



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

## DIOCESE OF WHEELING-CHARLESTON

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March 3, 2021

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I write you today, asking you to take action on two bills before the United States Senate: the American Rescue Plan (a.k.a. Covid-19 Relief Act) and the Equality Act. The action is to contact our two West Virginia Senators, Shelley Moore Capito and Joe Manchin, about the bills.

The Covid-19 Relief Act is being debated now in the Senate. It will likely come to a vote by Friday – only two days from now. It has some provisions that are morally acceptable and reasonable responses to the pandemic we are still living with: extending nutrition programs that help women and children, aid to struggling farmers, emergency rent assistance, an extension of unemployment benefits, coverage for the cost of Covid vaccines. It is less generous to religious schools than last year's CARES Act and less helpful to immigrants than I would like but, on balance, it has many good features.

The problem with the Covid Relief bill is that it allows funds to be used to pay for abortions. Along with having nothing to do with Covid relief, it omits the forty-year compromise, called the Hyde Amendment, that allowed federal funds for abortions only if the abortion was necessary to save the mother's life or the pregnancy was the result of incest or rape. That Amendment has saved many lives and is still supported by a majority of Americans.

Please ask Senators Capito and Manchin to seek to include the Hyde Amendment in the Covid Relief Plan.

The Equality Act, which has already passed the House of Representatives, prohibits discrimination against gay, lesbian and transgendered persons in some areas that make sense: lodging, serving on a jury, accommodations at work for pregnant women. But it would codify in federal law the category of "gender identification," meaning that a person who is biologically one sex can insist on being treated as of the other sex. It would be illegal under federal law to deny to a boy, who had declared himself a girl, the right to compete in women's sports or to share a dorm and bathroom facilities with girls at a camp. "Gender identification" is untethered to reality. It is unscientific. If your body has two X chromosomes you are female; if it has an X chromosome and a Y chromosome you are male. This mistaken concept of "gender identification" runs through the whole bill.

In addition, the bill would allow abortion to come in by the back door, for the Equality Act forbids discrimination on "pregnancy-related conditions," language that can be used to seek an abortion. (The Centers for Disease Control considers an unwanted pregnancy to be a disease.)

So a doctor opposed to abortion could not legally refuse to perform one and a Catholic hospital would have to allow abortions, contrary to the personal and corporate conscience of each.

Finally, the Equality Act explicitly exempts itself from any appeal to its provisions by religious Americans on the basis of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (1996). It directly contradicts the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion, making it illegal to follow the precepts of one's religion.

Please ask Senators Capito and Manchin to oppose the fatally-flawed Equality Act. It has so many holes it should just sink.

You may reach Senator Capito's office in Washington at 202-224-6472 or go to her website and, under "Contact," press "Share Your Opinion."

You may reach Senator Manchin's office in Washington at 202-224-3954 or go to his website and, under "Contact Joe," press "Email Joe."

You have a constitutional right to express your opinion to elected officials and a moral duty, in grave matters, to do so. I urge you to act quickly.

God be with you! May Christ's light shine more brightly in our country.

Sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark E. Brennan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Mark E. Brennan  
Bishop of Wheeling-Charleston