



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**January 24, 2014**

### **WCC BACKS PROPOSALS TO CURB HUMAN TRAFFICKING**

The WCC is supporting two bills that would strengthen Wisconsin's human trafficking laws. The proposals, Senate Bill 492 and Assembly Bill 620, were considered in separate legislative hearings during the week of January 20. Among other things, the bills would create a process by which a victim of human trafficking who is convicted of prostitution may request a court to vacate the conviction.

WCC Associate Director Barbara Sella offered written testimony in support of SB 492 to the Senate Committee on Transportation, Public Safety, and Veterans and Military Affairs on January 21, and to the Assembly Committee on Corrections two days later on January 23.

"Human trafficking constitutes one of the gravest offenses against the human family. It preys upon the most vulnerable women, children, and men who are frequently tricked or coerced into performing uncompensated work or degrading and dangerous activities," Sella wrote. "It denies everything that a civilized society stands for and that Catholic social teaching espouses: the protection of human dignity and human rights; the preferential option for the poor; the call to family and community; the rights of workers; and solidarity."

Sella noted that the Catholic Church, along with other religious and secular institutions, has been involved in combating human trafficking both nationally and internationally for some time. In the U.S., the Catholic Coalition Against Human Trafficking, which consists of about twenty Catholic organizations, was one of the groups that helped draft the federal Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 and its subsequent reauthorizations.

She also reminded the committees that just this past December, Pope Francis addressed the issue of human trafficking in a speech for new ambassadors to the Vatican:

Human trafficking is a crime against humanity. We must unite our efforts to free the victims and stop this increasingly aggressive crime which threatens not only individuals but the basic values of society and of international security and justice, to say nothing of the economy, and the fabric of the family and our coexistence. ... Suitable legislative intervention in the countries of origin, transit and arrival, which will also facilitate orderly migration, can diminish this grave problem. (December 12, 2013)

Senate Bill 492 is authored by Senator Jerry Petrowski (R-Marathon). Assembly Bill 620 is authored by Representative Amy Loudenbeck (R-Clinton). Both bills have broad bi-partisan backing, in addition to having the support of Attorney General J.B. Van Hollen and the Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

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