



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TESTIMONY REGARDING ASSEMBLY BILL 710: PARTIAL BIRTH ABORTION

Presented to the Assembly Committee on Judiciary and Ethics
January 31, 2008

My name is Barbara Sella and I am the Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns at the Wisconsin Catholic Conference. On behalf of Wisconsin's Roman Catholic bishops, I urge you to support Assembly Bill 710, which would bring Wisconsin's law on partial birth abortions in line with federal law.

As Catholics, we try to evaluate every public policy in light of its impact on the human person. And we strive to do this in a way that is consistent. Thus, we oppose the death penalty, assisted suicide, euthanasia, and abortion.

Each of these four forms of killing have their defenders, who claim that at certain critical times, the life of one human being may have to be sacrificed for the good of another. In the case of abortion, pro-choice advocates generally concede that a human life is in the womb, but that this life has fewer rights than those of its mother.

This simply does not stand to reason. In a democracy such as ours, we uphold the principle that we are all created equal, and endowed by our Creator with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Mother and child share these fundamental rights. Rather than destroying the child in order to uphold the mother's right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, we need to look for different ways to uphold the rights of both.

We do not close our eyes to the suffering and despair of women who are facing an unwanted pregnancy. In fact, it is precisely in helping women that we can best help their unborn children. In addition to rethinking labor, urban, residential, and social service policies to create a society where it is possible to bear and care for children, we need to change our abortion laws, so that when a woman is faced with an unplanned pregnancy, she will not feel the subtle pressure and temptation to kill her unborn child. We simply cannot accept the contention that a woman cannot advance unless she is at liberty to abort her children.

The Church is also not blind to the plight of pregnant women whose lives are truly in danger. The Church recognizes that in some rare instances, where a mother's life is truly at risk, the death of her unborn child is tolerated if it happens as an unintended consequence – and an indirect result – of providing her with non-abortive operations, treatments, and medications that have as their direct purpose the cure of her serious medical condition.

As you deliberate on this bill, you may wrestle with the question of whether it is appropriate to limit the ban to just this procedure, and whether to allow for a "life of the mother exception." Although this bill does not ban all abortions, we believe a vote for it is justified.

Even though the Church's teaching on the matter is clear – abortion is never permissible – in his encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*, Pope John Paul II counseled that "when it is not possible to overturn or completely abrogate a pro-abortion law, an elected official... could licitly support proposals aimed at limiting the harm done by such a law and at lessening its negative consequences at the level of general opinion and public morality."

The pope added, "This does not in fact represent an illicit cooperation with an unjust law, but rather a legitimate and proper attempt to limit its evil aspects."

Based on this teaching, the Wisconsin Catholic Conference recognizes that state lawmakers must exercise prudential judgment to determine at this place and time in history what is realistically attainable in crafting a law that bans or drastically limits partial birth abortions.

Today, we can see more clearly than in 1973 the consequences and the limits of an unchecked "right to choose." An estimated 90 percent of fetuses diagnosed with Downs Syndrome are aborted. A growing number of married couples are experiencing infertility, and yet cannot adopt domestically, in part because of the high rate of abortions. In other parts of the world, the number of aborted females has reached critical proportions.

Banning partial birth abortion brings us closer to the day when these practices will no longer be acceptable. We respectfully urge you to support Assembly bill 710.

Thank you.