



## Statement on House Bill 112

The Catholic Church teaches that a human being's most fundamental right is the right to life. This right belongs equally to every member of the human family – born and unborn – and must be protected in law.

On behalf of the Commonwealth's Catholic bishops, the Virginia Catholic Conference affirms the right to life as the most basic foundation of its advocacy. The Conference applauds Delegate Robert Marshall, the patron of House Bill 112, for defending and advancing the right to life in many ways during his years in the General Assembly.

House Bill 112 states the following:

“Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

*1. § 1. That a human being is any organism, including an embryo, who possesses a genome specific for and consistent with a member of the species Homo sapiens. For the purposes of certain inherent and constitutionally guaranteed rights, every human being is deemed a legal person in the Commonwealth.*

*§ 2. Unborn children have protectable interests in life, health, and well-being, and the natural parents of unborn children have protectable interests in the life, health, and well-being of their unborn children.*

*§ 3. Subject to the United States Constitution and the Constitution of Virginia, the laws of the Commonwealth shall be interpreted and construed to acknowledge on behalf of all human beings, including unborn children at every stage of development, the equality and inherent rights guaranteed by Article I, Section 1 of the Constitution of Virginia and the right to due process guaranteed by Article I, Section 11 of the Constitution of Virginia.*

*§4. Nothing herein shall be construed to expand, limit, or otherwise modify any determination of law regarding what constitutes appropriate medical services for pregnant women.”*

House Bill 112 is referred to by some as a “personhood” measure, yet the legislation is expressly subordinate to existing unjust laws that contradict the right to life that unborn children have been given by God. At a House of Delegates subcommittee meeting on House Bill 112 on Wednesday, February 10, proponents of the bill testified that the measure would not ban any conduct that is currently legal (*e.g.*, abortion) and would not create a conflict or “test case” between federal and state law.

Mindful of the bill’s conceded inability to affect unjust laws permitting abortion, the Virginia Catholic Conference offered the following prepared remarks on House Bill 112 at the February 10 subcommittee hearing:

“The Catholic Church’s persistent efforts on respect life issues are well known. The teaching of our Church is that a human being’s most fundamental right is the right to life. This right belongs equally to every member of the human family – born and unborn.

This right must be embraced in our communities and protected in law. Government’s most basic responsibility, therefore, is to recognize and guarantee this right.

This is the principle behind this legislation. It is a principle which we wholeheartedly proclaim, and we applaud the patron for pursuing this principle over many years in so many ways.

There are different schools of thought, however, on what means are effective in giving this principle legal effect. From a constitutional perspective, we do not offer an opinion today on whether HB 112 is an effective way to give the natural right to life legal recognition.

We certainly hold that enshrining this right in law must be the goal, but we also recognize that reasonable people who are pro-life can disagree on the means to achieve this, and the debate this evening has certainly shown this.”

Virginia’s bishops work to uphold this principle by defending all human life from conception to natural death in their teaching and in legislative advocacy through the Virginia Catholic Conference. Through this advocacy, they are pursuing the following initiatives during the 2010 Virginia General Assembly session:

- Prohibiting the use of state funds for abortions, Planned Parenthood, and research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses.
- Opposing legislation that would promote or provide state funding for research that requires the destruction of human embryos or fetuses, or for entities that conduct such research.
- Requiring that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given an opportunity to view an ultrasound image of her preborn child.

- Requiring abortion clinics to be licensed by the state and subject to regulations applicable to outpatient surgery centers.
- Opposing attempts to subject pro-life pregnancy resource centers to stricter regulation than abortion clinics.
- Supporting conscience protections for medical students who decline to be involved in training for abortion procedures.
- Supporting a requirement that, prior to receiving an abortion, a pregnant woman be given information about the effects abortion may have on future pregnancies.
- Supporting legislation to protect pregnant women from being forced to have an abortion.
- Opposing all proposals to expand the circumstances under which death sentences can be imposed under Virginia law.

You are encouraged to visit the website of the Virginia Catholic Conference at [www.vacatholic.org](http://www.vacatholic.org) for more information about these issues, and to sign up for the Advocacy Network to receive action alerts as these measures proceed through the General Assembly.