



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

**TESTIMONY REGARDING SB 232:
CONTRACEPTION MANDATE FOR PHARMACISTS
Presented by Barbara Sella, Associate Director
March 5, 2008**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on this complicated issue.

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference opposes SB 232 for several reasons, having to do with how we define human life, abortion, and conscience rights. I will briefly state the objections and then explain what the Catholic Church teaches on conscience and contraception so that our position may be better understood.

Objections to SB 232

Our first objection to SB 232 is that it strikes out the phrase in s. 20.927(1g), “unborn child” means a human being from the time of conception until it is born alive.” In so doing, the bill imposes a legislative answer to the question of when life begins. But this definition ignores what science tells us, which is that the union of an egg and a sperm at conception marks the beginning of a new human life.

Second, eliminating the above phrase would redefine abortion in a way that would affect not just pharmacists, but other health care professionals as well. If abortion no longer includes the harm done to the pre-implanted fertilized egg, then all health care professionals and institutions would be forced by state statute to provide such abortifacients as the intrauterine device (IUD), whose only function is to prevent a newly conceived human life from implanting.

Third, in asserting that abortion never means the “use, administration, delivery, prescribing, or dispensing of any federal-food-and-drug-administration-approved contraceptive,” the bill is too broad. We simply do not know what other contraceptives will be approved by the FDA in the future. Some of them could, in fact, interfere with implantation or directly destroy a newly conceived human life. Given the recent problems with FDA-approved medications, we should also all be cautious about the possible health risks to the woman of any new drugs.

Fourth, we have serious reservations about the bill’s impact on the conscience rights of pharmacists. Indeed, SB 232 would seem to directly contradict Article I, Section 18 of our state Constitution, which explicitly affirms, “nor shall any control of, or interference with, the rights of conscience be permitted.”

Conscience in the Catholic Tradition

For Catholics, conscience is “the interior voice of a human being, within whose heart the inner law of God is inscribed. Moral conscience is a judgment of practical reason about the moral quality of a human action. It moves a person at the appropriate moment to *do good* and to *avoid evil*” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, #1777-1778, emphasis added).

Too often our society views conscience as merely that which stops individuals from doing evil. However, conscience, in its fullest sense, is that which calls us to something better, to be something more than what we are. Conscience is not minimalist, seeking the lowest common denominator. Conscience leads us to the higher, greater good. It is not a means of calculating, “What is the minimum I must do – or avoid doing – to be a moral person?” Rather, it is a voice that calls us to be as virtuous as we can be.

Contraception in the Catholic Tradition

In order to better understand why some retail pharmacists may not want to distribute artificial contraception, I want to say a word about the Catholic position on contraception.

In 2006, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued a statement on sexuality and contraception entitled, “Married Love and the Gift of Life.” In it, the bishops explained what distinguishes the Catholic view of sexuality from that of our secular culture.

Our culture often presents sex as merely recreational, not as a deeply personal or even important encounter between spouses. In this view, being responsible about sex simply means limiting its consequences—avoiding disease and using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. ... God’s plan for married life and love is far richer and more fulfilling. Here sexuality is the source of a joy and pleasure that helps the spouses give themselves to each other completely and for their entire lives.

The Church views artificial contraception as objectively immoral because it introduces a “false note” in a marriage. Artificial contraception restricts the total self-giving of the spouses. Contraception may also cause one or both spouses to treat each other more like objects than as persons. In some cases, the failure of contraception may tempt couples to seek an abortion when an unwanted life is conceived.

The bishops’ statement goes on to explain that couples may indeed control the number and spacing of births using Natural Family Planning, and it highlights some of the benefits of this approach, benefits that a growing number of non-believers are discovering.

The Church’s objection to artificial contraception is not about trying to penalize or control individuals. It is about not trivializing the most creative power that we human beings possess. It is about protecting the human dignity of parents and their unborn children. It is about reminding society that women should not have to radically delay childbirth, artificially suppress their fertility, or ingest strong chemicals in order to get an education and participate in the workforce at every level.

Conclusion

As we regularly argue in our testimony on the rights of workers, prisoners, children, the sick, and the elderly, each human being possesses an inherent and inalienable dignity. Each human being is a moral agent, with an equal claim to live a dignified life and to act in accordance with his or her conscience. Any legislation that denies our humanity and coerces the conscience of even a few individuals should not be supported. Please oppose SB 232.

Thank you.