



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING  
Mr Johnathan Davis (Chair), Mr James Milligan MLA (Deputy Chair),  
Mr Michael Petterson MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT

**Submission Number: 25**

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## Catholic Archdiocese of Canberra & Goulburn

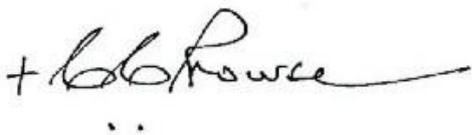
### Submission to the Inquiry into abortion and reproductive choice in the ACT Discrimination by the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry.

1. The Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn comprises more than 90,000 Catholics living in the Australian Capital Territory. More than fifty per cent of Canberrans profess a religious faith according to the 2021 Census.
2. The Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn is part of the Roman Catholic Church. As such it holds as **integral to Catholic belief the dignity of the human person and the promotion of the common good.**
3. These core principles are also **essential to a flourishing society and require an absolute commitment to human life from conception to natural death.**
4. The Archdiocese appreciates that, under the civil and criminal codes of the ACT, the termination of pregnancy is permitted under a variety of circumstances and through a variety of means.
5. Our view is that termination services and options are readily available in the ACT and that this is required to such a level is a tragedy.
6. The Archdiocese directly and through its agencies seeks to support life-affirming choices. Our social welfare agency **Marymead Catholic Care supports children, young people and families to thrive.** It does this in very tangible ways through perinatal supports for women and families, parental education and support services, disability support and assistance programs including Ricky Stuart House, foster care and, short term accommodation options. Catholic Education offers high quality affordable education to those who seek for their children educational options within inclusive, supportive communities. Catholic health agencies offer a range of pre-natal, peri-natal and post-natal health care and support options for those in the midst of reproductive choices.
7. It is evident that the Archdiocese, along with the wider Catholic Church, not only proclaims a life affirming doctrine – **we daily act to support those who are experiencing the joys and the challenges that often come with pregnancy and reproductive choices.**
8. With regard to the specific matters considered in this Inquiry we submit the following:
  - a. With particular reference to (1): accessibility to full reproductive choices in the ACT is quite limited, especially for those who are members of the communities at the periphery of our society identified in the Terms of Reference. These groups of people are **too often coerced into the termination of pregnancies; denied access to alternatives; and, not offered the levels of support to continue with a pregnancy that would enable them to make a genuine choice.**
  - b. One area not explicitly addressed in the terms of reference is the plight of women in the grip of coercive control and domestic violence. Much more needs to be offered to such women to support their dignity and their life choices.
  - c. It is our view that the ACT Government, health and welfare agencies could be doing more to support people in their reproductive choices through **improved access to high quality health care that is bulk-billed; improved social housing options; additional financial support – including for those fleeing domestic violence; improved industrial workplace conditions and childcare options; and, improved awareness of support services to sustain pregnancy and parenthood – particularly in the early stages.**

- d. The various items under (2) are serious issues for the ACT beyond the scope of abortion and reproductive choice. Many citizens in the ACT are unable to access quality health care due to a lack of bulk-billing, together with a lack of suitable alternatives. The ACT Government and Health Directorate are to be commended for the efforts in the various 'Nurse led Walk-in Clinics' in an attempt to address these issues; however, it is also the case that these are not an adequate alternative to physicians who are readily available in a timely fashion at an affordable cost. Access to suitable transport, leave and childcare are simply inadequate for large parts of the Canberra community – in particular, those identified as being in vulnerable circumstances or parts of the community.
  - e. The Archdiocese encourages this Committee to make recommendations to support a variety of reproductive choices – especially choosing to give birth and measures to actively support those who do so.
  - f. Several practical options are available to the Committee and the Legislative Assembly. These include: **widespread communication of support services for those in need of pregnancy support**, such as Karinya House, Companion House and Winnunga Nimmityjah's Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program. Each of these services could expand their reach and levels of support if they were to receive increased government funding. In particular, **it is within the scope and means of the ACT for the Nurse-Family Partnership Program to be expanded to all new mothers in the ACT**. Greater availability of these support services would enhance women's choice and capacities to undertake parenthood.
  - g. Further, the Committee could recommend to Government further funding for additional support services for those who receive pre-natal diagnosis of foetal anomalies. Receiving such news during pregnancy is clearly distressing; the limited range of options available post-birth to support a child with additional needs and their families does have an adverse impact on women's choices. Extending the designated objects of the Disability Services Act 1992 to the pre-natal time period; and, making it clear that the ACT community tangibly supports those who make positive choices with regard to such diagnoses, would reduce the pressure on pregnant women and their families to terminate pregnancies. Current practice does not promote a "positive image of people with disabilities" or "enhance their self-esteem".
9. As the Committee might well anticipate, **the Archdiocese of Canberra and Goulburn is unambiguously committed to human life from conception to natural death**. This commitment means supporting in tangible ways those who require support as they navigate the various challenges presented by pregnancy and beyond. The Archdiocese offers this support within its means and advocates for additional and much stronger resource commitments from government.

I would welcome any opportunity to discuss this submission, to provide additional avenues for dialogue or information sharing and collaboration that seeks to serve the common good and promote the dignity of persons.



Archbishop Christopher Prowse  
Catholic Archbishop of Canberra Goulburn