

January 28, 2025

To: Montana Senate Judiciary Committee

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

Re: Testimony in support of SB 139

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

I am here to voice our support for Senate Bill 139.

First of all, we want to thank the sponsor for her care and concern for the protection of young people. The Catholic bishops of Montana join in this commitment to ensuring our children are protected both in law and practice.

We also want to thank the sponsor for the amendment she is offering. As a result of her openness to engage in dialogue and conversation with our Catholic leaders, we were able to arrive at an amended bill that seeks to advance public policies to keep our kids safe, while at the same time respecting deeply held Catholic beliefs regarding sacramental Confession. We are very grateful for this cooperation.

It is important to note that with the proposed amendment, this bill will reflect the current operational reality in both Catholic dioceses in Montana as it relates to mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect. Current diocesan policies state that, with the very narrow exception of disclosures made within the Sacrament of Penance, our Catholic clergy are mandatory reporters in every other instance. Therefore, this amended bill will mirror the policy approach taken by the Catholic Church in our state.

We hope that this bill serves as an opportunity to highlight the obligation we all have to advocate for the safety of each child that is entrusted to our care.

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, we urge a “do pass.” Thank you for your time.