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April 12, 2016

Representative Paul Seaton, Chair  
Health and Social Services Committee  
State Capitol, Room 102  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representative Seaton:

We, the Catholic Bishops of Alaska, are writing today to ask for your consideration in moving SB 89 from your committee to allow for a full vote of the House prior to legislative adjournment. We support several points within the legislation.

First and foremost, the Catholic Church believes that parents are the first and primary teachers of their children. In a recently released teaching on the family titled "The Joy of Love" Pope Francis succinctly lays out this role for all to consider:

"At the same time I feel it important to reiterate that the overall education of children is a "most serious duty" and at the same time a "primary right" of parents. This is not just a task or a burden, but an essential and inalienable right that parents are called to defend and of which no one may claim to deprive them. The State offers educational programs in a subsidiary way, supporting the parents in their indeclinable role; parents themselves enjoy the right to choose freely the kind of education – accessible and of good quality – which they wish to give their children in accordance with their convictions. Schools do not replace parents, but complement them. This is a basic principle: "all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities in the name of the parents, with their consent and, to a certain degree, with their authorization".

Senate Bill 89 clearly outlines this responsibility in providing parents the right to discern what they believe best for their children, from testing to curriculum.

A second consideration for the committee is while much of the headlines have focused on the "who" that would be teaching a curriculum on the human body, we offer that human sexuality is sacred. Many religions, including the Catholic Church, teach that life is sacred from conception to natural death. Further, in Pope Francis's teaching on the Family he notes "Where sex education is concerned, much is at stake." We have attached the paragraphs from the document that discuss the need for sex education which outlines a prudent approach.

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While we recognize that others may not hold this same viewpoint, we agree with the proposed legislation, which asserts that medical providers who support access to and provide for abortions are not the same ones who should be teaching children whose families may have dissimilar values. We believe there are alternatives in all our communities statewide that do not have a health teacher or curriculum in their districts. These could include public health nurses.

Due to our own schedules, we are all unavailable to testify in person or at an LIO today. We did want to voice our support for this legislation, which we believe ensures that parents maintain their rights of being the first educators of their children and that school districts statewide will be prohibited from offering a health curriculum provided by those who provide abortions.

Sincerely yours,

Handwritten signatures of Roger L. Schwietz, Chad W. Zielinski, and Edward J. Burns in blue ink.

+Roger L. Schwietz, OMI  
Archdiocese of Anchorage

+Chad W. Zielinski  
Diocese of Fairbanks

+Edward J. Burns  
Diocese of Juneau

Attachment

CC: Members of the HES Committee  
Rep. Mike Chenault, Speaker of the House  
Rep. Charisse Millett, Majority Leader  
Rep. Craig Johnson, Rules Chair

POST-SYNODAL APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION  
AMORIS LÆTITIA  
OF THE HOLY FATHER FRANCIS  
TO BISHOPS, PRIESTS AND DEACONS  
CONSECRATED PERSONS CHRISTIAN MARRIED COUPLES  
AND ALL THE LAY FAITHFUL  
ON LOVE IN THE FAMILY

*From Chapter 7  
The need for sex education*

280. The Second Vatican Council spoke of the need for “a positive and prudent sex education” to be imparted to children and adolescents “as they grow older”, with “due weight being given to the advances in the psychological, pedagogical and didactic sciences”. We may well ask our-selves if our educational institutions have taken up this challenge. It is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished. It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving. In such a way, the language of sexuality would not be sadly impoverished but illuminated and enriched. The sexual urge can be directed through a process of growth in self-knowledge and self-control capable of nurturing valuable capacities for joy and for loving encounter.

281. Sex education should provide information while keeping in mind that children and young people have not yet attained full maturity. The information has to come at a proper time and in a way suited to their age. It is not helpful to overwhelm them with data without also helping them to develop a critical sense in dealing with the onslaught of new ideas and suggestions, the flood of pornography and the overload of stimuli that can deform sexuality. Young people need to realize that they are bombarded by messages that are not beneficial for their growth towards maturity. They should be helped to recognize and to seek out positive influences, while shunning the things that cripple their capacity for love. We also have to realize that “a new and more appropriate language” is needed “in introducing children and adolescents to the topic of sexuality”.

282. A sexual education that fosters a healthy sense of modesty has immense value, however much some people nowadays consider modesty a relic of a bygone era. Modesty is a natural means whereby we defend our personal privacy and prevent ourselves from being turned into objects to be used. Without a sense of modesty, affection and sexuality can be reduced to an obsession with genitality and unhealthy behaviours that distort our capacity for love, and with forms of sexual violence that lead to inhuman treatment or cause hurt to others.

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283. Frequently, sex education deals primarily with “protection” through the practice of “safe sex”. Such expressions convey a negative attitude towards the natural procreative finality of sexuality, as if an eventual child were an enemy to be protected against. This way of thinking promotes narcissism and aggressivity in place of acceptance. It is always irresponsible to invite adolescents to toy with their bodies and their desires, as if they possessed the maturity, values, mutual commitment and goals proper to marriage. They end up being blithely encouraged to use other persons as a means of fulfilling their needs or limitations. The important thing is to teach them sensitivity to different expressions of love, mutual concern and care, loving respect and deeply meaningful communication. All of these prepare them for an integral and generous gift of self that will be expressed, following a public commitment, in the gift of their bodies. Sexual union in marriage will thus appear as a sign of an all-inclusive commitment, enriched by everything that has preceded it.

284. Young people should not be deceived into confusing two levels of reality: “sexual attraction creates, for the moment, the illusion of union, yet, without love, this ‘union’ leaves strangers as far apart as they were before”. The language of the body calls for a patient apprenticeship in learning to interpret and channel desires in view of authentic self-giving. When we presume to give everything all at once, it may well be that we give nothing. It is one thing to understand how fragile and bewildered young people can be, but another thing entirely to encourage them to pro-long their immaturity in the way they show love. But who speaks of these things today? Who is capable of taking young people seriously? Who helps them to prepare seriously for a great and generous love? Where sex education is concerned, much is at stake.

285. Sex education should also include respect and appreciation for differences, as a way of helping the young to overcome their self-absorption and to be open and accepting of others. Beyond the understandable difficulties which individuals may experience, the young need to be helped to accept their own body as it was created, for “thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. An appreciation of our body as male or female is also necessary for our own self-awareness in an encounter with others different from ourselves. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment”. Only by losing the fear of being different, can we be freed of self-centredness and self-absorption. Sex education should help young people to accept their own bodies and to avoid the pretension “to cancel out sexual difference because one no longer knows how to deal with it”.