



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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WCC URGES LEGISLATURE TO KEEP LAW BANNING ABORTION

Arguing that Wisconsin's law banning abortion upholds the value of all human life, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference urged lawmakers to oppose a bill that would remove the ban from state statutes.

The proposal, Senate Bill 398, would repeal section 940.04 of the statutes that makes abortion illegal. Though unenforced since the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized abortion, the law would go back into effect if the Court overturns its ruling in *Roe v. Wade*. Senate Bill 398 was the subject of a public hearing in the Capitol on February 27.

Barbara Sella, WCC Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns, told the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services that even though Wisconsin's ban on abortion cannot be enforced, it nonetheless has value.

"Laws do more than prohibit certain behaviors. The law is also a teacher, helping the 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."

Sella noted that 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," she added.

Sella also rebutted a main contention of the bill's supporters that leaving s. 940.04 on the books will mean women will be imprisoned for having an abortion if the practice again becomes illegal.

"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."

Sella drew a parallel to legislation banning human trafficking, the goal of which is to prosecute those who facilitate or profit from the trafficking, but not to prosecute the victims of trafficking even if they have engaged in illegal activities.

Noting that most women who have abortions are young, less educated, and more likely to be poor, Sella told the committee that lawmakers should focus on eliminating the conditions that lead women to abort.

“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,” she said. “These issues should be the focus of our public policy efforts, not the defense of abortion.”

Sella reminded the committee that women’s rights advocacy has not always meant support for abortion. Such nineteenth-century women’s rights leaders as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton openly opposed abortion.

“To accept abortion on demand . . . is to accept that we are not created equal, and that some human lives have greater moral worth than others,” Sella added. “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,” Sella concluded.

Opponents of the bill included Wisconsin Right to Life, Pro-Life Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Family Action, Inc. Scores of private citizens, including many students, also registered their opposition to the bill.

Supporters included Planned Parenthood, NARAL Pro-Choice, the American Civil Liberties Union, the League of Women Voters, the National Association of Social Workers – Wisconsin Chapter, and the Wisconsin Nurses Association.

The Committee took not action on the bill following the hearing.

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