



Diocese of Joliet

Office of the Bishop
425 Summit Street
Joliet, IL 60435

Tel: 815-722-6606

Fax: 815-722-6632

March 21-22, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

I am taking the extraordinary measure of communicating with you by letter this weekend because I believe we are faced with an urgent matter in the Illinois General Assembly.

Several weeks ago we learned of an extremely troubling bill, HB2354, that would create the "Reproductive Health and Access Act." This bill has now passed the House Human Services Committee and will be debated on the floor. You may find the full text of the bill on the internet (www.ilga.gov) by typing in "HB2354" in the number search on the left and then clicking "Full Text" at the top left of the page which gives a synopsis of the bill.

Why should Catholics and others be concerned about this bill? There are a number of critical reasons. The bill seeks to:

- *declare abortion to be a fundamental right in our state*
- *pre-empt any existing state restrictions on abortion or prevent any common-sense regulation such as parental notification*
- *expand public funding of abortion through Medicaid*
- *mandate comprehensive sex education for all children in public schools*
- *invalidate the Illinois Health Care Right of Conscience Act protecting health care professionals and employers; in other words, it would violate the right of conscience of health care institutions and health care professionals when it comes to abortion*

I feel a responsibility to bring this matter to your attention so that we will all understand the broad, immoral implications of this bill. It is not an exaggeration to say that the bill threatens our freedom of religion and conscience in Illinois. Why would I make such a strong claim?

Section 35 of the bill states, "Individual health care professionals who object to providing certain reproductive health care based on religion or personal conscience may refuse to provide such services only under the following conditions..." The conditions set forth include requiring the "objecting health care professional" to provide prior written notice of his or her objection to providing such services. Our State should be defending our freedom of religion, not requiring individual citizens to defend their own right to that freedom – against state law!

As Francis Cardinal George has written to his parishioners this weekend, "In our country, we recognize conscientious objection to war, even though defending one's country is a noble and moral act. We recognize the conscientious objection of those doctors who will not cooperate in administering the death penalty, even for terrible crimes. Why do some Illinois legislators want to take away conscientious objection to abortion?"

We must work for the defeat of HB2354, and I urge you to contact your state representative and let him or her know of your strong opposition to HB2354. If you do not know your state representative, visit the Illinois General Assembly's web site at www.ilga.gov and find the "Legislator Lookup" link under "Additional Resources" at the end of the second column. If you have any problems, call the Catholic Conference of Illinois at 312-368-1066 for assistance.

Please join with me in prayer for the defeat of this disturbing bill and for those who support it. Don't forget to thank those legislators who oppose it. Be assured of my daily prayers for each of you.

Sincerely in Christ,

J. Peter Sartain
Bishop of Joliet