

# CATHOLIC CONFERENCE OF OHIO

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May 19, 2022

## **Proponent Testimony on HB 598 The Human Life Protection Act**

Chairman Wilkin, Vice Chair White, ranking minority member Brown, and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Jerry Freewalt. I am the Executive Director of the Catholic Conference of Ohio. The Conference is the official representative of the Catholic Church in Ohio in matters of public policy. I urge your support of HB 598, the Human Life Protection Act. The passage of this legislation would legally protect the lives of unborn children if the U.S. Supreme Court upholds a state's authority to prohibit abortion or the adoption of an amendment to the U.S. Constitution authorizing a state to prohibit abortion.

The Catholic Church has a long history of care and concern for those who are the most vulnerable, born and unborn. In Ohio, the outreach ministries of the Catholic Church is comprised of six dioceses and three Eastern-Rite eparchies, parishes, Catholic schools, health care systems, and Catholic Charities agencies serving thousands of Ohioans daily, including prenatal and parenting programs, infant mortality services, foster care, after-school activities, family and homeless shelters, immigration clinics, clothing centers, food pantries, among many other social services. We do this as an expression of our faith, an answer to the call to love one another, and in recognition of the sanctity and value of every human life.

Catholic clergy, religious, and lay women and men worldwide have advocated against the grave injustice of abortion since the first century. Abortion destroys a human life. Modern science has only underscored the Church's view that life begins at conception and that unique life, like all human lives, has inherent dignity and must be treated with the respect due to a human person in every circumstance and stage of development.

Our nation was founded on the self-evident truth that all people are created with an inalienable right to life. It is the right to life which serves as the foundation of all other human rights. In light of this truth, we hold

that every child, at every moment of existence, deserves love and the protection of the law. We do not believe any person or government has the right to take the life of an innocent human being.

We also hold that the real problems that lead women to consider abortion should be addressed with solutions that support both mother and child. While the Church never condones abortion, we acknowledge the fears and anxieties of women and couples facing unexpected or difficult pregnancies. We encounter them each day in our ministries. Such circumstances and needs represent society's responsibility to prioritize the well-being and empowerment of women, children, and families so that they may flourish and reach their full potential. No mother, especially the most vulnerable, should go without both material resources and personal accompaniment during and after pregnancy.

As we urge you to immediately pass HB 598 to protect the lives of unborn children, we also advocate for life-affirming and pro-family policies that promote the common good, such as an expansive child tax credit or allowance, funding for pregnancy resource centers, increased access to affordable housing, expanded paid leave for families, and robust support for homeless pregnant and parenting women among others. Public policy must always be measured by how it both respects the life and dignity of the human person and advances the common good.

At this moment in Ohio and our country, the Catholic Church desires and is committed to magnify and act on a vision of society infused with a Christian love that stands with mothers in need with humility, gentleness, and patience. This includes ensuring our parishes and ministries are places of welcome, assistance, and hope for those facing life's most difficult challenges.

We encourage your support for H.B. 598, the Human Life Protection Act, and other policies to help Ohio further a culture of life and a community of care that allows each person to flourish no matter their circumstance or stage of development.

We thank the sponsor and co-sponsors of this legislation.