

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
WEST END PLACE

150 Staniford Street, Boston, MA 02114-2511

Phone (617) 367-6060

FAX (617) 367-2767

LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary
From: Edward F. Saunders, Jr., Esq., Executive Director
Re: House 1488, An Act Relative to Health Education in Women's Correctional Institutions.
Date: July 27, 2009

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference ("Conference") respectfully submits this testimony in opposition to *House 1488, An Act Relative to Health Education in Women's Correctional Institutions*.

While the bill's title would lead one to believe that the bill's purpose is to improve health education for incarcerated women, the thrust of the bill is to codify a requirement to distribute contraception materials to female prisoners.

This bill requires the health services unit in each correctional institution where women are incarcerated to have available to all women written information on women's health, contraception, and sexually transmitted infections; provides female prisoners of child bearing age contraception counseling; and not less than three months prior to her release, begins the contraceptive regimen of her choice. Upon her release, the woman would be given a twelve month prescription for contraceptives to refill her medication and referrals for prescription refills and follow up care.

Numerous studies examining sexual behavior and STD transmission have demonstrated risk compensation behavior, which is a greater willingness to engage in potentially risky behavior when one believes risk has been reduced through technology.¹ In 2004, researchers described how the early aggressive promotion of condoms ruined efforts to reduce HIV/AIDS in Botswana, while resistance to condom promotion in Uganda encouraged behavior changes that dramatically reversed the epidemic in that country.² Contraceptive use also has numerous side-effects and risks of serious complications. The side-effects of the pill include headaches, depression, decreased libido and weight gain.³ Documented serious complications include heart attacks,⁴ cervical cancer⁵ and blood clots.⁶ Additionally, more than half (58%) of all abortion patients

¹ J. Richens et al., "Condoms and Seat Belts: the Parallels and the Lessons," *The Lancet* 355 (2000): 400-403; M. Cassell et al., "Risk compensation: the Achilles' heel of innovations in HIV prevention?", *British Medical Journal* 332 (2006): 605-607.

² T Allen and S Heald, HIV/AIDS Policy in Africa: What has worked in Uganda and what has failed in Botswana? *Journal of International Development* 2004; 16:1141-1154.

³ B Tanis, et al., "Oral Contraceptives and the Risk of Myocardial Infarction," *New England Journal of Medicine* 345 (December 20, 2001).

⁴ R Hatcher, et al., *Contraceptive Technology* at 418 (1998).

⁵ J Kemmeren, et al., "Third Generation Oral Contraceptives and Risk of Venous Thrombosis: Meta-analysis," *British Medical Journal* 323 (July 21, 2001).

⁶ Kaiser Network Daily Reproductive Health Report, "British Lawsuit Filed Against Makers of 'Third-Generation' Birth Control Pills," October 2, 2001.

were using contraception during the month when they became pregnant.⁷ This indicates that reliance on contraceptives may increase one's proclivity to abort if contraception fails and pregnancy occurs.

We applaud efforts to improve health care and education for women; however, this bill fails to do so by focusing on contraception. A woman's overall health would be better served by including in any health education program information relative to natural family planning and abstinence. These methods avoid the possible complications and medical side-effects associated with contraception, thus promoting a woman's health. The Conference respectfully submits that in light of these factors it is better for a women's physical, emotional and spiritual health to provide educational resources and services that teach Natural Family Planning and promote abstinence.

For these reasons, the Conference urges the Committee to report House 1488 unfavorably recommending that the bill ought not pass.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.

⁷ S Henshaw & K Kost, "Abortion Patients in 1994-1995: Characteristics and Contraceptive Use," 28 Family Planning Perspectives 140, 144-145 (July/August 1996).