



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

### TESTIMONY REGARDING ASSEMBLY BILL 427 Presented to the Assembly Committee on Judiciary and Ethics September 13, 2007

My name is Barbara Sella and I am the Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns at the Wisconsin Catholic Conference. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of Assembly Bill 427.

For Catholics, being pro-life involves more than opposition to abortion. Being pro-life also involves understanding the social, economic, and psychological forces that often impel women to make such a tragic choice and then helping women to overcome these obstacles.

In his 1995 encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II underscored how “tragic and painful” the abortion decision is for many women. Often, he noted, a woman chooses abortion “out of a desire to protect certain important values such as her own health or a decent standard of living for the other members of the family. Sometimes it is feared that the child to be born would live in such conditions that it would be better if the birth did not take place. Nevertheless,” he added, “these reasons and others like them, however serious and tragic, can never justify the deliberate killing of an innocent human being.” (GL, 58)

But the Pope did not stop there, for in the next paragraph he went on to identify others who share moral responsibility for the woman’s abortion.

As well as the mother, there are often other people too who decide upon the death of the child in the womb. In the first place, the father of the child may be to blame, not only when he directly pressures the woman to have an abortion, but also when he indirectly encourages such a decision on her part by leaving her alone to face the problems of pregnancy.... Nor can one overlook the pressures which sometimes come from the wider family circle and from friends. Sometimes the woman is subjected to such strong pressure that she feels psychologically forced to have an abortion: certainly in this case moral responsibility lies particularly with those who have directly or indirectly obliged her to have an abortion. (GL, 59)

In the end, then, moral responsibility rarely rests on the woman alone. Family members, employers, educators, health providers—all those who pressure or encourage a woman to rid herself of her child in a violent manner—share some responsibility.

Women who are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy deserve better. Women deserve to know that choosing life for their baby does not mean abandoning all hope for an education, for meaningful employment, and for a better life. They deserve to know that others will not only care enough to ask if abortion is what they really want, but will also help them find the proper resources to carry their baby to term.

Assembly Bill 427 is designed to give pregnant women facing an abortion perhaps their first glimmer of hope that there is another, better way of overcoming their present difficulties.

Even as we support this bill, we recognize that much more will have to be done to help pregnant women who feel that abortion is their only option. We need a renewed sense of both personal responsibility and social responsibility to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions.

Just last week, Pope Benedict XVI reaffirmed that to be pro-life is to actively help pregnant women in need. "I do not close my eyes," he said, "to the difficulties and the conflicts which many women are experiencing, and I realize that the credibility of what we say also depends on what the Church herself is doing to help women in trouble."

Together with all people of good will, the Catholic Church is committed to empowering women and protecting human life.

Thank you.