudsen attended and addressed a group of 120 in attendance as well as Senate President Mike Miller, various Senate and House representatives, Governor's Office Representative regarding the Opioid issue, coalition leaders and presentations from Archdeacon Jane O'Leary+, Deacon John Martin+, Secretary Al Collins, Dr. Stanley Andrisse and Rev. Ken Phelps+.

So grateful for the help for Senator Ed Reilly, Ardath Cade and Cindy Neseth, David Mallery and Mark Kellogg in helping to coordinate this event.

What are your hopes for the future? I understand that the Bishop and you have identified top priorities...tell us about them.

Every year in October, +Bishop Sutton shares the Diocese's legislative priorities that have been endorsed by either the Episcopal Church General Convention or our own Diocesan convention. This year the priorities were concerned with Clean Energy Jobs, Fracking (which had been passed last year but still was having issues), Parole Reform, Ban the Box for Higher Education, Drug pricing transparency, Health Care and issues involving the Opioid Epidemic.

How can others (lay and ordained) become involved?

Please call me at 443-253-6191 or email kathyshahinian@aol.com to become involved!!! We will be providing legislative training so you can use your gifts to research, write or present oral testimony. We will need help putting together the legislative committee/team and also the Episcopal Advocacy Day for next year. There is something for everyone.

Is there anything else you'd like our readers to know about Public Policy?

Being a deacon, besides being a mom, is by far the most life changing event in my life. Sometimes an earlier path that we have chosen in our lives finds a way to resurface later in life. I never expected to return to Annapolis to do public policy work in the late 1990's but God had another plan. Please consider looking into the public policy ministry and help make a difference!

About Deacon Shaninian:

Deacon Kathy Shahinian was ordained in June, 2013. She was born and raised in Baltimore and grew up-attending Trinity Episcopal Church in Towson. She holds a B.A. in liberal arts and an M.A. in business and human resources from the College of Notre Dame. She previously served at St. Martin's in the Field and is presently serving at St. Anne's in Annapolis. Since 1998 she has worked "in the world" full-time as a benefits consultant for a Baltimore insurance broker. Since 2012, she has served as the Diocesan Public Policy Advocate during the legislative session, and is currently enrolled at the Ecumenical Institute where she is pursuing a Masters in Church Ministries.

Attached is a picture of the 5th Annual Episcopal Advocacy Day this year -

The ninety-day Maryland General Assembly session ended April 10. Deacon **Kathy Shahinian** and the **Maryland Episcopal Public Policy Network (MEPPN)** met with state leaders and advocated for our legislative priorities throughout the 2018 legislative session. **Follow MEPPN on Facebook** or check out **#EpiscopalAdvocacyMD** on Twitter to learn more.

