

Written Testimony of Thomas P. and Tina M. Wilson
RE: In Opposition to House Bill HB1171 - Declaration of Rights – Right to
Reproductive Liberty
March 29, 2022

As citizens of the state of Maryland and practicing Catholics, we are vehemently opposed to **Maryland House Bill HB-1171** on both legal and moral grounds. This testimony seeks to express our concerns around **HB-1171**.

At first glance, this bill uses patriotic terms such as “liberty” and “equality,” in association with “reproductive rights”, which naturally appeal to persons of good will. Our initial response in reading the bill was, “that doesn’t seem so bad.” But as we did further research on HB1171 and discovered that there are many hidden ramifications from these euphemistic terms, we became much more concerned.

As part of our research, we reviewed the written testimony provided by the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ). In that testimony dated February 18, 2022, the ACLJ pointed out that the *“full scope and repercussions of House Bill 1171 are unclear and could severely impact the rights and freedoms of Maryland citizens.”* We wondered why the ACLJ is so concerned about the seemingly benign language in the bill. The written testimony provided us with the answer. *“Because the radical measures that would be implemented should H.B. 1171 be passed are relatively new, and because the language of H.B. 1171 is both broad in scope, and vague, it is not possible to fully quantify the effects on law that H.B. 1171 would have if passed. Nonetheless, the proposed amendment would have significant effects, disrupting the many laws in place that currently protect life and conscience. Most notably, the passage of H.B. 1171 would prohibit future legislative efforts to place even modest limits on abortion, thwarting those who value innocent life and seek to protect it, and would prohibit future legislation that protects life from being enacted.”*

In our minds, the purposeful use of broad and vague language conceals a potentially significant impact; many of the existing Maryland laws in place to protect the interests of all could be suddenly invalidated. As pointed out by the ACLJ testimony, *“an abortion amendment would invalidate state abortion restrictions that are supported by the majority of the public, including the following common sense, protective laws: partial-birth abortion bans; infanticide bans; bans on selective abortion based on gender or disability; parental notification; informed consent; and many more. House Bill 1171 contains no saving provisions for already existing laws.”* The present language of HB 1171 seeks to conceal the true nature of the bill and its implications on Marylanders.

Of even greater concern to us, the ACLJ testimony points out a *“long list of laws that would likely be struck down, **without notice to the public**, by this proposed legislation. . . But H.B.1171 would appear to be intended to drive a stake into all of these laws, and more, and do so in a way that would **leave voters uninformed entirely on the scope of the issue** on which they are voting, including the surrender of their right to adopt protections for life in the future. [emphasis added].”*

Moreover, a constitutional amendment is not necessary to create or protect any abortion right. The Maryland Freedom of Choice Act (1991) protects abortion and provides for its continued

existence. And, unlike constitutional amendments, it is subject to alteration as needed according to the will of the people through their elected representatives.

Therefore, we believe it is paramount that voters understand the potential ramifications of this bill and be provided with the best available information to make an informed decision. *We seek your support* in the hope that this bill be withdrawn, or at least adequately amended in the Senate to provide greater insight and understanding as to the potential outcomes from passage of HB1171.

Finally, we have a strong moral objection to this bill. The foundation of our opposition to HB1171 is in our Catholic Faith. As we recently passed the 49th anniversary of the Supreme Court case *Roe v. Wade*, decided on Jan 22, 1973, there is no class of person that needs as much help as children in the womb. Children in the womb are truly our neighbors, as are their mothers. Since its beginning, the Catholic Church has taught that human life begins at conception (CCC, §2270– 2271). The child in utero enjoys all the rights proper to a human person regardless of the stage of development. In good faith, we cannot stand for any legislation that would tolerate the further murder of innocents.

In summary, we want to express our strong opposition and ask that you represent our concerns as the Maryland Senate reviews HB1171. Thank you once again for your consideration and action on our observations and suggestions.

Respectfully,

Thomas P. and Tina M. Wilson
Long-time residents of MD District 17