

Kansas bishops decry end of state program for pregnant women in need

TOPEKA, Kan. – The Catholic bishops of Kansas told Gov. Mark Parkinson that his administration's decision to end state funding in 2010 for a program that helps women facing crisis pregnancies "will have grave repercussions for some of the most vulnerable among us."

"We implore you to consider the true costs of ending this important program," they wrote in a July 31 letter to Parkinson. "The state cannot afford to turn its back on women seeking help in choosing life."

Called the Senator Stan Clark Pregnancy Maintenance Initiative, the program "provides women facing crisis pregnancies with a wide array of support services, including counseling on alternatives to abortion," the bishops said in their letter.

"Its absence will send a disturbing message about our priorities as a state," they said, "especially when taken in concert with your recent veto of a budget amendment restricting public funding for Planned Parenthood, the nation's largest abortion provider."

The Legislature had approved more than \$345,000 to fund it for 2010, a smaller amount than the bishops had hoped for, they said. However, until the program was cut, the bishops said they were confident that even that amount would help the women who needed it.

"Because of this program, there are children alive today who otherwise, as victims of abortion, would not be among us," they said.

More than half of the pregnant women served by the program live at or below the federal poverty level, the bishops noted.

The Kansas Catholic Conference, the public policy arm of the Kansas bishops, told

Catholic News Service Aug. 13 that it had received no reply yet from the governor.

The same day in an e-mail to CNS, Beth Martino, who is Parkinson's press secretary and communications director, said the budget cuts the governor made for most Kansas agencies "were simply target dollar amounts."

"In most cases, the governor did not identify specific programs or initiatives that he recommended for reductions," she said, adding that Parkinson "trusts cabinet officials to make their reductions based on the priorities for their agencies."

Martino said the governor also "understands that agencies often have difficult decisions to make when the state budget is extremely limited."

In their letter the Catholic bishops said they recognized that Kansas, like the entire country, is facing economic hardships.

"We are fully aware of the dire fiscal circumstances currently confronting the state. We have recognized for some time that, in order for the state's budget to be balanced, painful cuts were inevitable," the bishops said.

They said they fully expected the program for pregnant women in need "to face its fair share of budget cuts" for the 2010 fiscal year, but eliminating it altogether "has very large consequences for women in Kansas," despite the "relatively small amount of funding" used for it.

Signing the letter were Archbishop Joseph F. Naumann of Kansas City and Bishops Ronald M. Gilmore of Dodge City, Paul S. Coakley of Salina and Michael O. Jackels of Wichita.