



Committee on Pro-Life Activities

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March 30, 2023

Dear Senator/Representative:

As Congress begins the appropriations process for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, many committees within the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) are engaging on appropriations matters under their purview. Together, these views represent the breadth of concern of the bishops in the budget and appropriations process. I write on behalf of the USCCB Committee on Pro-Life Activities.

Each year, the USCCB works with Congress to advance many of our common goals through the annual appropriations process, including through funding that supports the poor, migrants and refugees, foreign assistance, environmental protection, healthcare, housing, nutrition, and other programs which help people meet basic needs and promote the common good. These goals, which are necessary for human flourishing and essential to the dignity of the human person, cannot be separated from the protection of preborn lives.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's ruling in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which restored to the people the ability to protect women and children from abortion, it is as important as ever that government priorities respond to the needs of mothers, children, and families. Last October, four bishop chairmen wrote to you with numerous policy recommendations for exercising radical solidarity with women and their families in need, including investments in maternal and child health, child care, strengthening the Child Tax Credit, a paid parental leave policy, and more.¹ We renew this call today for a society that makes it easier to welcome and raise a new child and that promotes life and hope for both preborn children and their mothers.

At the same time, the USCCB remains gravely concerned about continued efforts to expand taxpayer funding of abortion, especially if the Hyde Amendment or any of the other life-saving appropriations riders were to be removed from the annual appropriations bills. It is vital that the Hyde Amendment and all the related life-saving appropriations riders remain in place during the 118th Congress and beyond. *The USCCB will oppose any bill that expands taxpayer funding of abortion, including any appropriations bill.*

In addition, we strongly encourage Congress in the appropriations process to stop the Administration's aggressive and overreaching actions of the past year that facilitate and promote access to elective abortion, especially through the Departments of Health and Human Services (including the Food and Drug Administration), Defense, and Veterans Affairs. Turning veterans' hospitals and neighborhood convenience stores into abortion providers is unconscionable and degrades the dignity of patients and communities.

¹<https://www.usccb.org/resources/letter-congress-regarding-policies-support-women-and-families-october-26-2022>.

We take this stand because abortion is not healthcare; it is the antithesis of healthcare. And as Pope Francis stated, “I ... appeal to all politicians, regardless of their faith convictions, to treat the defense of the lives of those who are about to be born and enter into society as the cornerstone of the common good.” And further, “Their killing in huge numbers ... undermines ... justice [and] compromise[es] the proper solution of any other human and social issue.”² It is impossible to truly work against injustices like violence, racism, poverty, and other societal problems while promoting and funding the destruction of human beings in the womb. This is why policies like the Hyde Amendment, which has been estimated to have saved nearly 2.5 million lives,³ are crucial.

Further, far from promoting “women’s health,” abortion often has disastrous effects on women’s wellbeing. An analysis across multiple studies found abortion to be associated with a 55% increase in mental health difficulties relative to women who had maintained unplanned pregnancies to term. This was particularly notable for the incidence of substance abuse and suicidality.⁴ Similar results, with a 45% increase in disorders, were found in a separate 2016 report as well.⁵ And a 2019 study published in Italy found women who had abortions tragically also experienced more than double the suicide rate of women who gave birth.⁶

Not only are women often personally traumatized by abortion, but their partnerships can be adversely impacted as well. The rate of marital breakups and dissolution of romantic relationships after an abortion has been reported to be between 40 and 75 percent, “often related to the breakdown of intimacy and trust.”⁷ The relationship dissolution can leave women alone to care for themselves and any other children, with far less income and resources. Thus, rather than solving a woman’s problems, abortion often compounds them.

By offering “free” abortions or otherwise facilitating abortions, the government effectively asks pregnant women in difficult circumstances to end the life of their child, as the only complete “solution” to their economic difficulty in welcoming that child. But this is not a true support for women, and abortion is never a positive “solution.”

It is also worth noting that, despite increased political polarization, the solid majority of Americans still oppose taxpayer funding of abortion. A Marist poll from January of this year found that 60% of Americans oppose domestic taxpayer funding of abortion and a solid 78% oppose U.S. taxpayer funding of abortion in other countries.⁸ There, as well as in a separate poll, policies protecting fundamental conscience rights garner the support of strong majorities of Americans who believe that people should not be forced to support or participate in abortion against their will, even while disagreeing on the legality and moral status of abortion.⁹

² <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2019-02/pope-francis-pro-life-movement-politicians-defend-life.html>.

³ <https://lozierinstitute.org/addendum-to-hyde-40-analyzing-the-impact-of-the-hyde-amendment/>.

⁴ <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/abortion-and-mental-health-quantitative-synthesis-and-analysis-of-research-published-19952009/E8D556AAE1C1D2F0F8B060B28BEE6C3D>.

⁵ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5066584/>.

⁶ <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00737-019-00977-1>, as reported in <https://lozierinstitute.org/new-study-elevated-suicide-rates-among-mothers-after-abortion/>.

⁷ <https://www.deveber.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Chap15.pdf>.

⁸ <https://www.kofc.org/en/resources/communications/polls/2023-kofc-marist-poll-presentation.pdf>.

⁹ *Id.*; see also <http://www.usccb.org/about/pro-life-activities/upload/USCCB-Key-Takeaways-handout-final.pdf>.

The Hyde and Helms Amendments and related pro-life appropriations provisions, which have been enacted year after year, reflect this consensus while providing essential protections for women, their preborn children, and the conscience rights of medical professionals.

Instead of removing protections for preborn children and their mothers, as you move forward with your important work on appropriations, I strongly urge you to use the resources and policies in these bills to fund and promote policies and goals that recognize and protect the dignity and sanctity of human life in all conditions and at all stages of development. We must all do better to meaningfully assist all women, especially the poor and marginalized, those who live in the peripheries, and those struggling with an unexpected or difficult pregnancy for any reason. This cannot be done in truth or charity if the supposed solution offered is to eliminate the child.

Please join together in working towards a better way that offers dignity and support both to women and to their precious children. I pray for your finding common ground in this, to provide solutions that empower mothers, children, and indeed all brothers and sisters in our human family, to have the positive futures that they deserve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael F. Burbidge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M".

Most Reverend Michael F. Burbidge
Bishop of Arlington
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities