



Freedom of Choice Act and Similar Measures Attacking Life Questions & Answers

Q1: What would legislation like the Freedom of Choice Act do to our human rights?

A1: At the present time, the Freedom of Choice Act (FOCA) has not been passed and would have to be re-introduced when the 111th Congress convenes in January 2009. There is speculation that the provisions in prior FOCA legislation may be introduced piece meal rather than one comprehensive bill or accomplished by a presidential executive order. The provisions could include:

- Every woman has a “fundamental right” to an abortion and no government (federal, state or local) could “interfere with” or “deny” her right to choose to bear a child or terminate a pregnancy at any stage of fetal development.
- Hospitals or other facilities offering health services that presently do not perform abortions may be forced to do so on the grounds that not offering abortion is discriminatory. Physicians may not be exempt from performing abortions due to conscientious objection. Similarly, public funding to pay for childbirth may also be required to pay for abortions.
- All laws that have put reasonable protections in place such as parental notification, informed consent, regulations for abortion clinics and clinic personnel credentials could be overturned including the federal law banning “partial birth” abortions.

Q2: What position have the bishops taken on FOCA or possible similar legislation?

A2: At their annual fall assembly in November 2008, the United States bishops issued a post election statement welcoming President-elect Obama and the members of the new Congress but also emphatically stating the fundamental good of life for all was altered when in 1973, *Roe v. Wade* removed protections for the unborn. Any legislation such as FOCA that would outlaw some of the legal protections that have been enacted in states and by the federal government would be seen as a direct attack on the human lives of unborn children and the right to free exercise of religion. (www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2008/08-174.shtml)

Q3: What does the Catholic Church teach about human rights?

A3: Pope John Paul II compiled a list of human rights, as articulated in the teachings of Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council and Pope Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (Hundredth Year). First on the list is the right to life from conception to natural death, an integral part of which is the right of the child to develop in the mother’s womb. “The source and synthesis of these rights is religious freedom, understood as the right to live in the truth of one’s faith and in conformity with one’s transcendent dignity as a person” (Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #155). As an exercise of religious freedom, no one should be forced to act in a manner contrary to their beliefs as individuals or as a member of society.