



**Cardinal Seán P. O'Malley Statement On
Massachusetts Legislation Expanding Access to Abortion**

BostonCatholic.org

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Our Commonwealth is facing an issue that holds significant moral implications for all citizens. At this time there are two bills (HB 3320 and SB 1209) proposed in the Massachusetts legislature which have extreme consequences for the protection of life. These bills have been described as a means of protecting the provisions of the Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Roe v. Wade*, but they go far beyond that decision and take us in dangerous directions. The bills are threatening to human life and dignity and should, in my judgement, be opposed even by those who support the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

The citizens of Massachusetts and their elected officials represent many faiths and also a secular position that does not embrace any particular religious tradition. I do not address the proposed legislation from a religious perspective but as an issue of human rights, in this case the right to life, as I also speak to other human rights issues such as welcoming immigrants to our country, supporting a strong social safety net for the poor and the call for racial justice. I do not seek to impose the Catholic Church's teachings on a diverse society but wish to help build a society which protects human life from its inception to natural death.

The purpose of the proposed legislation is clear: in a time when state law may become a central focus in the larger debate about abortion, these bills seek to extend current Massachusetts law in unnecessary and unjustified ways. Specifically, the proposed legislation would produce the following consequences:

- Allow abortion in Massachusetts during all nine months of pregnancy.
- Eliminate any requirement that even late-term abortions be performed in hospitals.
- Eliminate the requirement to make efforts to care for a child who survives an attempted abortion.
- Eliminate any requirement that a pregnant minor (under 18) have any adult consent (parental or through the courts) before undergoing an abortion.

Collectively these changes have radical consequences for society. In the proposed legislation abortion is described as "any medical treatment intended to induce termination of a clinically diagnosable pregnancy except for the purpose of producing a live birth". There are many clinical procedures which can satisfactorily be described in purely medical terms. Abortion is not one of them. While the procedure has significant clinical dimensions, there is also a human reality that deserves more adequate recognition at any stage of development. By depersonalizing the reality, the legislation dehumanizes the decision faced by women, their families and physicians.

Prior to and following the 1973 Roe v. Wade decision the Church has tried to provide care, compassion and assistance to women in crisis pregnancies. The Archdiocese of Boston today sponsors Pregnancy Help to provide spiritual and material assistance to women facing difficult choices about abortion. We also sponsor Project Rachel, a retreat program for women seeking counsel and healing after abortion.

We do not seek to judge or blame individuals, particularly women and families faced with excruciatingly difficult pregnancies. Our objective is to consider the implications of the proposed legislation, which among its provisions removes any limits to abortion in the third trimester of pregnancy. The legislation is being advocated on the basis of complex and emotionally wrenching medical cases, but the implications of these laws without limits can lead far beyond the hard cases.

The proposed legislation (HB 3320 and SB 1209) presents all citizens of the Commonwealth with a serious moral question concerning the protection of human life. Legislators, I hope, will not presume that broad support in Massachusetts for legal abortion automatically translates into willingness on the part of the public to embrace the extreme provisions of these bills. These realities deserve our serious consideration with the highest convictions of what is right and our full compassion. And the unborn children who will be most directly impacted by the proposals deserve to have their lives protected.