



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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### **LEGISLATURE OKS PRO-LIFE BILLS ON HEALTH EXCHANGES AND “WEB CAM” ABORTIONS**

In the closing days of the 2011-12 legislative session, the Wisconsin Assembly gave final approval to two bills that ensure access to health care without increasing support for abortion. One measure, Senate Bill 92 bars health insurance providers that participate in a future state exchange from including elective abortions in their coverage. The proposal, Senate Bill 92, sponsored by Senator Rich Zipperer (R-Pewaukee) and Representative Robin Vos (R-Burlington) passed the Assembly on a 61 to 34 vote. The Senate had approved the bill in October 2011.

The federal health care reform legislation enacted in 2010 requires states to create exchanges that offer health insurance consistent with the new law by January of 2014. The federal law provides that states have the option of excluding abortion coverage from health plans participating in the state exchange. Senate Bill 92 creates that exclusion.

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) had offered testimony in support of the bill at a public hearing last May. Other supporters of Senate Bill 92 are Wisconsin Right to Life, Pro-Life Wisconsin, Ministry Health Care, Wisconsin Employee Benefit Advisors, and Wisconsin Family Action. Opponents of the bill include NARAL Pro-Choice Wisconsin, Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Wisconsin.

Another proposal to win legislative backing was Senate Bill 306, authored by Senator Mary Lazich (R-New Berlin) and Representative Michelle Litjens (R-Oshkosh). The bill protects women from being coerced into having an abortion and prohibits “webcam” abortions.

During a webcam abortion, a doctor conducts a brief interview with a patient from a remote location using video conferencing technology. The doctor then remotely dispenses the abortion pill, RU 486, to the woman. A nurse is present at the patient’s location, but there is no physical examination performed prior to the administration of the abortion-inducing medication.

As stated in WCC testimony on the bill, “[n]ot giving a woman a physical exam before dispensing pills designed to destroy her unborn child after she leaves the abortion facility is reckless at best and potentially harmful to her health and life.”

Senate Bill 306 also repeals a century-old state statute that allowed for prosecution of pregnant women who have abortions. Repeal of the older statute would leave no doubt that our state is not interested in prosecuting women, but only in finding ways to help them and their unborn children to thrive.

Like SB 92, SB 306 also had the backing of the WCC, Wisconsin Family Action, Pro-Life Wisconsin, and Wisconsin Right to Life.

WCC Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns, Barbara Sella, praised passage of the two bills.

“These bills are the result of cooperation and hard work by a number of pro-life organizations. These victories remind us of what is possible when we work together,” Sella said.

She also noted that more has to be done help parents choose life.

“Even as we celebrate these legislative victories, we recognize that much more will have to be done to help pregnant women who feel that abortion is their only or best option,” Sella observed. “We need a renewed sense of both personal and social responsibility to reduce the number of unplanned pregnancies and abortions. We need greater support for marriage, parenting, and adoption. We need to reach out to women who find themselves pregnant and isolated so that they don’t feel shamed or pressured into aborting.”

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