



July 1, 2024

To: Pastors and Parish Administrators

From: Dennis Poust, Executive Director

Re: "Equal Rights Amendment" ballot referendum

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As you may be aware, a referendum that is on the general election ballot for this November is asking voters to approve or reject what is known as an Equal Rights Amendment to the New York State Constitution. While some of the language of the proposed amendment is unobjectionable, the New York State Catholic Conference, which represents the Bishops of New York State in public policy matters, strongly opposes the referendum for important reasons.

First, it would enshrine a fundamental right to abortion on demand in the state Constitution. While the practical impact of this likely would be minimal given that the state legislature already has embedded this right in statute, by adding it to the state Constitution, it would make it nearly impossible to enact any pro-life laws even if public opinion in New York was to evolve.

Second, because the language of the amendment would bar discrimination based either on "age" or "gender identity" or "gender expression," it could open the door to a judicial interpretation barring parents from having any say in medical interventions of their minor children regarding "gender transition" and could impact youth sports, locker room and bathroom facility use and more.

We also have concerns regarding religious liberty implications for our charitable institutions.

A ballot issue committee has been formed as the formal opposition to the amendment. Known as the Coalition to Protect Kids-NY (CTPKNY), this committee is registered with the New York State Board of Elections and reports on its funding and expenditures in accordance with state election law. The Catholic Conference and your local diocese support the goal of the CTPKNY to defeat the amendment. Attached is a letter from the CTPKNY, which we have agreed to pass on for your information. The letter asks for parish engagement in efforts to defeat the referendum, by sharing CTPNYK print materials in your parish and by sharing their digital materials on your social media platforms at your discretion.

Also enclosed are some guidelines for parish advocacy developed by legal counsel designed to help you understand what a parish may and may not do to support the CTPKNY's efforts and remain in compliance with state and federal law. Please refer to these guidelines and keep in mind parishes should not expend funds and should not share materials that are partisan in nature (including those that picture or mention political leaders or parties by name). The CTPKNY will provide any materials gratis to avoid you incurring copying or staff costs. If you are interested, please contact them directly as explained in the letter. If you have specific questions, contact your diocesan Respect Life Office or diocesan attorney.