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STATEMENT ON LATE-TERM ABORTION – Monsignor J. Bryan Hehir

Massachusetts is recognized as one of the most morally and legally permissive states on abortion in our country. The polling data and existing laws verify such a designation. Yet, at the level of moral principles Massachusetts law can be deceptive. Deep personal convictions divide Massachusetts citizens about the morality of abortion, especially on highly complex cases which can arise during pregnancy.

In those instances, the clash of moral convictions and existing law can become intense for individuals, for health professionals and for public officials. The most vivid examples of these complex cases involve late-term abortions.

Until the action of the Massachusetts House taken yesterday, existing Massachusetts law held that late-term abortions (after 24 weeks) required that the following criteria be directive of professional practice: Late-term abortions were legally permissible:

- If necessary, to preserve the patient's life.
- If necessary, to preserve the patient's physical or mental health.
- If warranted because of a lethal fetal anomaly or diagnosis; and
- If warranted because of a grave fetal diagnosis

The decision of the Massachusetts House has obliterated these four moral-legal criteria for governing late-term abortions. The decision taken yesterday has replaced these multiple criteria with a single standard of professional judgement of the physician.

The Catholic Church in Massachusetts, in accord with centuries of Catholic teaching, has opposed the moral evil of directly intending the taking of innocent human life. It has also tried to bring civil law into accord with this moral teaching. The broader range of Catholic teaching sustains the protection of innocent and defenseless human life against direct attack from conception until natural death.

In seeking to make known and effective its moral teaching, the Church recognizes the differences of principles, practices, and convictions it faces in the wider civil society. It acknowledges the opposing positions of other individuals, while holding firmly to its own teaching and convictions.

This posture of civil engagement with others does not lead the Church to be passive in the case of late-term abortion. We must express not only deep disappointment but unyielding moral resistance to proposals to remove rationally justifiable legal limits governing professional and

policy standards in these cases. We have always respected the role of the medical profession and health care personnel in their service of others. But eliminating the moral-legal restraints embodied in the criteria cited above in our judgement leaves an unacceptable void in the protection of human life. For this reason, we must strongly oppose and invite others to oppose the recent actions of the legislature. We appeal to the Massachusetts Senate to restore critical restraints in these cases of late-term abortion.