

Legislative Report

**By Alicia Records
Legislative Intern**

Alicia Records, a member of St. John's Cathedral Parish and a graduate student with Boise State University School of Social Work, is fulfilling her internship requirements with Catholic Charities of Idaho (CCI). She is a life-long, faithful Catholic and excited about integrating her faith into her education. She is working with Will Rainford, CCI and Diocese of Boise legislative liaison, as a legislative analyst intern. The native Idahoan holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology with minors in anthropology and sociology. She has worked for St. Luke's Regional Medical Center with oncology patients for four years as a certified nursing assistant. Her interests include issues surrounding health care, including access to health care for minorities and the impoverished, preventative care, and end of life care. Upon completion of her Masters of Social Work degree, she plans to work as a medical social worker.

The maternal bond is the most natural and sacred of human attachments. Nurturing this relationship is particularly vital during the earliest stages of childhood growth. A healthy bond between mother and child is critical to the lifelong relationship that they will share in future. It is also critical to the spiritual, physical, and emotional well being of the child as he or she devel-

Treatment needed for drug-addicted moms

ops into adult.

The fundamental mother-child bond is currently in jeopardy in the Idaho Legislature. A proposal Sen. Denton Darrington (R-Delco), is expected to introduce soon, will allow for felony prosecution of women who give birth to babies addicted to illegal drugs. Although it is always imperative to protect the unborn child, this bill will endanger the sacred bond between a mother and child. Further, the bill will continue to criminalize the mental illness of addiction, stigmatize children of drug addicted mothers, add to the increasingly overpopulated prison and foster care systems, and horrifically increase the number of abandoned and dead babies.

The bill will not reduce the incidence of drug-addicted births, or reduce addiction and the use of narcotics. The only way to make a positive difference in the lives of drug-addicted mothers and their children is to provide extensive treatment.

Drug addiction is a mental health problem and needs treatment just like any other health problem. Research has shown that drug treatment is most effective for mothers when they remain with their children. A government-funded study found that a drug addicted mother's chance of successfully completing drug treatment increases dramatically when she is allowed to keep her child. Similar research at the University of Florida has shown that treatment is also better for the infant child. The results of this study found that after one year chil-

dren who were left with their mothers tested better on infant development than those placed in foster care. Evidently, the mother-child bond is powerful and should be protected instead of divided.

The proposed bill will also contribute to the increasingly large population of women in Idaho prisons, and children in foster care. Presently, there are 200 more women in prison than capacity allows. Further, 79.8 percent of the women in Idaho prisons are in need of intensive substance abuse treatment. The cost of incarceration for women in 2004 was \$65.07 a day per inmate. If this legislation is passed, the female inmate population will continue to swell.

With the increase of mother incarceration the population of children in foster care will also rise. Last year there were approximately 2,382 children placed in the foster care system by the courts or law enforcement. On any given day there are approximately 1200 children in foster care in Idaho. It is unknown how many current foster care placements result from drug-addiction, but assuredly most are related to drug addiction. The cost both in economic and human suffering terms, are astronomical.

Drug use is inherently destructive, but it is essential to remember that as Catholics it is our moral obligation to care for the victims, both mothers and children. As St. Augustine said; "Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His works, unless His omnipotence and

goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil. This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist and out of it produce good."

If a woman is drawn into the evils of drug addiction and does become pregnant the community has an obligation to protect her child and with the will of God, through treatment, bring healing.

It is our responsibility as Catholics and faithful citizens of this community to oppose Sen. Darrington's legislation and support mothers who are drug-addicted through treatment programs, not incarceration. Healing must take place in order for hope and health to bind the relationship of a mother and her child. Strong relationships will produce healthy and involved citizens for our future and the future of generations to come.

A coalition of concerned groups and individuals, including Will Rainford, CCI and Diocese of Boise legislative liaison, is drafting a counter proposal.

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Contact your legislator today and tell her or him how you feel! You may do so by calling (208) 332-1000 or (800) 626-0471. You may also send email to infocntr@lso.state.id.us.

A Social Action Network is sponsored by Catholic Charities of Idaho. Over 200 Network members receive alerts when important bills come up and then contact their own representatives. To join the network, on the Internet go to www.catholicidaho.org/cci/.