



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**TESTIMONY ON ASSEMBLY BILL 154:  
ABORTION OPT-OUT IN STATE EXCHANGE  
Presented to the Assembly Committee on Insurance  
By Barbara Sella, Associate Director  
November 17, 2011**

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) strongly supports Assembly Bill 154, which would prohibit insurance providers that participate in a future state exchange from including elective abortions in their coverage.

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.

Abortion, however, is not health care. No other medical procedure deliberately terminates a human life. Women and children deserve health care, not abortion.

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

However, 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.

Assembly Bill 154, then, is necessary because it sends a different message, namely that true health care respects the dignity of every human life, irrespective of wealth, ethnicity, race, sex, disability, etc. AB 154 sends the message that government has a responsibility to foster the health and well-being of people currently living in poverty, not to enable their destruction.

Finally, AB 154 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.

Even as we support AB 154, we reaffirm that affordable health care is a basic human right. 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 and which demonstrate that it is indeed possible to offer women and their children the highest quality health care without resorting to abortion.

The new federal health reform law (Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act) explicitly allows states to enact a law like AB 154. We strongly urge you to support it.

Thank you.