



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

September 3, 2015

WCC SUPPORTS DIVERTING FAMILY PLANNING FUNDING AWAY FROM PLANNED PARENTHOOD

On September 2, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference testified in favor of reforming how Title X of the federal Public Health Service Act funds are disbursed in Wisconsin at a public hearing of the Assembly Committee on Health.

Federal Title X funds are used to provide family planning and related preventive health services (e.g., cancer, diabetes) for low-income women and men. In Wisconsin, Planned Parenthood is the sole recipient of these funds.

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. The 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. In effect, the bill would prohibit Title X funds from going to Planned Parenthood, which receives \$3.5 annually from this program.

The authors of the bill, Representative André Jacque (R-DePere) and Senator Chris Kapenga (R-Delafield), argued that public health assistance should not be used to terminate human life and that other Wisconsin public health programs, including family planning clinics, would be better suited to receive these funds.

Opponents countered that such defunding would cause Planned Parenthood to close some of its 22 statewide clinics, leaving thousands of men and women without the medical home of their choice.

WCC Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns, Barbara Sella, emphasized the advocacy of the U.S. bishops for affordable health care. Quoting a 1993 statement from the U.S. bishops, she said, “Health care is more than a commodity; it is a basic human right, an essential safeguard of human life and dignity.”

Having said this, however, she explained 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.”

Sella also highlighted another provision of the bill, one that has received little attention. 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.

Sella explained that “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...”

“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,” she concluded.

The Committee adjourned without taking further action on the bill. Readers are encouraged to contact their representatives, urging them to support this legislation. Go to <http://legis.wisconsin.gov/> and type in home address under “Find My Legislators.”

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