

In Historic First, All Four Catholic Bishops Will Testify At State House On Abortion

For the first time ever, Cardinal Bernard F. Law of Boston, Bishop Sean P. O'Malley, O.F.M. Cap. of Fall River, Bishop Thomas L. Dupre of Springfield, and Bishop Daniel P. Reilly of Worcester will travel to the Massachusetts Statehouse on Tuesday, May 18, to testify together on a bill banning partial-birth abortion.

The four Ordinaries will address the Joint Committee on the Judiciary, which is considering several abortion-related bills.

"The unprecedented decision of the Cardinal and the Bishops to attend a legislative hearing as a team demonstrates their commitment to promoting life in all its stages," says Gerry D'Avolio, executive director of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference.

Earlier this year, the four Ordinaries held a joint press conference on the death penalty issue, and three of the four attended a legislative hearing on the issue.

Twenty-eight states have enacted laws to ban partial birth abortion, while President Bill Clinton has twice vetoed bans passed by Congress. In a partial birth abortion, a doctor pulls an unborn child by the feet partly from the womb and then kills the child. The Office of Pro-Life Activities of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops conservatively estimates 600 to 2000 such abortions are performed annually in the United States, most for non-health related reasons.

JOINT STATEMENT ON PARTIAL-BIRTH ABORTION

Delivered to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary, Massachusetts General Court, Tuesday, May 18, 1999, by Bernard Cardinal Law, Bishop Sean O'Malley, Bishop Daniel P. Reilly, and Bishop Thomas Dupre.

The Massachusetts legislature has before it the opportunity to stop the performance of partial-birth abortions in our state. We urgently petition you, our elected representatives, to vote to stop this procedure, which has as its sole aim the killing of a child in the process of being born. This procedure takes an innocent human life, and

does so in a visibly brutal manner. It also poses serious physical and emotional risks to the mother, while answering no medical necessity.

We are concerned, as members of the legislature are, about difficulties women may face with unplanned pregnancies. Our challenge as a society, however, is to offer solutions to these difficulties which affirm human dignity and concern for the common good, and to reject anything which undermines the value and dignity of human life. Partial-birth abortion clearly fails to meet this challenge.

As doctors have testified before Congress and in numerous state legislatures, partial-birth abortion is never medically indicated to preserve the mother's life or health. While the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists supports partial-birth abortion, it could identify no circumstances where partial-birth abortion "would be the only option to save the life of the mother or preserve the health of the woman." The American Medical Association supports a ban on partial-birth abortion and also observes that such a procedure is never medically indicated to preserve the mother's life or health.

To support partial-birth abortion is to begin to accept infanticide, a frightening possibility already disturbingly evident in the culture. Just a few months ago, a prestigious university proudly hired a professor who openly advocates killing disabled infants, whether their disability is life threatening or no more serious than hemophilia.

This is the context in which the General Court of Massachusetts will debate and vote on this critical issue. We urge you to do what we all know in our hearts is right: to stop partial-birth abortions from being performed in Massachusetts.

We ask you, we implore you, to take a stand against this violence and devaluation of life. You have an opportunity to set a model for the nation. We must stop partial-birth abortions in this Commonwealth.