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Bishops Speak Out Against Abortion Legislation

A Statement of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts

The Massachusetts State Legislature will consider passing into law two deeply troubling bills this legislative session. They are identical in text but differ slightly in their titles. The first, (HB 3320) is "*An Act removing obstacles and expanding access to women's reproductive health*". The second, (SB 1209) is "*An Act to remove obstacles and expand abortion access*". Combined they share the same acronym – ROE.

The supporters of these bills argue the proposed changes to Massachusetts law are simply intended to protect a woman's right to an abortion in the event the United States Supreme Court overturns the 1973 decision in the case of *Roe v. Wade*. However, in reality these bills would create a significant expansion of current Massachusetts state law. More specifically, ROE would:

- 1) Allow abortions during the nine months of pregnancy for virtually any reason.
- 2) Eliminate any requirements that abortions be performed in a hospital.
- 3) Eliminate the requirement that provides medical care to a child who survives an abortion attempt.
- 4) Eliminate the requirement that a minor under the age of 18 have the consent of a parent, guardian, or the courts.
- 5) Provide state funding for women who cannot afford the procedure.

In order to understand the serious moral questions raised concerning the protection of human life, the specific wording of the bills must be examined closely. For example, that examination is particularly significant while considering the language that would allow for an abortion in the third trimester of a pregnancy. The two bills state in part:

A physician, acting within their lawful scope of practice, may perform an abortion when, according to the physician's best medical judgment based on the facts of the patient's case, the patient is beyond twenty- four weeks from the commencement of pregnancy and the abortion is necessary to protect the patient's life or physical or mental health, or in cases of lethal fetal anomalies, or where the fetus is incompatible with sustained life outside the uterus. Medical judgement may be exercised in the light of all factors – physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the person's age – relevant to the well-being of the patient.¹

¹ HB 3320, lines 27-33; SB 1209, lines 25-32

In just these two sentences, the bills would make extreme changes to Massachusetts law. In addition to aborting infants with fetal anomalies or where the fetus is incompatible with sustained life outside of the uterus, it allows physicians to perform abortions up until birth for a myriad of undefined reasons (ie: physical, emotional, psychological, familial, age) to protect a woman's life, physical health or mental health. The result would become abortion on demand for the full term of pregnancy.

The Catholic Church has always upheld the dignity of human life and spoken out against abortion at all stages of pregnancy. As Bishops we are encouraged by the most recent statistics which clearly indicate that the rate of abortions in both this state and across the country has significantly decreased over the past 40 years. In fact, the rates today are 50% lower than the rates in 1980. However, at a time when the overall number of abortions have decreased, society cannot now accept such an egregious attack on human life as these bills would provide.

Therefore, we, the Roman Catholic Bishops of the four Dioceses of Massachusetts, call on our elected officials to carefully consider the consequences that these bills would bring to the lives of infants, parents, families and the citizens of the Commonwealth. We urge all people of good will, regardless of what faith they practice, to vigorously oppose these extreme measures.



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