



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

### TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 305: SALE OF FETAL BODY PARTS

Presented to the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

By Barbara Sella, Associate Director

August 11, 2015

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the state's Catholic bishops, strongly supports Assembly Bill 305, which would prohibit the sale and use of fetal body parts derived from an unborn child whose life is terminated by an induced abortion.

The two pillars of Catholic social teaching that support every position we take are 1) that human life is sacred and 2) that human life is social.

However, these are not simply religious principles. Rather, as the Founders asserted in the Declaration of Independence, these are self-evident truths. Life is sacred not because it is a choice made for us by others, but because it is an endowment from the Creator. And because all of us are connected by our common humanity and all of us are created equal, when the rights of one are trampled, the rights of all are threatened. That is why the Founders asserted that government exists to secure these rights.

The practice of selling human tissue, especially when it is procured by the willful destruction of a developing human life, is an assault on both those principles. This practice is wrong not only because it violates the teaching of various religious traditions, but also because it rejects the values enshrined in the Declaration of Independence itself.

Human life is not a commodity to be bought and sold or otherwise diminished for the gain of others. A civilized society treats every human being as an end, not as a means to an end. A human being must never be seen as a collection of spare body parts. The sale of fetal tissue and organs is one more example of what Pope Francis has called the "throwaway culture, which has today enslaved the hearts and minds of so many."

Research involving the use of human tissue and organs offers exciting possibilities for the prevention and treatment of diseases and disabilities. We all long for the day when cancer, Parkinson's, and Alzheimer's can be cured or prevented entirely. But the manner in which this research is conducted is as important as the cure. Medical progress must always be accompanied by moral progress. Medical progress must always be measured in light of its impact on the human person.

As the bishops wrote in their 2008 pastoral letter, *Serving All and Sacrificing None: Ethical Stem Cell Research*:

[R]aising moral concerns is essential for genuine scientific progress. Consider the infamous biomedical case of the Tuskegee Syphilis Study. Even after penicillin was discovered in 1947, medical researchers working for the U.S. Public Health Service in Tuskegee, Alabama, deliberately withheld the drug from infected African-American men—impoverished and mostly illiterate—without their consent, so that they could study the full progression of the disease. Today, no one would dispute that ethical standards were sorely lacking in the Tuskegee Study and that true scientific progress can be made only when those standards are securely in place.

The Catholic Church firmly believes that medical progress can be made without selling human body parts as if they were mere commodities. Today when medical experimentation on animals is falling out of favor with the general public and with many in the scientific community, we need to insist that scientists find other ways to cure diseases without sacrificing human lives. We are confident that if the sale of aborted fetal body parts is prohibited, human ingenuity will find other, moral means of conquering diseases. The many cures made possible by the use of adult stem cells is proof of this.

Finally, we are very concerned that the trade in fetal body parts depends on providing false or misleading information to young and vulnerable women about what will happen to their aborted children. How many of these women are truly consenting to what has become a lucrative trade? We see parallels here with the practice of harvesting adult organs from the poor in developing countries for the benefit of wealthier persons in the developed world. We must not allow this to continue.

I would like to close with another quote from the bishops' stem cell pastoral:

Many scientists are people of deep faith and moral conviction. They recognize that faith and science, far from being mutually exclusive, in fact complement one another. Instead of asking, "Will we be religious, or will we be scientific?" they ask, "How can our scientific research best serve humanity? How can we best respect our human subjects in our research?"

AB 305 affirms the dignity of the most vulnerable human life, both mother and child. It affirms ethical scientific progress. We strongly urge you to support it.