



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Jesse James, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse Prevention, Children & Families

FROM: Tia Izzia, Associate Director for Human Life & Social Concerns

DATE: September 21, 2023

RE: Support for Senate Bill 369 Newborn Infant Safety Devices

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to support Senate Bill 369, authorizing newborn infant safety devices under the safe haven law.

While as a society, we must always work to ensure that women and their children can remain united and receive the help they need to flourish, we know that there are women in complex circumstances who will decide to relinquish their child after giving birth. This has always been the case throughout history. Today, these circumstances might include an unsafe home environment, drug use, domestic abuse, fear of entanglement with law enforcement, and other difficult situations. SB-369 provides women with a last resort and totally anonymous option to be able to ensure their own safety and that of their child. Additionally, newborn infant safety devices keep vulnerable infants safe because they are cared for immediately by trained professionals.

In 2001, the safe haven bill was signed into law. It was a bipartisan bill that came out of the Speaker's Task Force on Abandoned Babies. The Wisconsin Catholic Conference, along with Planned Parenthood, and many others supported the bill. Everyone recognized that this was a much-needed service.

Allow me to quote an excerpt from the WCC's testimony in 2001:

We are aware of concerns that the proposal may further enable women in their denial and misdirect them away from traditional adoption support systems. We hope that the proposal does not undermine these important services, but in fact provides an avenue for furthering information about services available to women in need to alleviate their sense of isolation and helplessness.

While safe haven is a last resort option, it is an essential one. It is part and parcel of embracing both mother and child. The Catholic Church will continue to push for proposals that ensure that mothers can remain united with their children and that both can thrive. There are many more proposals that get us closer to this goal: expanding postpartum care, reducing costs for birth, eliminating racial disparities in maternal and infant mortality, supporting birth mothers after adoption, removing sales tax on feminine hygiene products and baby supplies, the Embrace Them Both bill package, and more.

Together, we can and must build an economy and society in Wisconsin where women and children can live safely and readily access the resources they need to thrive. To echo what we said in 2001, if one life is saved then this law has served a laudable end. For all these reasons, we urge you to pass Senate Bill 369.