



Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities

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Dear Representative:

As chairman of the U.S. bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities, I am writing today to urge your support for H.R. 36, the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act introduced by Reps. Trent Franks (R-AZ) and Marsha Blackburn (R-TN) on January 6.

The Catholic Church's teaching concerning abortion is well known. 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 – and we hold that the real problems that lead women to consider abortion should be addressed with solutions that support both mother and child. We understand that not everyone agrees with the Church's teaching and that there are other views regarding these matters.

It is widely recognized that our citizens were deeply shaken by the revelations of Dr. Kermit Gosnell's actions, which led in 2013 to his being convicted of murder and other crimes committed in the course of providing abortions. This tragic circumstance led many Americans to realize that our permissive laws and attitudes have allowed the abortion industry to undertake these procedures. All decent and humane people are repulsed by the callous and barbarous treatment of women and children in Gosnell's clinic, and in other clinics that abort children after 20 weeks. Among the lessons learned are these:

1. The Supreme Court's past insistence that unborn children must be "viable" to deserve even nominal protection is not meaningful or workable. "Viability" is a *prediction* about whether a given child would have survived indefinitely outside the womb *if* given medical support. Some children killed by Dr. Gosnell were surely "viable" in this sense – though that can be difficult to prove if they are killed at birth. The reality, as attested by eyewitnesses at the clinic, is that the children were born *alive* and crying or screaming in pain, until their lives were intentionally and deliberately ended.

2. These procedures after the middle point of pregnancy also pose serious dangers to women – as evidenced by Dr. Gosnell's own manslaughter conviction for one woman's death, and news about the death or serious complications of other women undergoing such procedures.

3. Some have tried to argue that such difficult and risky procedures should instead be done in more "mainstream" abortion clinics. This misses the point. Many women were sent to Gosnell by those very clinics, because they wanted nothing to do with abortions performed at such a late stage in the child's development. What does it say about us as a nation, if we will not act against abortions that even full-time abortionists find abhorrent?

For all these reasons, the proposed ban on abortions at 20 weeks after fertilization is a place to begin uniting Americans who see themselves as "pro-life" and as "pro-choice." On behalf of our country and the children whose lives are at stake, I urge you to support the common-sense reform offered by H.R. 36 and to oppose all weakening amendments.

Sincerely,

Seán Cardinal O'Malley
Archbishop of Boston
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities
U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops