

THE CATHOLIC WORLD REPORT



THE DISPATCH: MORE FROM CWR...

The fight for life in middle America

“In Nebraska,” says Sandy Danek, executive director of Nebraska Right to Life, “pro-abortion forces seem to be taking a focused approach against our pro-life protections.”

🕒 January 16, 2024 👤 CWR Staff ➦ The Dispatch 💬 4

🖨️ Print

(Image: Aditya Romansa/Unsplash.com)

Nebraska will likely be another “ground zero” state in the battle over abortion in 2024. Long a pro-life bastion, Nebraska enacted substantial legal protections for the unborn in 2023 and successfully defended them against a Planned Parenthood lawsuit.

But abortion advocates are not giving up and, like in Ohio, are trying to use initiative-and-referendum to put an amendment to the state constitution on next November’s ballot to ensconce abortion-on-demand.

Nebraska Right to Life, founded in 1973, begins 2024 with a [Walk for Life and a Walk for Life Gala Dinner](#), held January 26-27, in Lincoln.

Catholic World Report spoke recently with Ms. Sandy Danek, executive director of Nebraska Right to Life, about pro-life developments in the Cornhusker State.

CWR: What is the current status of abortion in Nebraska?

Sandy Danek: LB574 was signed into law on May 22, 2023. Governor Jim Pillen was joined by the elected officials who courageously worked to pass this protective measure, the “Let Them Grow Act,” with Amendment 1658, the “Preborn Child Protection Act.” The law prevents most elective abortions after 12 weeks gestation and went into effect immediately. The provision allows for exceptions for rape, incest and life of the mother.

While this law did not go as far as we would have wanted, the lives it saves have an impact on Nebraska families. The Nebraska Heartbeat Act, which would have banned abortions at approximately six weeks gestation, failed to pass (because it needed a supermajority) by a vote of 32-15-2 on April 27.

Attorneys for Planned Parenthood of the Heartland argued that when the “Preborn Child Protection Act”—Amendment 1658—was attached to the “Let Them Grow Act”—LB 574—on May 16, it violated the Nebraska Constitution’s requirement that legislation be confined to a single subject. Lancaster County District Court Judge Lori Mare rejected their claim, letting the law go into effect.

Planned Parenthood, backed by the American Civil Liberties Union of Nebraska, filed notice with the Nebraska Supreme Court that they are appealing the dismissal of their lawsuit. The case is pending.

CWR: Didn’t the Legislature almost miss the chance to pass pro-life legislation?

Sandy Danek: When the Nebraska Heartbeat Act failed in the Legislature, Governor Pillen and pro-life senators sprung into action which resulted in Amendment 1658 being attached to the Let Them Grow Act, that bans transgender surgeries on minors.

CWR: The fight over abortion is not over, because Nebraska is one of those states where citizens can put legislation directly on the ballot. Petitions are being circulated to write a pro-abortion amendment into Nebraska’s constitution. Tell us what’s going on and whether you think they’ll get on to the 2024 ballot.

Sandy Danek: On November 15, “Protect Our Rights” abortion advocates released their ballot initiative language, which would enshrine a right to abortion until birth in our Nebraska Constitution.

Their amendment reads: “All persons shall have a fundamental right to abortion until fetal viability, or when needed to protect the life or health of the pregnant patient, without interference from the state or its political subdivisions. Fetal viability means the point in pregnancy when, in the professional judgment of the patient’s treating health care practitioner, there is a significant likelihood of the fetus’ sustained survival outside the uterus without the application of extraordinary medical measures.”

The amendment also would allow for abortion-on-demand throughout pregnancy. It leaves post-viability abortion for “health” of the mother to the discretion of the abortionist. Without defining “health,” courts have found that it can be based on nonmedical factors, including mental, spiritual, financial or familial health. Furthermore, viability is defined as being based solely on the abortionist’s judgment and would not include any baby who needs “extraordinary medical measures,” which could be as simple as a short stay in the NICU. The elimination of health and safety protections for women Language on the fundamental right to abortion “without interference from the state” puts all of Nebraska’s medical safeguards at risk. This includes obtaining informed consent and performing a medical screening, seeing a physician in person or even seeing a medical professional at all. It would allow pills to be sold through the mail by people with no medical background.

By using the words “all persons” in the amendment, this will mean parents will not have any ability to consent or even know if their minor daughter seeks an abortion. They may also have no recourse if their daughter is harmed during the abortion. And in fact, parents *will* have financial liability for any follow-up physical and/or mental care their minor daughter may require post-abortion. This is an orchestrated attempt to mislead Nebraskans into thinking this is a reasonable measure, but it is, in actuality, abortion-on-demand up until the birth of a baby.

Nebraska women deserve better than this. Nebraska Right to Life will work with others, including the Nebraska Catholic Conference, Nebraska Family Alliance, and Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America to spread the word of the threat this amendment represents.

CWR: What kinds of current pro-life protections in Nebraska would that amendment dismantle?

Sandy Danek: LB574 would be eliminated: instead of a 12-week ban on abortion, abortion would be legal on demand through birth. Nebraska’s medical safeguards would be struck down. Informed consent requirements that include making a woman aware of the state of fetal development, giving her an ultrasound, and providing a 24-hour waiting period would be eliminated. Nebraska’s requirement for parental consent would disappear: parents would not even have to be notified that their minor daughter obtained an abortion (though they would bear responsibility to handle any post-abortion complications or psychological harms). Nebraska’s ban on partial birth abortions would disappear, because abortion would be legal through birth. Laws that enable criminal prosecution of those who try to murder an unborn child or which punish harm done to that child during commission of an assault on a woman would also be nullified. Bans on dismemberment abortions would be eliminated. And taxpayers would be forced—contrary to current Nebraska policy—to pay for it all.

CWR: Nebraska seems like a pretty solidly pro-life state but there are always surprises: pro-abortionists crow they can win at the ballot box. How would you see any such amendment turning out if put up to a vote?

Sandy Danek: Fifty years of abortion on demand in this country has had a devastating effect on the life issue. The abortion industry continues with misinformation, well-funded campaigns proclaiming big government is taking away their rights. This is a complicated issue and most people find it difficult to understand the ramifications of Roe’s reversal. Pro-life organizations, including Nebraska Right to Life, will do their best to educate Nebraska voters.

CWR: A similar pro-abortion amendment is being circulated in South Dakota. Unlike the amendment adopted last November in Ohio, the South Dakota people ostensibly want to limit it to abortion and not explicitly the full range of “reproductive decisions.” Is there any synergy between what’s going in the neighboring states, and is this an effort to strike at America’s pro-life heartland?

Sandy Danek: In Nebraska, pro-abortion forces seem to be taking a focused approach against our pro-life protections. Other states provide an indication of what may be coming should this pro-abortion ballot initiative pass. They will be relentless in coming after laws that protect informed consent,

parental consent or the current 12-week protection. This seems to be the abortion industry's agenda: strike down all restrictions.

CWR: What can people do to stop this amendment in Nebraska? What can people outside Nebraska do to help you?

Sandy Danek: Pro-life Nebraskans need to be well-informed. This is the responsibility of the pro-life organizations like Nebraska Right to Life. Contributions will be sorely needed as our opposition is well-funded, with money both in and outside of Nebraska. It is important for every Nebraskan who wants to protect life to speak out and dispel the deliberate, deception messaging of the abortion industry.

CWR: Tell us about the upcoming Nebraska Walk for Life. What other prolife projects does Nebraska RTL have lined up for 2024?

Sandy Danek: The Walk for Life, which takes place in Lincoln, the state capital on Saturday, January 27, starting at 10 am. This is the Walk's 51st year. It draws four to five thousand people from all across Nebraska, with a strong presence of young people. They march from the state capitol building to the University of Nebraska Lincoln Student Union. We have an inside venue with lots of pro-life vendors as well as food and drink from the winter cold.

This year, our keynote speaker is Melissa Odhen of the Abortion Survivors Network. Born in 1977 after a botched abortion attempt, Ms. Odhen will talk about her current book, *Abortion Survivors Break Their Silence*. 2024 is our second year for the Walk for Life Gala. Last year, 500 people joined us to celebrate the post-*Dobbs* era. It was a wonderful opportunity to come together and honor those who do the important work of protecting life. It also keeps us better informed about upcoming issues in our state, like the pro-abortion amendment. The Gala takes place the night before the Walk for Life, at the Cornhusker Marriott Hotel in Lincoln, on Friday, January 26th, at 6 pm.

CWR: Many states that have liberal abortion laws have also legalized various forms of euthanasia. Is there any pressure for "death with dignity" legislation in Nebraska?

Sandy Danek: A few years ago, there was a legislative effort for assisted suicide, but it did not gain much support. Again, education on the end-of-life issues is critical.

CWR: Pro-life crisis pregnancy centers have been under political pressure and criminal attack. What's the situation look like in Nebraska?

Sandy Danek: There has been vandalism on two of the pregnancy help centers in Lincoln and Omaha, but have not been aware of anything happening in smaller communities.

CWR: How many abortion clinics are there in Nebraska and how do you bear witness to life there?

Sandy Danek: There are three: one in Lincoln and Omaha (both operated by Planned Parenthood) and one in Bellevue, which was the facility operated by late-term abortionist Leroy Carhart who died in April

2023. In addition to his Bellevue facility, he had a site in Maryland that provided abortions up until birth. There appears to be someone providing abortions at the Bellevue site, but details are still sketchy.

We network with Sidewalk Advocates for Life. For example, in Lincoln, there is a strong structure working through our largest chapter Lincoln Right to Life. The building across the street from the Planned Parenthood abortion facility houses a Women's Care Center in addition to space occupied by Lincoln Right to Life. There is a weekly presence there with many activities, including training to be a sidewalk advocate. Planned Parenthood no longer provides abortions on a weekly basis (it sometimes runs out of abortionists!) but people will still come to pray for an end to abortion weekly. On days when abortions are performed, a social media message goes out to all to come to the facility for prayer. Their support is so great, they have a sidewalk advocate scheduled for the time in which patients would be coming and going for an abortion.

*If you value the news and views Catholic World Report provides, ***please consider donating*** to support our efforts. Your contribution will help us continue to make CWR available to all readers worldwide for free, without a subscription. Thank you for your generosity!*

[Click here](#) for more information on donating to CWR. ***[Click here](#)*** to sign up for our newsletter.
