

WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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WCC SAYS HEALTH EXCHANGE SHOULD NOT INCLUDE ABORTION

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) testified on May 25th in favor of legislation to prohibit insurance providers that participate in a future state exchange from including elective abortions in their coverage. The proposal, Senate Bill 92, is sponsored by State Senator Rich Zipperer (R-Pewaukee) and more than 35 other legislators. The bill was the subject of a public hearing before the Senate Committee on Public Health, Human Services and Revenue.

“For nearly one hundred years the Catholic Church has been a voice for universal access to health care. The Church has long advocated that public funds be used to help the needy obtain health care and health insurance,” testified WCC Associate Director Barbara Sella. “Abortion, however, is not health care. No other medical procedure deliberately terminates a human life. Women and children deserve health care, not abortion.”

The federal health care reform legislation enacted last year requires states to create exchanges to offer health insurance consistent with the new law by January of 2014. States that fail to create such exchanges will use an exchange developed by the federal government. The federal law also provides that states have the option of excluding abortion coverage from health plans participating in the state exchange. Senate Bill 92 creates that exclusion.

Some opponents of this bill argue that excluding abortion coverage unfairly discriminates against poor women by denying them the option to purchase insurance that covers abortion in the state exchange. Opponents also argue that by not being able to access this coverage through a state exchange, poor women may be forced to obtain unsafe abortions.

“As a state and as a nation, we need to confront the fact that the very presence of elective abortion has put enormous pressure on poor women to abort their own children. Elective abortion sends the not-so-subtle message that one of the best ways to escape poverty is by eliminating the children of the poor,” Sella argued.

“Senate Bill 92 sends a different message, namely that true health care respects the dignity of every human life, irrespective of wealth, ethnicity, race, sex, disability, etc. Senate Bill 92 affirms that the government has a responsibility to foster the health and wellbeing of people currently living in poverty, not to enable their destruction.”

Sella also pointed out that the bill upholds a key principle of Supreme Court jurisprudence on abortion:

“Congress and the states have a legitimate interest in promoting childbirth over abortion (see *Maher v. Roe*, 1977 and *Harris v. McRae*, 1980). Though abortion is legal, government has a

duty to the living – born and unborn. That is why both state and federal law prohibit the use of Medicaid dollars to pay for elective abortions.”

Sella concluded by reminding the committee of the Church’s longstanding commitment to life, human dignity, and health care.

“We reaffirm, as the U.S. bishops did during the federal health care debate, that a way must be found so that all who live in our nation – born and unborn, citizen and immigrant – may live in dignity, from the beginning to the end of life. We uphold the work of Catholic hospitals and clinics, which serve 1 in 6 patients nationwide. These facilities demonstrate that it is indeed possible to offer women and their children the highest quality health care without resorting to abortion.”

Other supporters of Senate Bill 92 are Wisconsin Right to Life, Pro-Life Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Family Action. Opponents of the bill include NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin and Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin.

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Contact: Barbara Sella or Kim Wadas at 608-257-0004.