

**March 28, 2012**

**Statement by the Roman Catholic Bishops of Montana  
The Roman Catholic Bishops neutral on CI-106, the personhood initiative.**

The Roman Catholic Bishops of Montana are united in opposition to all threats to life and religious liberty that continue to surface in our country today. We approach these challenges prayerfully as church leaders and pastors concerned for the protection of the unborn, the elderly, the poor, the homeless, the sick and those institutions that provide for them. At the very core of our concern is the common goal of saving the unborn, supporting mothers and ultimately putting an end to the tragedy of legalized abortion. We affirm that human life begins at conception and needs to be safeguarded. We also encourage all who struggle against abortion to work together to seek its end.

As the battle to protect innocent life continues, different ideas and strategies come forth. The personhood amendment is one such idea. The basic strategy of personhood is to amend state constitutions to declare that personhood begins at conception, thus creating a challenge which will ultimately cause the US Supreme Court to overturn Roe v Wade.

It is an honorable goal, however, leading pro-life attorneys and constitutional experts have advised us that passing a state personhood amendment could be problematic, in part, because of its heavy reliance on unpredictable courts and dependence on future legislative actions to define and implement the law. They have also expressed concerns that state personhood initiatives might trigger an appellate process that could strengthen Roe v Wade.

We fully understand the difficulties our citizens face as we attempt to advance a culture of life in Montana. We believe the first step is to take a more direct approach by neutralizing the expanded right to abortion found in our state constitution. This right has been interpreted to be greater than that found in federal law thus creating a nearly insurmountable obstacle to common sense restrictions on abortion in the state. Therefore, after several years of working with constitutional experts, we have developed an amendment which would restore balance to the Montana constitution. This amendment is very specific and directly addresses the area of our constitution that has thwarted so many of our previous efforts to place safeguards on and limit funding of abortion. The amendment was introduced in the 2011 session and received 96 of the 100 votes it needed to be placed on the ballot. We will bring it back in 2013 with an even greater effort to obtain passage.

This constitutional amendment will open the way to addressing real change in the state. For instance, laws could be passed requiring a parent be notified in cases when their underage child is seeking an abortion. All efforts to protect children with a similar law in the past have been declared unconstitutional. Passage of this and other laws would save numerous lives as we work to change hearts and minds with the ultimate objective of overturning Roe v. Wade.

Every life is precious. We reaffirm our goal to affect public policy that moves us toward a common goal of complete protection of human life from conception to natural death.

Most Reverend George Leo Thomas

Most Reverend Michael W. Warfel

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