

Statement of the Catholic Bishops of North Dakota on Pro-Life Legislation in the North Dakota Legislative Assembly

March 12, 2009

We, the Catholic Bishops of North Dakota, reaffirm our steadfast commitment to defending human life from conception to natural death and express our support for legislation that brings us closer to ending all abortions and establishing legal protection for all unborn children.

The people of North Dakota, through their public officials, have steadily and strategically advanced the cause for life, making the state one of the most pro-life in the nation. As the Catholic bishops of North Dakota, we are privileged to have participated in those endeavors and are pleased that Catholics have responded to the call to end abortion.

Several bills introduced this legislative session provide another opportunity to move forward. House Bill 1445 requires that a woman considering an abortion be told that the abortion will terminate the life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being. This is a scientific truth that women deserve to know. Pictures also convey the truth of unborn life. For that reason we support HB 1371, which gives a woman an opportunity to view an ultrasound of her unborn child. SB 2265 helps ensure that women are not coerced into abortions and SB 2391 improves the successful alternatives-to-abortion program. All these efforts, however, would be in vain if undone by federal law. For this reason, we support HCR 3015, which expresses the legislature's opposition to the so-called "Freedom of Choice Act" and similar proposals.

These initiatives, all of which passed their chambers of origin with strong support, comprise a set of steps proven to protect human life and help women. We urge their final passage.

In addition to these proposals, the legislature is also considering HB 1572, a different kind of bill, with a unique approach. On its face, HB 1572 expresses a basic truth - that every individual human life is a human being and that every human life deserves legal protection as such.

We agree with the goal of establishing the full legal recognition of the right to life of every unborn child from the moment of conception and will never waver from that objective. Laws, however, are not just expressions of abstract ideas or desired goals, but concrete rules of action. This means that the truths of faith and reason must be chiseled into civil policy with great precision in both thought and execution, thus meeting the demands of the cardinal virtue of prudence. To this end, we have sought and carefully weighed valued opinions from pro-life groups, legal experts with extensive and lengthy experience in abortion law, ethicists, state Catholic conferences, and brother bishops. While opinions can vary, it is apparent to us that HB 1572, as written, raises

many unanswered questions, could lead to unintended consequences and injustices, and would not achieve the goal of providing a direct challenge to *Roe v. Wade* and its progeny.

We share, however, the desire to establish in law our state's intent to protect all human life from the moment of conception and we believe the legislature can remedy the questions about, and the potential problems with, HB 1572. To that end, we have directed the North Dakota Catholic Conference to draft amendments that would preserve the intent of HB 1572 while eliminating unnecessary problems. With those amendments, we could support HB 1572 as one part of our state's continual march forward for life.

Thank you to all who have worked to advance the protection of human life through legislative efforts and community initiatives. The efforts of each citizen of North Dakota toward ensuring the protection of all human life are necessary and critical. None of us can sit back and wait for others to do this work. Any governmental body that does not understand, embrace and defend the inherent dignity of human life does not truly serve those it governs, but rather moves slowly and surely toward its own destruction as its people are destroyed, one by one, under the protection of law.