



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TESTIMONY REGARDING SENATE BILL 398: ABORTION BAN REPEAL **Presented to the Senate Health and Human Services Committee** **February 27, 2008**

My name is Barbara Sella and I am the Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns at the Wisconsin Catholic Conference. On behalf of Wisconsin's Roman Catholic bishops, I strongly urge you to oppose Senate Bill 398, which would repeal our state's abortion ban.

Laws do more than prohibit certain behaviors. The law is also a teacher, helping a community attain its highest aspirations. Wisconsin's abortion ban reflects our state's progressive and humanitarian tradition that all human beings – whether born or unborn – deserve to be treated with equal respect.

Over the past century, Wisconsin led the nation in protecting the vulnerable from exploitation. Reforms such as child labor laws, the minimum wage, the creation of child welfare programs, civil rights laws, and family leave laws have all increased the protection of groups that otherwise risked being harmed by the more powerful.

On the day that *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, Wisconsin will once again be at the forefront of states that protect the most vulnerable of all – the unborn.

Let me be equally clear as to what will not happen when *Roe* is overturned. Women who have abortions will not be put in jail. For the enforcement of s. 940.04 will not repeal s. 940.13, which protects women who abort from prosecution.

The WCC fully supports s. 940.13. The aborted child is not the only victim of an abortion. Women are also victims and they deserve compassion, not incarceration.

According to the most recent statistics on induced abortions (“Facts on Induced Abortion in the United States,” Guttmacher Institute, January 2008) in 2005, half of all induced abortions were obtained by women under the age of 25. A woman living below the federal poverty level was four times more likely to obtain an abortion than a woman living at 300% of the poverty level. Two-thirds of all abortions were obtained by unmarried women. African-American women and Latino women were 4.8 and 2.7 times more likely to get an abortion than White women. Three-quarters of women who aborted said they could not afford to care for a child.

In short, abortion is most prevalent among young, poor, unmarried women, with the highest rates among women of color. These are individuals who feel compelled to obtain an abortion because they do not have sufficient economic or emotional support.

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Catholic teaching holds that the solution to poverty and illegitimacy is not abortion, but love and responsibility, justice and solidarity. Women and their unborn children deserve the right not only to a safe birth, but also to a safe and dignified life – to sufficient nutrition, housing, education, health care, and employment. These issues should be the focus of our public policy efforts, not the defense of abortion.

In 1973, some believed that legalized abortion was the way to a more just society. Today we know better. In the 35 years since *Roe v. Wade*, out-of-wedlock births have steadily increased. Child neglect persists. Ninety per cent of all fetuses diagnosed with Down Syndrome are aborted. Women and men suffer psychological and physical harm from their past abortions. Millions of unborn children have lost their lives.

To accept abortion on demand is to accept these injustices. It is to accept that we are not created equal, and that some human lives have greater moral worth than others. It is to accept that human lives conceived out-of-wedlock, or with fetal abnormalities, are less entitled to our respect. It is to accept that a human life is only precious if it is wanted by somebody else.

This logic is not simply unjust – it defies reason. The basic premise of a democratic society is the equal rights of all its members. Our nation's Founders affirmed that our Creator endows every human life with intrinsic and inalienable dignity. Lincoln reaffirmed this at Gettysburg. We can reaffirm it today by leaving s. 940.04 in our state statutes.

Thank you.