Montana Catholic Conference

Exhibit No. 2
Date 2/2/05
Bill No. SB 330

March 16, 1995

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, I am Sharon Hoff, representing the Montana Catholic Conference. In this capacity, I act as liaison for Montana's two Roman Catholic Bishops on matters of public policy. The Montana Catholic Conference supports HB482.

Abortion poses serious physical health risks including infections, hemorrhage, ripping or perforation of the uterus, anesthesia complications, cervical injury, and death.[1] Teenagers 17 years of age or younger are two-and-a-half times more likely than women ages 20-29 to acquire endometritis following abortion.[2] The adolescent is entitled to parental help in order to fully understand and to weigh carefully her specific risks of incurring physical injury from abortion. Because a minor is often too immature to make fully informed decisions, parental involvement is imperative to ensure that she receives the benefit of appropriate counsel from those who best know her physical, emotional, familial, and psychological background--her parents.

Opponents of parental involvement legislation claim that adolescents are generally as competent as adults to make the decision to have an abortion.[3] But substantial evidence from both clinical and laboratory studies of actual decision-making in pregnancy demonstrate that adolescents and adults differ significantly in the ways they actually make decisions and in the quality of their decision-making. Adolescents are more likely to see their pregnancy decision as "externally compelled."[4] Even opponents of parental involvement legislation admit that there is cause for concern about impulsive decisions by the teen who is still ambivalent: "Issues that go unresolved before the abortion may then create more difficulties afterward."[5]

To deny the teenager input from her parents, those who generally assist her in other major decisions in her life, can be emotionally and psychologically traumatizing. She will feel pressure to consider her parents views whether or not she consults them.[6]

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[1] Willard Cates, Jr., M.D., M.P.H., Kenneth F. Schulz, M.B.A., and David A. Grimes, M.D., "The Risks Associated with Teenage Abortion," The New England Journal of Medicine, vol. 309, no. 11, September 15, 1983): pp. 621-624.

[2] Burkman et al., "Morbidity Risk Among Young Adolescents Undergoing Elective Abortion," Contraception, vol. 30 (1984):pp.99-105. This Johns Hopkins study also reports that cervical laceration has been shown to be about twice as common among women aged 17 years or less compared to older women.

[3] ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, "Parental Notice Laws," (1986): p. 5.

[4] Catherine C. Lewis, Ph.D., "A Comparison of Minors' and Adults' Pregnancy Decisions," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, vol. 50, no. 3 (July 1980): p. 449.

[5] Nancy Adler and Peggy Dolcini, "Psychological Issues in Abortion for Adolescents, "Adolescent Abortion, ed. Gary B Melton (Lincoln, NB:University of Nebraska Press, 1986) p. 85.

[6] Everett L. Worthington et al., "The Benefits of Legislation Requiring Parental Involvement Prior to Adolescent Abortion," American Psychologist (December 1989): p. 1543.

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A secret abortion, without disclosure for discussion, creates a psychological burden for the pregnant teenager and a barrier to her future relationship with those people in her life who are most significant to her.[7]

Opponents of parental involvement legislation make the claim that required parental involvement can be devastating to the family and to a girl's psychological development.[8] Experts in psychiatry and psychology have concluded that the contrary is true. To the extent an adolescent does not share feelings surrounding an unexpected pregnancy with her parents, she may become more isolated and alienated.[9] Without the benefit of parental involvement legislation, the girl will most likely either keep her pregnancy and abortion forever a secret from her parents, which can cause guilt and anxiety that her parents might somehow discover the secret, or tell her parents that not only did she become pregnant but also that she made an important life decision without notifying them.[10] Parental involvement legislation provides the opportunity for the teenage girl to share the problem with her parents immediately, thereby reducing the emotional and psychological risks associated with keeping the pregnancy secret.

The inability to deal with a dilemma or an inadequate understanding of the nature of her situation and its causes can considerably impair future coping abilities of the pregnant teenager. An adolescent may retreat into sexual activity or drug or alcohol abuse to escape pain and, if these immature defenses do not ease her conflict, she may be more likely to experience adverse psychological effects after the abortion.[11] Immature coping mechanisms typical of adolescence such as the projection, denial, or "acting out" of conflicts can become permanent defenses.[12]

Parental involvement legislation acknowledges the agonizing pain that accompanies an adolescent's unexpected pregnancy and helps to provide her with the support she deserves from those who have her best interests at heart--her parents. We urge a do pass for HB482. Thank you.

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[7] Vincent M. Rue, "Abortion in Relationship Context," Int'l. Rev. of Nat. Fam. Plann. (Summer 1985):p.97.
[8] ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project, "Parental Notice Laws", 1986: p. 8.
[9] Rue, "Abortion in Relationship Context," p. 97.
[10] Worthington et al., "The Benefits of Legislation," p. 1543.
[11] Nancy B. Campbell, Kathleen Franco, and Stephen Jurs, "Abortion in Adolescence," Adolescence, vol. 23, no. 92 (Winter 1988): p. 821. This comparison of women who had abortions in their teenage years whose abortions occurred after age 20 reveals that the adolescent group had significantly higher scores on the following scales: antisocial traits paranoia, drug abuse, and psychotic delusions.
[12] Ibid