

KDCCW Legislative Commission Report

Spring 2018

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Thank you for allowing me to serve as the Legislative Commission Chair for the Knoxville Diocesan Council of Catholic Women. I look forward to meeting you at the KDCCW convention in Chattanooga. I have been following legislation in several categories that should be of interest to us.

This year Tennessee elections are especially targeted by the abortion industry, particularly since the recent ruling (January 2018) upholding Amendment 1 (“Nothing in this Constitution secures or protects a right to abortion...”). To summarize: after the 2014 Amendment 1 victory at the polls, the abortion industry challenged the vote in U.S. District Court for Middle Tennessee. At issue was the interpretation of language specifying how an amendment vote must be counted. State attorneys’ request for dismissal was denied; in 2015 the state filed an appeal in a county court that ruled (Judge Binkley) in favor of the state (2016). One day later, the federal judge (Sharp) in the original suit ruled in favor of the plaintiffs (the abortion industry and friends). Judge Sharp ordered the state to recount the 2014 votes.

Tennessee’s Attorney General Slatery filed an appeal of Sharp’s decision with the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit (2016). On January 9, 2018 the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit ruled unanimously (3 - 0) that the voting procedure was correct. Recently, on February 28, 2018 the court said the arguments would not be reheard. This was a long, hard won victory to undo the damage done by the Tennessee Supreme Court in 2000 in *Planned Parenthood v. Sundquist*. This case struck down many laws regulating abortion, making Tennessee one of the most radical abortion states and an out-of-state abortion destination.

Opponents of Amendment 1 will not take defeat at the polls and in the courts lightly. We have reason to be exceptionally vigilant, learn about the candidates and vote, especially in the primary elections where candidates are eliminated in the early stage.

At present, (Tennessee) Bills HB 2251 / SB 2148 and HB 2262 / SB 2494 are bills pertaining to the dispersal of funds that could be used to promote elective abortion. The first two concern state policy: avoiding the use of state money to promote or support elective abortion. The second set prioritizes health departments as recipients of family planning funding, not private organizations like Planned Parenthood.

To emphasize, HB 2262 seeks to codify into law the policy in place since 2011 that prioritizes funding of the health departments. Until these policies become law, a governor of another mind could overturn the measures the current governor has put in place to re-direct funds to health departments. HB 2262 passed in the House Finance, Ways and Means Committee on Tuesday, March 13, 2018. It will be heard by the Calendar and Rules Committee and scheduled for a vote by the full House of Representatives.

HB 1831 / SB 2257 concern the opioid crisis. They make changes to the requirements in dispensing and tracking opioid prescriptions. HB 1832 / SB 2258 includes sentence reduction for inmates who participate in intensive substance abuse treatment while serving a drug abuse sentence.

On the national front, the phenomenon of online sex trafficking is being addressed in HR 1865. The tech companies have so far defeated the lawsuits of victims of online trafficking and the effort to address this crime is critically important, for the sake of women and children of both sexes. The bill is an attempt to amend the Communications Act of 1934 to address an Internet phenomenon, not an easy task. Another US bill is HB 3299 that attempts to close a loophole in interest rate caps exploited by lenders like Payday. The rate is at times 390%, a grave exploitation of low-income borrowers: 390%, not 3.90%!

Some links for more information:

www.capitol.tn.gov

www.congress.gov

www.votesmart.org (basic civics and voting info for the public and teachers)

<https://catholicwomensforum.org> (A program of the Ethics and Public Policy Center)