



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Assembly Committee on Health

FROM: Barbara Sella, Associate Director, Respect Life and Social Concerns

DATE: September 2, 2015

RE: Assembly Bill 310, Title X Funding Reform

On behalf of the Wisconsin Catholic Conference, I thank you for the opportunity to submit the following testimony and urge you to support Assembly Bill 310, which would reform how Title X of the Public Health Service Act funds are disbursed in Wisconsin.

Assembly Bill 310 would establish a priority process that would make Title X funds flow first to the Department of Health Services (DHS) for use in the Wisconsin Well–Woman Program, and then onto other public entities that provide services to women at the local level. This bill would prohibit public entities from distributing Title X funds to a private, nonprofit entity that provides abortion services, makes referrals for abortion services, or has an affiliate that provides abortion services or makes referrals for abortion services.

At the outset, we would like to reiterate certain principles that not only guide the Catholic Church’s ministry, but are recognized by all as necessary for the advancement of the common good. One such principal is the importance of access to quality health care. Since 1919, the bishops of the United States have been vocal advocates of the idea that all Americans should enjoy access to affordable health care. As the U.S. bishops stated in 1993, “Health care is more than a commodity; it is a basic human right, an essential safeguard of human life and dignity.” We affirm that Wisconsin must continue to seek improved access to comprehensive health care services for those in need, especially women.

Having said this, we think that abortion and those entities that facilitate abortion do not reflect the respect for human dignity that should be at the core of all health care institutions. By prioritizing funding for state and public health entities, Assembly Bill 310 ensures that women’s health care is devoted to prevention, diagnosis, and care, not termination of life.

Assembly Bill 310 also allows the employee of a Title X recipient agency to refuse to offer family planning services to the extent that doing so is contrary to that employee’s personal beliefs. The Wisconsin Constitution explicitly recognizes the importance of the right of conscience. By permitting employees to forgo an activity that would violate their conscience, AB 310 further clarifies that which is already true, namely that “[t]he right of every person to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of conscience shall never be infringed...” (Wis. Const. Art. I, s. 18)

As responsible citizens, we acknowledge that the government should not establish a religion. But neither should government programs promote health care entities and practices that fail to uphold and adhere to the first principle of medicine, to do no harm. There are a myriad of providers that can meet women's health needs without invoking ethical inconsistencies. As a society, we should champion these providers by making certain they gain access to the funds necessary to serve women in need.

For these reasons, we urge you to support Assembly Bill 310. Thank you.