



Abortion Mandate

HB 1647

Testimony before the House Health Care & Wellness Committee

February 10, 2015

Representative Cody and members of the Committee, my name is Eusebio Elizondo. I am the Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Seattle. I am here this afternoon on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of our state to ask you to oppose HB 1647.

The Catholic Bishops of Washington State oppose the very intent of this legislation. The Catholic Church's support for the dignity of the human person and its opposition to abortion are well known and well documented. Deeply rooted in our Catholic faith is the belief that life is sacred from the moment of conception until natural death. We cannot equivocate in that belief.

Our position in support of the dignity of all life, and therefore opposed to the taking of all innocent life, is not unknown to you. But this legislation goes beyond our moral objections to abortion and undermines our very right to voice those objections and to live according to the teachings we hold in faith.

Pope Francis observed in his Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* that "religion [cannot] be relegated to the inner sanctum of personal life, without influence on societal and national life." (no. 183) This same point was made by his predecessor Pope Benedict XVI who deplored efforts like those inherent to House Bill 1647 that would deny the right of conscientious objection on the part of Catholics and individuals of other faith traditions with regard to cooperation in practices opposed to our moral teaching. As Pope Francis points out, legislation like House Bill 1647 would in practice reduce our religious freedom to mere freedom of worship, without guarantees of respect for freedom of conscience and the freedom to act on our moral teachings. This is an intolerable denial of our constitutionally guaranteed right to religious freedom and a challenge we will energetically oppose.

Moreover, this attack on our religious liberty and the religious liberty of private individuals of every faith tradition, who have a moral objection to abortion — and therefore object to being coerced into paying for the abortions of others — is entirely unwarranted. All state regulated health plans currently offer abortion in their plans. However, under the law, employers are not required to include this coverage. We ask you to oppose House Bill 1647, and allow employers the freedom to live according to their religious teachings, while providing individuals the right to purchase insurance options of their choice.

Under this legislation, abortion coverage would no longer be optional as it is now. It would be mandatory. As we have previously stated to this committee, such a mandate discriminates

unjustly against churches, religious organizations and people who for religious reasons oppose abortion. It is a denial of our first freedom, the right to religious liberty, and is an affront to the premise upon which our great nation was founded.

In closing, on behalf of the Catholic Bishops of Washington State I must be absolutely clear. The Catholic Church in Washington State and its affiliated organizations do not now, nor will we in the future, offer coverage for abortion in our health care plans. There is every reason to believe that if this legislation passes in its present form, an appeal to the courts, which would be protracted and costly to all parties, would result.

Thank you for your attention. Please oppose HB 1647.