

February 25, 2025

To: Montana House Taxation Committee

From: Matthew C. Brower, Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference

Re: Testimony in support of HB 537

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is Matt Brower. I serve as the Executive Director of the Montana Catholic Conference, and I am providing this testimony on behalf of the Roman Catholic bishops of Montana.

I am here today to voice our support for House Bill 537.

Families across our state are facing increasing financial pressures due to inflation, the rising cost of housing and other economic factors. It's no secret that raising children is only becoming more expensive. To help illustrate this point, consider the Baby Boutique program that Catholic Social Services runs out of the Cathedral of St. Helena here in Helena and at RiverStone Health in Billings. In fiscal year 23-24, they handed out a little over 67,000 diapers to families in need. Catholic Social Services is currently on pace to hand out over 90,000 diapers this current fiscal year. They are averaging roughly 180 families per month and about a third of those are new families each month.

A Birth Day tax credit is a tool that can help offset the impact of rising inflation and provide some measure of relief to families with newborns who are feeling most acutely these various economic strains. In turn, it can help increase family stability during a time of significant stress and offer parents a bit of support as they try to provide homes within which their children can thrive, especially during the critical stages of early development.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, on behalf of the Montana Catholic Conference, I urge a "do pass" and thank you for your time.