



## Diocese of Springfield in Illinois

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Office of the Bishop

March 17, 2009

Dear Friends in Christ,

I write to you about a serious threat to our freedom to practice our Catholic faith in the state of Illinois.

A bill has been introduced in the Illinois General Assembly (HB 2354, the “Reproductive Health and Access Act”) that would remove the right to conscientious objection to abortion and related procedures for all health care workers. For thirty years we have been told by the courts and by legislators that abortion is a rare but necessary tragedy and that abortion providers should not face legal punishment. Now some are proposing that abortion is a human right, and worse, that those who would try to qualify it in any way or who will not provide it should be punished under law.

This proposed law will drive Catholic doctors and nurses from health care and will make it impossible for Catholic hospitals to continue to be places where life is always respected, where no one is deliberately killed. In our country, we recognize conscientious objection to war, even though defending one’s country is a noble and moral act. We recognize the conscientious objection of those doctors who will not cooperate in administering the death penalty, even for terrible crimes. Some Illinois legislators want to take away conscientious objection to abortion.

The enemies of human life and religious freedom in Illinois are well funded. Pressure on legislators is great and is increasing. I ask you to contact your Representative this week to express your dismay that the Illinois legislature, elected democratically, would debate a bill that removes freedom of conscientious decision-making for health care workers as a condition of their employment. Surely people of good will can agree that the State should not come between a health care worker and God.

Unfortunately we have had to live with the fact that our laws no longer protect unborn human life. We cannot live with the prospect that our laws will no longer protect conscience. In 1844, Abraham Lincoln broke with his own party, the often anti-Catholic Whigs, and proposed: “Resolved, that the guarantee of the rights of conscience, as found in our Constitution, is most sacred and inviolable, and one that belongs no less to the Catholic, than to the Protestant; and that all attempts to abridge or interfere with these rights, either of Catholic or Protestant, directly or indirectly, have our decided disapprobation, and shall ever have our most effective opposition.” Illinois HB 2354 betrays the legacy of Lincoln in his home State.

Catholics and all people of good will should work to ensure its defeat. I also ask you to thank those legislators who are courageously opposing HB 2354 and to pray for those who are supporting it. To contact your legislator, please go to [www.ilga.gov](http://www.ilga.gov), or call 312-368-1066.

Sincerely in Christ,

Most Reverend George J. Lucas  
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois