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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Joint Committee on the Judiciary
From: James F. Driscoll, Esq., Executive Director
Re: House Bill 1565, “An Act relative to a woman’s right to know.”
Date: July 9, 2013

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“MCC”) respectfully submits this testimony in support of House Bill 1565, “An Act relative to a woman’s right to know.”

House Bill 1565 requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) to make available a pamphlet, web page, and telephone message describing a woman’s rights under the Massachusetts Patients Rights Act, detailing the risks of abortion, listing agencies providing abortion alternatives and prenatal care, and supplying scientifically accurate descriptions of fetal development. Abortion providers would be required to inform women and young girls before the procedure that such materials are available and give the materials to those who request them. Abortion facilities would be required to provide women and young girls 24 hours to reflect before going through with the abortion. These requirements would not apply in medical emergencies.

A provision contained in Section 2 of House Bill 1565 would further require that access to ultrasound imaging of the unborn child and electronic audio recording of the unborn child’s heartbeat be offered to the pregnant woman. As of the end of 2012, informed consent laws similar to House Bill 1565 have been put into effect in thirty-two (32) states. Twenty-five of those states require informed consent with a one-day reflection period, while seven states require informed consent with no reflection period.¹ House Bill 1565 provides the Commonwealth an opportunity to join other states in the country in this effort to support the inherent dignity of all women and young girls.

House Bill 1565 would improve current policy regarding informed consent, and move our laws closer to providing equal protection for all women and their children. It would reinforce every woman’s right to know the complete facts about an invasive medical procedure prior to its execution on her body. Additionally, the bill would ensure that all clients have access to professionals that can offer a second or third opinion prior to the procedure.

For the foregoing reasons, the MCC urges the committee to give House Bill 1565 a favorable report recommending passage.

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.

¹ Americans United for Life, Woman’s Right to Know Act: Model Legislation and Policy Guide for the 2013 Legislative Year, p. 19, (2013). Available at <http://www.aul.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/WRTK-Informed-Consent-2013-LG.pdf>.