



January 18, 2023

Dear Legislator:

As the Catholic bishops of Minnesota, we encourage you to vote no on H.F. 1/S.F. 1. The legislation undermines our state's credibility as a protector of the most vulnerable, and, coupled with bills such as H.F. 91/S.F. 70, attempts to create an unlimited abortion regime in Minnesota that is out of step with Minnesotans' actual views and those of the rest of the world.

We are disappointed to see the quick pace at which these destructive bills are moving, and we hope to give legislators pause. When contemplating policy on any issue, we must consider all those who will be affected. In this case, that includes the mother, father, and most especially, the unborn child whose life is being taken.

In a post-*Dobbs* world in which states that allow abortion have the responsibility to both regulate the practice and protect nascent human life, we should be working to find common ground on the challenges before us in Minnesota. We stand firm that every child should be welcomed in life and protected by law.

### **We cannot ignore the child in the womb**

We are deeply troubled by Minnesota's current situation: in spite of the fact that scientific inquiry has definitively determined that human life begins at conception, a woman can procure an abortion for almost any reason at any stage of pregnancy up till birth. To put this in perspective, in 2021 there were 222 abortions involving viable babies older than 20 weeks. Almost half of all abortions are paid for with taxpayer funds. Currently, an 11-year-old girl can get an abortion without even one parent knowing. There is no requirement in place that a licensed physician perform an abortion. And abortion proponents, including some elected officials, are working proactively to shut down pregnancy resource centers, who work diligently to give women a choice other than abortion.

As inconvenient as it is for some, we cannot ignore the reality of the unborn child in the womb—a living human being who is owed the protection of the community. We cannot allow state-sanctioned violence against a whole class of human beings. At the very minimum, we should all be able to agree that post-viability abortions, except to save the life of the mother, should not be allowed; that taxpayers not be required to fund any more abortions than those already required by the courts; and that medical professionals should not be punished for refusing to participate in abortion.

### **A better Minnesota: common ground for the common good**

Rep. Kotyza-Witthuhn stated in her remarks in the House State and Local Government committee that no one is pro-abortion. If so, it seems that we should all be working together to limit the demand for abortion and properly welcome children into the world. Part of that welcome is establishing right relationships ("prenatal justice") between the community and the mother, father, and child. We must encourage marriage and family stability, and ensure that parents are supported when necessary due to economic hardship.

This support means, among other things, policies that fund: nutritional aid for expectant mothers; healthcare coverage during and after pregnancy for both mother and child; childcare assistance; and adequate housing. Enacting reasonable paid family and caregiver leave laws would help people retain work and care for their newborns. Reconsidering whether our adoption policies are unreasonably burdened by excessive costs or barriers to participation is also an imperative. And rather than attacking programs such as the Positive Alternatives

grants (H.F. 289/S.F. 336), we should strengthen those that help us walk with women in need during crisis pregnancies.

We also contend that there is a social duty to remove unnecessary barriers to contracting marriage, having children, and being able to raise them well. By raising the family to the top of our state's policy priorities, we can help restore the family to its proper position as the foundational building block of society where children best flourish.

The work to limit demand for abortion does not, however, absolve the legislator from the responsibility to protect the living human being in the womb. No amount of support for public assistance programs is sufficient to exonerate one from complicity and cooperation in creating legal frameworks that facilitate the death of other human beings through legal abortion.

### **The bill's implications for the courts beyond abortion**

We also wish to express our concern that the bill goes beyond abortion in its misguided attempt to protect the rights to reproductive freedom and to make decisions about reproductive healthcare. The bill directs state courts to protect these "rights" in a variety of novel legal and bioethical contexts that may arise. As was seen in the Senate Judiciary and Public Safety Committee, both the scope and legislative intent of this language is unclear, and this should give legislators pause lest they open a Pandora's box in the courts.

Defined appropriately, it is the case that people do have such a right to reproductive freedom, but the immunity from government involvement in such decisions extends only to the right to conceive a child. As noted above, however, once a child is conceived the broader community has an interest in its protection and well-being. And the community assuredly has an interest in promoting sound ethics in the creation of life and to ensure that, for example, economically disadvantaged women are not exploited, and children are not turned into commodities. The irresponsibly broad and open-ended definition of reproductive healthcare in this bill needs to be limited.

More fundamentally, we wish to remind our lawmakers that no individual has unlimited autonomy over the making and taking of life. To assert such unlimited autonomy is to usurp a prerogative that belongs to God alone. Authorizing a general license to make and take life at our whim will unleash a host of social and spiritual consequences with which we as a community will have to reckon. Can we really deny, for example, that legal abortion is a root cause of the violence and disrespect for the human person rampant in our culture?

We close by reiterating our commitment to work with legislators to find common ground to protect unborn children, but also to create a more welcoming world for them to flourish after birth and thereby limit the demand for abortion. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully yours,

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Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis

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