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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on Public Health

From: James F. Driscoll, Esq., Executive Director

Re: House Bill 2092, "An Act relative to consent and counseling," and Senate Bill 999, "An Act relative to responsible counseling."

Date: June 4, 2013

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference ("MCC") respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to the shared objectives of House Bill 2092, "An Act relative to consent and counseling," Senate Bill 999, "An Act relative to responsible counseling."

House Bill 2092 and Senate Bill 999 would amend the current law governing required consent for minors seeking an abortion. Under existing law, a pregnant teenager under the age of 18 is required to seek the informed consent of that teen and her parent or guardian. In the absence of that consent, a judge of the Superior Court Department of the Trial Court may grant permission after a petition brought by the teenager and a hearing which would judge the maturity and capacity of the teenager. House Bill 2092 would seek to lower the age of consent to 16 while both bills add a new classification of individuals that may offer informed consent in place of the parent or guardian. These authorized individuals are defined as a medical professional, such as physicians, physician assistants, or nurses; or a mental health professional defined as a psychologist or a social worker.

House 2092 and Senate 999 would remove existing statutory safeguards intended to ensure that a minor who does not or cannot obtain parental consent be found by a court to be mature enough to make an abortion decision or that, lacking maturity, the minor is making a decision found to be in her best interests. House 2092 and Senate 999 would allow abortions to be performed on minors without any court finding of maturity or best interests as long as the minor obtains counseling from an adult designated within a category of individuals codified under the legislation. The required verification of counseling need only indicate that "the alternative choices available to manage the pregnancy and the option of involving the women's parents, guardians, or other adult family members in her decision-making" were discussed.

Parents have an irreplaceable role in the development and well-being of their children. The role of a parent should not be subverted by lowering the age of consent from 18 years to 16 years or by empowering other adults, within non-judicial settings, who are limited in their knowledge of the minor or their familial situation. The bill's passage would substantially weaken the protections for parents and their minor daughters under current law. Parents

of teens could potentially be left without the needed information to understand any behavioral changes exhibited post-abortion. For these reasons, the MCC opposes House Bill 2092 and Senate Bill 999 and urges an unfavorable report that the bills ought not to pass.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.