



Diocese of Helena

MONTANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE



Diocese of Great
Falls-Billings

STATEMENT BY CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF MONTANA RE: PARENTAL NOTIFICATION REFERENDUM

We live in a great country that is full of promise, but we also face many challenges to life, family, and religious liberty. Some of those challenges are policy issues that have grave moral consequences. As Catholics we are called to respond. Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, a document published by USCCB states, "In the Catholic Tradition, responsible citizenship is a virtue, and participation in political life is a moral obligation. This obligation is rooted in our baptismal commitment to follow Jesus Christ and to bear Christian witness in all we do."

This November, a ballot referendum will be presented to the voters which would require abortion clinics to notify parents prior to performing an abortion on a minor child. Minor is defined as a child under the age of 16. The intent of the referendum is to protect the health and welfare of minors. It will also preserve the right of parents to be involved in all medical decisions which affect their children. That is not the case in Montana today. Currently parents do not need to be notified before an abortion, which could involve invasive surgery, is performed on their minor child. This is especially problematic, because should complications arise, parents who are not aware of the surgery may fail to seek the medical treatment their child requires.

The referendum also provides for a judicial bypass allowing a judge to grant permission for an abortion after evaluation of the specific situation. The bypass is necessary to meet constitutional requirements in cases where the minor may be in an abusive family.

This referendum is intended to protect children and preserve families. Currently a minor child cannot access medical treatment, including dental work, without parental permission. In fact, parental permission is required in Montana for virtually all non-emergency procedures except abortion. Parental permission is required before a school nurse can provide an aspirin to a minor child. Parental permission is required before a child can get a tattoo or a piercing, but a surgical abortion can be performed on a minor child without the parents' consent or knowledge. Very simply, this referendum protects children from harm by allowing parents to participate in these vital decisions.

Thirty seven states, including North and South Dakota, Wyoming, and Idaho, have laws requiring parental involvement before an abortion can be performed on a minor child, and parental notification laws have been credited for reducing abortion in every state in which they have been enacted. This referendum would also close a loophole which allows minors from our border states to travel to Montana for an abortion thus avoiding parental notification laws in their own states.

You will be asked to vote for or against requiring parental notification on the November ballot. You will hear emotional pleas from opponents because, they will say, medical decisions should be made without governmental interference. They will also say that some children in abusive homes will be afraid to discuss their pregnancy with their parents. They will not say that families should be allowed to make tough decisions without governmental interference. Catholics stand for life from conception to natural death, and Catholics promote strengthening of families. A vote for this referendum does both.

Most Reverend George Leo Thomas

Most Reverend Michael W. Warfel