



FLORIDA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS

The nonpartisan public policy voice of the Catholic Church in Florida

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Statement on the Day of Prayer for the Legal Protection of Unborn Children January 22, 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Our fidelity to Christ calls us to uphold and protect the inviolable dignity and sanctity of all human life from the moment of conception until natural death. Great progress has been made in recent years to protect women and their preborn children in Florida. That progress, as noted below, is at great risk.

We are encouraged that our state's 15-week abortion limit remains in effect as the Florida Supreme Court considers a challenge to it. The legislature's passage of a bill to further limit abortion to six-weeks of gestation during the 2023 session and its approval by Governor DeSantis is a momentous achievement. This legislation also increases resources to pregnant women and young families through the Florida Pregnancy Care Network almost six-fold. If the 15-week law is upheld, the further limit to six weeks will go into effect thirty days later, ushering in a new era. Much remains to be done to properly recognize the dignity of the child in the womb, but this marks tremendous progress in the legal protection of preborn children in Florida.

This progress, as well as gains made over the past several decades to protect women and their preborn children from the harms of abortion, is at significant risk. An extreme ballot initiative proposing to amend our state constitution to legalize full-term abortion is of grave concern. If ultimately passed, the amendment would legalize abortion up until birth, including when the baby is capable of feeling pain. While the proposed amendment permits parental notification, the amendment would eliminate the current law requiring parental consent for a minor daughter to receive an abortion.

As is required of the petition initiative process, the proposed ballot language is under review by the Florida Supreme Court. In our briefs to the Court, we contend that the ballot title and summary are misleading, which should preclude its placement on the ballot. The title states the amendment "limits" government interference with abortion when the amendment actually prohibits all regulation before viability. Neither does the language provide fair notice of its impact on existing statutory protections for women. If this extreme amendment ultimately appears on the November 2024 ballot, we urge all Floridians to "vote no."

A healthy society can only continue to flourish if based on a consistent recognition of the rights of each individual, especially the weakest and most defenseless. With this in mind, we remain committed to pursuing full legal protection of preborn children and continue to support efforts to offer practical assistance and accompaniment to women and their families experiencing difficulties during pregnancy and beyond. We invite all people of good will to join us in these endeavors.

Most Rev. Thomas G. Wenski
Archdiocese of Miami

Most Rev. Gerald M. Barbarito
Diocese of Palm Beach

Most Rev. Frank J. Dewane
Diocese of Venice

Most Rev. John G. Noonan
Diocese of Orlando

Most Rev. Gregory L. Parkes
Diocese of St. Petersburg

Most Rev. William A. Wack, C.S.C.
Diocese of Pensacola-Tallahassee

Most Rev. Erik T. Pohlmeier
Diocese of St. Augustine

Most Rev. Enrique E. Delgado
Archdiocese of Miami