



## WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on Health

FROM: Barbara Sella, Associate Director for Respect Life and Social Concerns

DATE: October 7, 2021

RE: AB 595, Selective Abortions

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The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to support Assembly Bill 595, which prohibits abortions solely because of race, color, national origin, ancestry, sex, or disability.

As has been widely reported, unborn children with certain congenital conditions are aborted at very high rates. In 2012, researchers estimated that between 1995 and 2011 over 67 percent of unborn children diagnosed with Down syndrome in the U.S. were aborted.<sup>1</sup> Similar high abortion rates have been found for those diagnosed with anencephaly and spina bifida.<sup>2</sup>

High rates of abortion have also been recorded in other parts of the world for children deemed to be of the unwanted sex, usually females. In 2012, the Guttmacher Policy Review issued a paper on sex-selective abortions, which recognized the widespread use of such abortions in Asian countries.<sup>3</sup> The paper concluded that the real way to stop sex-selection abortions is not to prohibit such abortions, but to address the underlying conditions that can lead to them, namely an end to poverty and violence, and an increase in access to health care and education for women.

We agree that there is much work to be done on these underlying issues. The Catholic Church runs charities, hospitals, schools, and prison ministries precisely to assist the most vulnerable. Here in Wisconsin, the bishops have long supported efforts to expand educational opportunities,

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<sup>1</sup> Jaime Natoli, et al., "Prenatal diagnosis of Down syndrome: a systematic review of termination rates (1995–2011)" *Prenatal Diagnosis*, Vol. 32, Issue 32 (March 14, 2012), <https://obgyn.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pd.2910>.

<sup>2</sup> Candice Johnson, et al., "Pregnancy termination following prenatal diagnosis of anencephaly or spina bifida: a systematic review of the literature" *Birth Defects Research, Part A*, Vol. 94, Issue 11 (October 25, 2012), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4589245/>.

<sup>3</sup> Sneha Barot "A Problem-and-Solution Mismatch: Son Preference and Sex-Selective Abortion Bans" *Guttmacher Policy Review*, Vol.15, Issue 2 (May 16, 2012), <https://www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2012/05/problem-and-solution-mismatch-son-preference-and-sex-selective-abortion-bans>.

increase access to health care, improve wages and employment, increase housing, reform criminal justice, and welcome immigrants.

But serving the needs of the poor and the vulnerable – as vital as it is – is not enough to halt the spread of selective abortions or abortion in general. For that to happen, a cultural shift must take place and the law can play an important part in that shift. The law signals what is and is not acceptable behavior. Choosing to abort, and facilitating an abortion, based on some perceived “defect” is simply wrong.

True freedom is not absolute choice – a choice without limits. True freedom involves living in such a way that one does not deny freedom to others. AB 595 forces us to confront once again the question of what truly furthers respect for women: absolute freedom that would deny the right to life to a girl because she is not a boy, or an affirmation that her life is worthy of respect both inside and outside the womb; absolute freedom to eliminate humans seen as “defective” or support for children and adults with special needs.

Even as we urge you to support AB 595, we also urge you to do more to help children and adults with disabilities. At every level, we need more funding to ensure that these individuals can reach their full potential and that their burdens and those of their families are shared by the community.

At no other time in human history have we made so many social, medical, and technological strides to assist those with medical conditions. It is time we make the moral stride to protect all unborn lives.