

**MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE**

150 Staniford Street, Boston, MA 02114-2511
Phone (617) 367-6060
FAX (617) 367-2767

INFORMATION AND NEWS RELEASE

Bishops Issue Statement on Controversial State Website

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Contact: James F. Driscoll, Esq., Executive Director, 617-367-6060

The following statement has been issued today by the Board of Governors of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley, OFM Cap., of the Archdiocese of Boston, Bishop George W. Coleman of the Diocese of Fall River, Bishop Timothy A. McDonnell of the Diocese of Springfield, and Bishop Robert J. McManus of the Diocese of Worcester in response to the controversy surrounding the government-funded website MariaTalks.com:

The critical social issue of teen pregnancy warrants the attention of the entire community. However, not all means proposed for solving this challenge conform to the dignity of the human person. A great number of elected state officials and concerned citizens have objected to a government-funded website intended to respond to teen pregnancy rates in Massachusetts. This website employs demeaning and sexually explicit terminology, an approach that rightly deserves the criticism it is receiving. This tactic only succeeds in talking down to minors under the mistaken assumption that the young are incapable of responding positively to challenging and uplifting appeals to their better nature.

The problems at stake here go much deeper than word choice and phrasing; a simple re-editing cannot resolve them. Those defending the website argue that it simply conveys medically accurate information, but this view is contested. As observed by those who seek the well-being of children and yet oppose the website, it promotes an overall message that sexual conduct for unmarried minors is acceptable whenever it "feels right." Additionally, the website describes abortion in misleadingly opaque terms, touting the procedure as "easier than you think," and emphasizes ways to obtain an abortion without parental knowledge. The website fails to acknowledge that many women, especially those undergoing an abortion in their teenage years, suffer long-term negative consequences. Furthermore, the website limits the list of available resources to organizations that advocate for or provide abortion and contraception.

For these reasons, we strongly support and join with those in the public policy arena who urge the state to eliminate funding for the website and who are asking the state to assist in its removal. We do not agree that the only choices available are limited to keeping the website running with tax dollars or doing nothing at all to address the problem of teen pregnancy. The state should work together with all sectors of the community, not just those with a vested interest in offering teens contraception and abortion, to find solutions that respect the dignity of young people and their capacity to make good and wholesome choices.