



February 28, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Peace be with you! As Catholics, we are committed to protecting the sanctity of human life no matter the circumstances or stage of development. We live this out by, among other things, accompanying the poor and needy, refugees and immigrants, prisoners on death row, young mothers, and children.

In Ohio, the dignity of life in its earliest stages is threatened by groups proposing an amendment to Ohio's Constitution for the November 2023 ballot that would enshrine and expand abortion at the expense of protections for preborn children and women. The Church must not be silent and cannot remain on the sidelines when confronted with such a clear threat to human life. This proposal demands a response, and we strongly encourage Catholics and all people of good will in Ohio to work against including the proposed amendment for the November ballot and, if it appears on the ballot, vote against the amendment to prevent countless deaths of preborn, innocent children.

Our Holy Father Pope Francis reminds us that "Our defense of the innocent unborn ... needs to be clear, firm and passionate, for at stake is the dignity of a human life, which is always sacred and demands love for each person, regardless of his or her stage of development" (*Gaudete et Exsultate*, no. 101). Our commitment to protecting and promoting life includes providing resources and accompanying women during and after pregnancy through our numerous social service agencies, schools, and parishes. This commitment also includes rejecting abortion expansion, which only perpetuates a throwaway culture that does not value human life.

The Catholic Conference of Ohio will be collaborating with statewide organizations, and diocesan respect life offices will be seeking volunteers to help coordinate a campaign at every parish. More information and materials will become available as we mobilize to oppose the proposed amendment on the November 2023 ballot.

We, the Catholic Bishops of Ohio, stand with you, our faithful, in our commitment in the name of the Lord of Life, to each human person from conception to natural death. Let us unite in fasting and offering this prayer:

God our loving Father, grant wisdom to those who govern us, compassion and courage to those who work to defend human life, and safety and care to every human being. For you alone who formed us in our mothers' wombs, and who call us home to heaven, are God, for ever and ever. Amen.

With you in Christ Jesus,

Most Rev. Dennis M. Schnurr
Archdiocese of Cincinnati

Most Rev. Daniel E. Thomas
Diocese of Toledo

Most Rev. Earl K. Fernandes
Diocese of Columbus

Most Rev. Edward C. Malesic
Diocese of Cleveland

Most Rev. Jeffrey M. Monforton
Diocese of Steubenville

Most Rev. David J. Bonnar
Diocese of Youngstown

Most Rev. Michael G. Woost
Diocese of Cleveland

Most Rev. J. Michael Botean
Romanian Catholic Eparchy
of St. George in Canton

Most Rev. Bohdan J. Danylo
Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy
of St. Josaphat in Parma

FULL TEXT OF PROPOSED AMENDMENT

Be it Resolved by the People of the State of Ohio that Article I of the Ohio Constitution is amended to add the following Section:

Article I, Section 22. The Right to Reproductive Freedom with Protections for Health and Safety

- A. Every individual has a right to make and carry out one's own reproductive decisions, including but not limited to decisions on:
1. contraception;
 2. fertility treatment;
 3. continuing one's own pregnancy;
 4. miscarriage care; and
 5. abortion.
- B. The State shall not, directly or indirectly, burden, penalize, prohibit, interfere with, or discriminate against either:
1. An individual's voluntary exercise of this right or
 2. A person or entity that assists an individual exercising this right,

unless the State demonstrates that it is using the least restrictive means to advance the individual's health in accordance with widely accepted and evidence-based standards of care.

However, abortion may be prohibited after fetal viability. But in no case may such an abortion be prohibited if in the professional judgment of the pregnant patient's treating physician it is necessary to protect the pregnant patient's life or health.

- C. As used in this Section:
1. "Fetal viability" means "the point in a pregnancy when, in the professional judgment of the pregnant patient's treating physician, the fetus has a significant likelihood of survival outside the uterus with reasonable measures. This is determined on a case-by-case basis."
 2. "State" includes any governmental entity and any political subdivision.
- D. This Section is self-executing.