

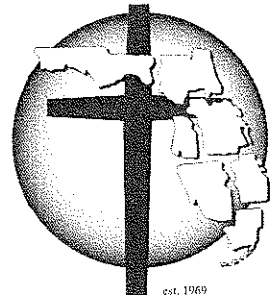
FLORIDA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

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D. MICHAEL MCCARRON, PH.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

January 15, 2008



The Honorable Allan Bense, Chair
Florida Tax and Budget Reform Commission
Holland Building, Suite 245
600 S. Calhoun Street
Tallahassee FL 32399-1300

Re: Support for Proposed Constitutional Amendment to Article 1, Section 3 Dealing with Religious Organizations and Entities (CP0020)

Dear Chairman Bense:

I write on behalf of the Florida Catholic Conference in support of the amendment soon to be considered by the Commission providing that individuals or entities may not be barred from participating in public programs because of their religion.

The Florida Catholic Conference is an agency of the Catholic bishops of Florida established in 1969. It speaks for the Church on matters of public policy, interacts with state government and the Legislature, and coordinates communication and activities between the Church and secular agencies. The bishops of the seven dioceses in Florida constitute its Board of Directors.

Catholic education in Florida includes two seminaries and four Catholic Universities; 27,770 college students; 36 high schools; 25,705 high school students; 179 elementary school; 60,759 elementary school students; seven special-education schools; 550 special-education students; 7,493 teachers; and 140,911 religious education students.

Catholic health care in Florida includes seven acute care hospitals; two rehabilitation hospitals; nine nursing homes or centers; and one Catholic hospice.

Catholic Charities ministries in Florida include 80 Catholic charities service centers (235,000 people assisted in 2006); and 73 specialized housing/day care centers (10,900 people assisted 2006).

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution assures government will be neutral toward religion and respect individuals' choices and religious matters. This provision in our Constitution does not reflect the pluralistic values of Floridians, but is instead reflective of the discriminatory and prejudicial fears of years gone by.

We urge support for this amendment which will remove a provision that allows discrimination against religious institutions and individuals without a compelling reason. Floridians deserve the opportunity to freely exercise their prerogatives, and not be declared ineligible for benefits simply based on their religious beliefs.

Respectfully yours,

D. Michael McCarron