

4 September 2008

Letter to each member of the Victorian Parliament:

Abortion Law Reform Bill 2008

Catholic social service agencies serve the poor, disadvantaged and marginalised, and work for a just, equitable and compassionate society. Aspects of our wide range of services that are relevant to this Bill are our work for an effective societal safety net for all members; provision of pregnancy counselling and pregnancy support; and substantial involvement in more general counselling, where the issue of abortion can arise. Building on Catholic social teaching, which is based on the inherent dignity of each person, Catholic social service providers in Victoria also strongly support respect for human rights as a fundamental building block of our society.

Our members are aware of the difficulties and the complex decisions that pregnant women can face, and of the vulnerable state of many women struggling with unexpected pregnancy who may feel that they have no real option but to choose an abortion. However, this Bill ignores any rights other than those of the mother - it does not acknowledge that another life is at stake. By treating such vulnerable members of our community in this way, the Bill devalues all human life.

Nor does this Bill take any of the positive steps that are needed to promote the welfare of mothers and families, including pregnant women: strengthening of the societal safety net to provide adequate housing and other support for marginalised, funding for pregnancy support services, additional funding for post-natal support, or support for adequate independent supportive counselling provisions for women in need.

Clause 8 of the Bill addresses conscientious objection of registered health practitioners, which includes registered psychologists. Among other things, it would require a registered psychologist who has a conscientious objection to abortion to refer a patient who requests advice in relation to abortion to another psychologist whom they know does not have a conscientious objection to abortion. This is a clear breach of the human rights of practitioners, forcing them to act against conscientiously held moral, cultural or religious beliefs. Respect for a conscientious objection is a fundamental principle in our society, and practitioners expect that their rights in this regard will be respected.

So, in seeking to decriminalise abortion, the Bill disregards the human rights of the unborn, it does not address key needs of mothers and families, and it breaches the human rights of health practitioners who have a conscientious objection to abortion. It should therefore be opposed.

I would be grateful for your response to these issues, and would welcome an opportunity to provide further information if that would be of assistance to you.

Yours sincerely,

Denis Fitzgerald
Executive Director