



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Senator Howard Marklein, Chair
Members, Senate Committee on Agriculture, Revenue and Financial Institutions

FROM: Barbara Sella, Associate Director, Wisconsin Catholic Conference

DATE: December 18, 2019

RE: Support for Senate Bill 114, Stillbirth Tax Credit

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC) greatly appreciates the opportunity to offer testimony today on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Wisconsin in support of Senate Bill 114, which creates a refundable individual income tax credit of \$2,000 that may be claimed by the parents of a stillborn child.

Every October, we recognize Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month, but much of society does not know how to react or help those who have faced the loss of a baby. When a family loses a child to stillbirth, it is a devastating experience that is often coupled with confusion and isolation. A parent's perspective quickly turns from joy to instant sorrow. The process is made more painful by having to inform friends and family of the death of a child and dealing with the reality of mounting health and funeral expenses.

When a family experiences a stillbirth, as one mother wrote "There are often no memorials, no flowers, or notes of condolence..." There is no aid and little acknowledgement. In creating a stillborn tax credit, Senate Bill 114 provides a formal acknowledgement to grieving families that the State of Wisconsin recognizes the loss they have suffered with the death of their child. This acknowledgement comes through a compassionate offer of assistance, a means to help families cope with the mounting challenges they face with such loss.

However, given that many families experience the loss of a child earlier during pregnancy, we would request that Senate Bill 114 be amended to include the unintentional loss of a child prior to the 20-week or 350 grams weight standard that triggers a fetal death report under current law. With the loss of a child earlier in the pregnancy the experience of the family is the same – the same love, the same grief, and frequently many of the same health and related costs. Therefore, these families should be provided with access to the same resources.

As Pope Francis once said, "Every child born is the promise of a life which once again reveals itself to be stronger than death." (*General Audience, September 20, 2017*) With a stillborn child, the love already experienced between parent and child must be acknowledged by our society and our communities must offer consolation for that hidden life lost. Senate Bill 114 is one important way to memorialize this life and provide comfort to those in sorrow.

We urge your support for Senate Bill 114. Thank you.