

Philadelphia council rescinds ‘pro-choice city’ designation

PHILADELPHIA - Cardinal Justin Rigali thanked the Philadelphia City Council June 14 for voting to rescind a “troubling resolution” that had declared Philadelphia a “pro-choice city.”

“The members who supported today’s resolution are to be commended for reflecting carefully upon this issue and showing the courage to revisit it,” he said in a statement shortly after the vote to rescind. “I appreciate that the council has considered seriously the sensitivities of all Philadelphians and has rightly voted to take these sensitivities into account.”

The vote to rescind was 13-4; nine council members had supported the original nonbinding resolution June 7, while eight members had opposed it.

Two of the three Catholic council members who had supported the designation reversed their votes.

After the first vote, Cardinal Rigali had called the declaration of the city as “pro-choice” both “divisive and erroneous.”

“In a city where so many people vigorously defend life at every stage, proclaiming Philadelphia ‘pro-choice’ is inconsistent with reality,” he said. “It unfairly saddles those who support life at all stages with this shameful label.”

The June 7 vote on the nonbinding resolution came only hours after Philadelphia was named the city with the highest murder rate in the country, leading Cardinal Rigali to chide the council for passing such a meaningless measure in the wake of the city’s disturbing trends in violent crime.

“Council members who voted for it should apologize to the thousands of Philadelphians they have offended today,” he said, “and turn their energies toward improving the quality of life and the safeguarding of all residents.”

The Philadelphia-based National Catholic Bioethics Center had joined the cardinal in condemning the original vote.

“We are known as the ‘City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection,’” said a statement issued by the center June 13. “There is nothing loving about the assault on human life that is abortion. It is a tragic violation of both our vulnerable sisters and their never-to-be-born children.”

The original resolution was introduced by Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown at the request of Planned Parenthood.

Brown acknowledged that the resolution was passed at the request of a special-interest group, and that Planned Parenthood had helped her craft the document.

“They asked me to do it. I agreed with their views and I agreed to introduce the resolution,” she told *The Bulletin*, a Philadelphia evening newspaper. “At the end of the day, we have to decide what we want the city to look like and be about.”

She declined a request for comment from *The Catholic Standard & Times*, Philadelphia archdiocesan newspaper.

A representative for Dayle Steinberg, president and CEO of Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pennsylvania, told the *Standard & Times* that Steinberg “did not have time in her schedule” to talk about the resolution.

One councilman, Deacon Juan Ramos of St. Peter the Apostle Parish, said he was not surprised that Planned Parenthood was behind the resolution. “The language of the resolution told me she had gotten it from one of the pro-abortion activist groups,” he said.

Although the resolution was largely symbolic, he and other members of the council believed it sent a false message about the city.

“This city cannot just be classified as a pro-choice city, because there are hundreds of thousands of people in this city who are pro-life, like myself,” he said.

The original resolution says the council reaffirms Philadelphia’s “long-standing position as a pro-choice city, and encourages other cities around the country to join us in voicing official support for reproductive rights.”

“Being a pro-choice city means encouraging the expansion of all forms of reproductive health care,” the resolution states. “Being a pro-choice city means

defending the right to choose a legal and safe abortion as a final but critical option for women.”

City Council President Anna C. Verna voted against the city’s designation as pro-choice, saying it “does not respect the views of thousands of the city’s citizens who do not agree with it.”

Councilman Jack Kelly, who also voted against the resolution, said he was taken by surprise when it came before the committee, because he had only heard about it that morning. After asking Brown not to introduce it, he told his colleagues that voting in favor of such a resolution would be “a slap in the face of our constituents with different viewpoints.”

Another opponent, Councilman Frank Rizzo Jr., said he found the whole process unnecessary. “It’s nonbinding,” Rizzo said. “There are not going to be signs (that say), ‘Welcome to Philadelphia: Pro-Choice City.’ That’s not going to happen. It was just unnecessary. I don’t understand why we even went there.”

Philadelphia would have been the largest U.S. jurisdiction to adopt such a resolution, joining the California cities of West Hollywood, Berkeley and Santa Cruz.

Contributing to this report were Susan Brinkmann, Lou Baldwin, Christie Chicoine, Barbara Fitzgerald and Nadia Pozo.