

Equal in Dignity: Women's Rights in New York State

Over 165 years ago, women from New York State gathered in Seneca Falls and began a great movement for women's rights. We stand on the shoulders of these foremothers, whose courage and persistence eventually won greater rights for women, including the right to vote. Yet all these years later, much remains to be done to ensure that the human dignity of women is truly and fully respected.

Pope St. John Paul II put it this way in his *Letter to Women* in 1995:

And what shall we say of the obstacles which in so many parts of the world still keep women from being fully integrated into social, political and economic life? We need only think of how the gift of motherhood is often penalized rather than rewarded, even though humanity owes its very survival to this gift. Certainly, much remains to be done to prevent discrimination against those who have chosen to be wives and mothers. As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State.

http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_29061995_women_en.html

Here in New York, we have the opportunity to pass historic legislation that would advance the human dignity of women and girls by curtailing workplace and housing discrimination based on gender, and by more effectively protecting victims of domestic violence and human trafficking. These common sense policies comprise nine of the ten points in the **Women's Equality Act**.

Tragically, the tenth point in the WEA would expand abortion provisions in New York State, which already tops the nation in the rate of pregnancies that end in abortion. It would open the door to permitting non-physicians to perform abortions, and to legalizing abortion through the third trimester of pregnancy. The Church has vigorously opposed this abortion expansion proposal from the time it was first introduced.

In coalition with the NY State Catholic Conference, our Diocesan Public Policy Committee is calling parishes and parishioners to focus on the WEA during the upcoming legislative session. For the next few months, this newsletter and other materials developed by the Committee will give details on the nine life-affirming points of the WEA and our opposition to the tenth point. Please read on to learn more, and pray for our state government officials, that they would uphold the dignity of all people— including women and preborn children.



**WOMEN'S RIGHTS
CONVENTION**
*Elizabeth Cady Stanton
addressing the first
Women's Rights Convention
in Seneca Falls, New York,
on June 20, 1848.*

According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, on average, nearly **20 people per minute** are victims of physical violence by an intimate partner in the United States.



In 2013, domestic violence courts in NYS heard **26,891** new cases.

On a typical day, there are more than **20,000** phone calls placed to domestic violence hotlines nationwide.

*“As pastors of the Catholic Church in the United States, we state as clearly and strongly as we can that violence against women, inside or outside the home, is **never justified**. Violence in any form—physical, sexual, psychological, or verbal—is **sinful**; often, it is a crime as well. We have called for a moral revolution to replace a culture of violence.”*

When I Call for Help: A Pastoral Response to Domestic Violence Against Women
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

<http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/domestic-violence/when-i-call-for-help.cfm>

Women’s Equality Act: 9 Life-affirming Points

Three Laws to Support Survivors of Domestic Violence

Three of the nine life-affirming provisions of the Women’s Equality Act address the issue of domestic violence. The first involves **housing discrimination**. Shocking as it may be, victims of domestic violence can be evicted from their housing because they are being abused! Abusers often cause property destruction and other disturbances. Landlords don’t want them around, and sometimes won’t even rent to victims coming out of domestic violence shelters due to concern that the abuser will return. Provisions in the WEA would prohibit building owners and managers from refusing to lease or sell to someone, or from evicting someone, because of her or his status as a domestic violence victim.

Related to this issue, this provision would also create a task force to study housing discrimination based on source of income. This would focus especially on Section 8 rental assistance, a government program that helps cover the rent for over 450,000 low income people in our State alone. Women and children escaping domestic violence often lose their housing, and many have to turn to programs like Section 8 for help. This task force would be a first step to prohibiting housing discrimination against these women and their families.

Two other provisions in the WEA involve **Orders of Protection**. One would make it clear that the victim of domestic violence protected by the Order cannot be accused of violating that Order. Victims of domestic violence have actually been arrested for violating the Orders set up to keep them from harm!

Many domestic violence victims move to other counties or even out of state to escape harm. The second provision would create a pilot project through which victims of abuse seeking an Order of Protection could testify remotely. This would enable them to avoid the fear and danger of having to testify in person in front of the abuser. This opportunity could encourage many more victims to seek Orders of Protection.

Let’s encourage our state legislators to stand with domestic violence survivors and pass these provisions!

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