



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 6, Born Alive Protection

The Wisconsin Catholic Conference (WCC), the public policy voice of the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin, urges you to support Assembly Bill 6, the Born Alive Protection Act. The Catholic Church has always held that induced abortion is both immoral and cruel because it treats some human lives as completely disposable.

AB 6 does three very simple, yet necessary things. First, it establishes a standard of care for infants who survive an induced abortion. It does this by requiring that health care providers “exercise the same degree of professional skill, care, and diligence to preserve the life and health of the child as a reasonably diligent and conscientious health care provider would render to any other child born alive at the same gestational age.” And it ensures “that the child born alive is immediately transported and admitted to a hospital.” Standards of care are especially valuable in unexpected situations when medical staff are called on to make split-second decisions.

Second, it sends a message to the medical profession and to the public at large that even though abortion may still be legal, for children outside of the womb, intentional neglect causing death is illegal.

Third, it makes health care providers or employees mandatory reporters when violations occur.

Some have argued that this legislation is not necessary in Wisconsin. However, so long as there are those who advocate for abortion, who debase and devalue those who are vulnerable or face challenges in life, we need to affirm that all born in Wisconsin have a right to life.

We must remember that the law is a teacher. It represents the collective conscience of the citizenry. The Born Alive Protection Act upholds the essential principle that every human life has dignity and should be treated equally by those to whom it is entrusted.

Finally, it is important to be specific about the number of lives that could be affected by this law. According to Wisconsin’s Department of Health Services (DHS), which provides an annual report on the number of induced abortions in the state, Wisconsin in 2019 reported 6,511 induced

abortions. Of these, 60 (or 1 percent) were performed on children over 20 weeks gestation.¹ It is these children who are the ones who might survive an attempted abortion, because an increasing number of children are viable even as early as 20 weeks. For example, a 2019 study has found that in Sweden, where neonatal care is more advanced than in the U.S., “For infants younger than 22 weeks, the survival rate has improved from 3.6 percent to 20 percent over the last decade, and for those born at 26 weeks, eight in 10 survive.”²

While the WCC supports this bill, there are ways in which it could be improved. First, since most late-term abortions are of children who are thought to have little chance of surviving more than a few days, weeks, or months, we believe that more information should be given to the birth parents regarding their options. They should be informed about advancements in maternal health and premature treatments and survival rates. Parents should have the option of utilizing perinatal hospice. This type of hospice cares for infants and their families when death may be imminent. Wisconsin is fortunate to have some excellent perinatal hospice programs. Too few parents, however, are aware of the support these programs provide.

Birth parents should also be informed that many families want to adopt children with Downs Syndrome and other serious, but not life-threatening, conditions.

Finally, women seeking abortions should be told that if their child is born alive, medical staff will provide the care necessary to preserve life. Women should also be told that they can choose to place their child with Safe Place for Newborns (<https://www.safeplacefornewborns.org>) should they choose not to parent their child.

AB 6 is humane and just. We urge you to support its passage.

¹ Wisconsin Dept. of Health Services Division of Public Health Office of Health Informatics, “Reported Induced Abortions in Wisconsin” (January 2021), <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/publications/45360-19.pdf>, p. 9.

² Cite in Ivan Couronne, “New studies confirm improved survival of extremely preterm babies” Medical Press (March 26, 2019), <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-03-sweden-world-extremely-preterm-babies.html>. Study found at Mikael Norman, et al., “Association Between Year of Birth and 1-Year Survival Among Extremely Preterm Infants in Sweden During 2004-2007 and 2014-2016” Journal of the American Medical Association, (March 26, 2019) <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2728924>.