

Recent Legislative Actions Encourage Adoptions

Mother Teresa is quoted as saying, “We fight abortion with adoption. Send us all the children you do not want. We will take care of them.”

Mother Teresa was an amazing person. Not only for what she did, but for her ability to express such a magnificent idea in such a simple way. Her statement is a call to all of us to consider adoption a “life” choice.

How often do we think of adoption as an alternative to abortion? Adoption is a reasonable and an effective way to save lives. It is a loving choice and is an approach that has provided the framework for positive bi-partisan legislative efforts.

This past legislative session we worked on two efforts to encourage adoptions. One was to create a tax credit for adoptive couples. The other was to make adoption a more viable alternative for young pregnant mothers who are seeking answers to what they should do.

This month we will talk about the bill we helped to pass providing a tax credit for adoptive couples. In future columns, we will talk about the much more complex issue of making adoption a more viable alternative for those young mothers who place their child with a two parent family.

HB490, an act to provide an adoption tax credit for adoptive couples, was sponsored by Rep. Julie French of Scobey. The bill was also co-sponsored by a diverse group of Senators and Representatives from both sides of the aisle. After passage in both the House and the Senate, it was signed into law by Governor Schweitzer on April 28th, 2007 and became effective for tax years beginning after December 31, 2006. The tax credit of \$1,000 is for all Montana couples who adopt a child and who are eligible for the federal adoption tax credit.

The origin of this legislation can be traced back to a meeting of the Catholic Bishops from Helena and Great Falls-Billings along with the Board of Directors of Catholic Social Services of Montana. The meeting was held in Great Falls, October of 2006. Joe Shevlin, a CPA from Helena and President of the Board, discovered in his practice that adoptive couples faced a tax liability in Montana. The tax liability was unintended, but none the less it was there, and it penalized adoptive couples. He brought the issue forward and Bishop Milone, Bishop Thomas, and the Board, made the decision to pursue a remedy in the upcoming legislative session.

The bill was drafted after much discussion regarding tax codes, carry forward provisions, and percentages. It was finally decided to pursue a flat \$1,000 credit for each adoption. Our goal was to correct the penalty and open the door to pursue even greater efforts to encourage adoption in the state.

The bill sailed through House Taxation Committee without comment and without a negative vote. It went on to the House floor and passed 100 votes for and none against. In the Senate, it was held up in committee for some time with other tax credit bills waiting passage of the budget bills. It finally came out of committee 9-0 and passed the Senate 48 for and 2 against.

This act will provide a small thank you for the sacrifice adoptive parents make. And those of you who read the legislative updates and responded to the alerts, can take great pride in your accomplishments. Your emails and phone calls helped to galvanize support, pass this bill, and give the parents a little pat on the back. Together we have taken a few more steps in our quest to promote adoptions as the “loving choice” in Montana.

Abolition of the death penalty, expansion of adoption services, health care, Catholic Days at the Legislature, and other legislative issues will be the focus of future articles. If you would like to join the Montana Catholic Conference in promoting these social justice efforts, please contact Moe at director@montanacc.org.