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March 16, 2011

RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT of LB 599

Senator Campbell and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

The Nebraska Catholic Conference, representing the mutual interests and concerns of the Archdiocese of Omaha and the dioceses of Lincoln and Grand Island, under the direction of the Diocesan Bishops, hereby wishes to be on record in support of **LB 599**. The Conference supported **LB 1110** last year on this same issue and most assuredly has not changed its position in any respect. The policy captured by the politically charged slogan, “no benefits for illegals” pales in comparison to protecting the health and well-being of innocent unborn children from impoverished families.

It is the firmly held view of the Nebraska Catholic Conference that restoring prenatal services for unborn children from impoverished families, regardless of their mothers’ immigration status, is an important and urgent Pro-Life matter. Denying coverage of prenatal care in these stressful circumstances of family poverty is contrary to human dignity and a grave injustice, which can do great harm to the lives of children at a very vulnerable stage in their development. What’s more, the lack of access to such vitally important medical care could be a decisive factor in causing some pregnant women to experience so much desperation that they turn to abortion rather than childbirth.

We understand that there are legitimate concerns regarding the predominantly federal policy issue of illegal immigration. We wish that every impoverished pregnant woman had lawful status, but the realities of a broken federal immigration system don’t support that consequence. Nevertheless, on this particular matter involving pre-natal care, our urging to you as policy makers is that the proper and necessary balance must favor serving the health and well-being of the unborn children from impoverished circumstances. These unborn children are not “illegals.” Realistically, their immigration status can best be described as presumptive U.S. citizens, who will be fully citizens upon

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their birth in this country. The fact that there is a federally supported program—the unborn-child option of the Children’s Health Insurance Program—that helps to make this vitally important coverage possible in these circumstances is a testament to a compelling respect for the lives and status of these unborn children.

While we continue to lament and oppose the decision that stands to date on this significant and substantive matter, we do not believe, or accept the notion that this issue has been finally resolved. We are encouraged by the introduction of LB 599. As long as the health and well-being of unborn children from impoverished family situations is at risk, and certainly as long as there is a federal program in place that can address this risk on a permissible, functional basis, this issue will persist. The longer-term repercussions for infants who have not had prenatal care will also relate to this harsh and harmful policy choice. We intend to continue to focus attention on it, through both advocacy and education within and beyond our own faith community.

And finally, Senator Campbell and members, a closing comment about illegal immigration. Even though we are unwavering in our position that LB 599 is first and foremost about human needs policy—that is, responding to the prenatal risks and needs of unborn children—and not about immigration policy, we cannot ignore the fact that concerns about illegal immigration thus far seem to have prevailed on this issue. One thing that has become apparent, once again, is the need for comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level. One of the things we have heard during the reaction to LB 1110 last year and now LB 599 is the idea that if the mothers of these unborn children can be identified as unauthorized immigrants, they should be deported to their countries of origin. That’s pretty easy to proclaim, but it is far from realistic; not with the current disconnect between immigration policy and economic conditions.

Thank you regarding our position on this bill. We urge that LB 599 be advanced for debate by the full Legislature.