



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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April 24, 2009

Dear Representative:

In a society where disagreements on abortion and the rights of the unborn child seem persistent and intractable, there are some statements that almost everyone can endorse. First, the fact that over a million abortions take place every year in this country is a tragedy, and we should at least take steps to reduce abortions. Second, no woman should ever have to undergo an abortion because she feels she has no other choice, or because alternatives were unavailable or not made known to her. An abortion performed under such social and economic duress meets no one's standard for "freedom of choice."

If you agree with these statements, I hope you will support and co-sponsor the Pregnant Women Support Act (H.R. 2035) recently reintroduced by Representative Lincoln Davis (D-TN).

This Act will provide many kinds of life-affirming support for pregnant women and their unborn children. These include: Eliminating pregnancy as a "preexisting condition" that can be used to deny health coverage for women; grants to support centers providing alternatives to abortion; assistance encouraging colleges and universities to provide support for pregnant and parenting students; increased support for the WIC program, and for adoption programs; allowing states to cover unborn children and their mothers under the Children's Health Insurance Program, providing prenatal care for especially needy pregnant women who may not otherwise be eligible; and improving services for pregnant women who are at risk from domestic violence. The bill also improves the means for informing women about supportive services available to them during and after pregnancy, through a public awareness program as well as a basic requirement that abortion facilities provide informed consent (including information about alternatives to abortion).

The Pregnant Women Support Act reaches out to women with a helping hand when they are most vulnerable, and most engaged in making a decision about life or death for their unborn children. It provides an authentic common ground, an approach that people can embrace regardless of their position on other issues. For example, it does not raise the entirely separate issue of seeking to reduce pregnancies through government promotion of contraceptives, which recently created so much controversy when it was inappropriately proposed for inclusion in an economic stimulus package. That issue raises serious questions regarding priorities in health care as well as the conscience rights of patients and health care providers, which demand a serious debate of their own. In any case, low-income women already have guaranteed coverage for family planning through Medicaid, with the Federal government assuring States that it will pay 90% of this

coverage – yet it is precisely among these women that abortion rates are highest. Many studies have concluded that programs for ensuring access to contraception do not reduce abortion rates (see www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/contraception/index.shtml).

Discussion of pregnancy prevention and related issues will surely continue inside and outside Congress. In the meantime, pregnant women need our assistance *now* so that abortion is not promoted to them as their *only* choice. Regardless of your stance on other issues related to abortion or family planning, I hope you will join Representative Davis in ensuring that the Pregnant Women Support Act will be considered and enacted by this Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Justin Card. Rigali".

Cardinal Justin Rigali
Archbishop of Philadelphia
Chairman, Committee for Pro-Life Activities
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops