



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TESTIMONY ON SENATE BILL 179 AND ASSEMBLY BILL 237: PAIN-CAPABLE UNBORN CHILD PROTECTION ACT

Presented to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
and the Assembly Committee on Health

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the state's Catholic bishops, strongly supports Senate Bill 179 and Assembly Bill 237, known as the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which would prohibit abortions at and after 20 weeks so as to spare these children the pain of being dismembered in the womb by means of a dilation and evacuation (D&E) abortion.

Our support is grounded in the first principle of Catholic social teaching, namely that every human being has intrinsic dignity and the right to life from conception until natural death.

As we do so, we stress that much more can and must be done to help families to care for these children. Because it is never enough just to outlaw injustice; society must also address the isolation, despair, and suffering that can give rise to injustice.

The Church encourages everyone to find ways to help families who face unplanned or grief-stricken pregnancies: to encounter and walk alongside them, as Pope Francis teaches us, with compassion and tenderness. We need to help them talk about their struggles and their grief. We need to let them know that they are not alone and that others have walked in their footsteps. We urge more families to consider adopting children, especially those with special needs, or to provide respite care to parents. We urge politicians to ensure that government assistance is readily available to families who do not have sufficient personal resources to care for their loved ones.

We call on the medical profession to give parents words of hope and to avoid sending the message that children with disabilities are burdens best eliminated. We urge them to inform patients about the option of perinatal hospice, which is a series of services provided to parents who choose to bring their babies to term. As a March 13, 2007, *New York Times* article observed, dozens of these programs have been developed across the U.S. in the last two decades (<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/13/health/13hospice.html>).

What the rapid proliferation of perinatal hospice demonstrates is how ready parents are to love and care for their fragile children to the very end of their natural lives. We are very happy to see that Senate Bill 179 and Assembly Bill 237 require that information on perinatal hospice be made available to women seeking abortions.

The website www.perinatalhospice.org currently lists five such programs for Wisconsin, including the Perinatal Palliative Care Program at Meriter Hospital here in Madison (<http://www.meriter.com/specialty-care/center-for-perinatal-care/perinatal-palliative-care-program>), which describes its services before, during, and after birth as follows:

A care plan is created with the family and specialized providers that focuses on what is important for the family in terms of the birth of their baby and his or her comfort and well-being after delivery. Throughout the pregnancy, the Care Coordinator continues to meet with the family to provide counseling and resources as well as to review and revise their care goals as needed. Resources may include spiritual care, mental health support, bereavement information, emotional support, and childbirth education options. A referral can be made to Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep, a non-profit organization of photographers who specialize in remembrance photography for parents suffering the loss of a baby. Upon admission to the hospital for the birth, the care plan is accessible to all staff to ensure personalized care. Supportive bereavement care is provided by dedicated nursing and medical staff. A memory box, footprints, mementoes, and photographs are provided. Post discharge bereavement support is provided with follow-up calls, cards, and perinatology consults or other referrals as needed.

None of us wants to be a burden, but each one of us is vulnerable in some way. Each one of us is an illness or an accident away from complete debilitation. But suffering need not be senseless or defeating. By God's grace and the support of family, friends, and community the most difficult circumstances can become occasions to give purpose to our lives. Simply put, all human lives matter.

Allow me to close with the words Pope Francis spoke last Friday to a group of children with disabilities and their parents. "You said that they recommended an abortion. You said, 'No, whatever comes, he has a right to live.' Never, does one solve a problem by eliminating a person. Never."

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Please support passage of Senate Bill 179 and Assembly Bill 237.