



United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

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October 21, 2021

Dear Representative:

In *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love), Pope Francis writes, "... We must always say 'no' to violence in the home."¹ In this exhortation, he renews the Church's calls for both public policies and pastoral care that meet the many needs of families, including services for those who have suffered domestic violence. The Family Violence Prevention and Services Improvement Act (FVPSA) (H.R. 2119) addresses both of these important aspects. The FVPSA authorizes and funds the National Domestic Violence Hotline, domestic violence shelters, victims' services, program support, and domestic violence prevention efforts. A number of Catholic ministries receive funding for services to end family violence.

The National Domestic Violence Hotline website cites that one in four women and one in seven men have been the victim of severe violence from an intimate partner and that intimate partner violence affects 12 million people a year.² These statistics are appalling. This, as with all forms of violence, must end. We encourage your support of services for domestic violence survivors.

We are concerned, however, about the insertion of sexual orientation and gender identity terminology in the bill. In *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis reaffirmed, "that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while 'every sign of unjust discrimination' is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence."³ At the same time, he reminded us that "'biological sex and the socio-cultural role of sex (gender) can be distinguished but not separated.' ... It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality."⁴ The currently proposed language in H.R. 2119 may discriminate against many faith-based providers who strive to serve everyone. It could do so by rendering them ineligible to employ FVPSA grants while fulfilling their mission to protect everyone if, for example, their arrangements maintain respectively designated spaces for men and women.

We also raise the concern that other pending legislation, combined with changes in this bill, could allow funding for abortion. Unlike previous reauthorizations of this law, H.R. 2119 would allow reimbursement for health care services. This, of course, is not bad in itself -- people fleeing domestic violence often have urgent medical needs -- and funding for this Act has traditionally been appropriated through the Labor, Health and Human Services (LHHS) bill, which is subject to the Hyde Amendment. However, it is incredibly concerning that the LHHS bill (H.R. 4502) recently passed by the House eliminates the longstanding Hyde Amendment. Should Congress actually eliminate the Hyde Amendment from enacted appropriations, funding under H.R. 2119 could be used to pay for elective abortions. Furthermore, the Build Back Better

¹ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 104 (2016).

² <https://www.thehotline.org/stakeholders/domestic-violence-statistics/>

³ Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, no. 150 (2016).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

Act currently appropriates \$27 million for FVPSA that is not subject to the Hyde Amendment. We ask Congress to ensure that the medical needs of victims of domestic violence are met and that taxpayer funding does not go to abortion.

The Catholic Church will continue its ministry of supporting families and helping victims of domestic violence so that everyone can be members of families that are reflective of the authentic love that St. Paul writes is patient and kind and generous.⁵ The concerns we raise must be addressed so that we can all go forward in the good work of protecting victims of domestic violence and maintain the highest levels of concern for their health and safety. We look forward to working with Congress in furtherance of these ends.

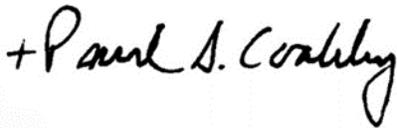
Sincerely,



His Eminence Timothy Cardinal Dolan
Archbishop of New York
Chairman, Committee for Religious Liberty



Most Reverend Joseph F. Naumann
Archbishop of Kansas City, KS
Chairman, Committee on Pro-Life Activities



Most Reverend Paul S. Coakley
Archbishop of Oklahoma City
Chairman, Committee on Domestic Justice
and Human Development



Most Rev. David A. Konderla
Bishop of Tulsa
Chairman, Subcommittee for the
Promotion and Defense of Marriage

⁵ 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8