



ARCHDIOCESE OF AGANA

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Monday, Nov. 28, 2022

Honorable Tina Rose Muña Barnes
Vice-Speaker of the 36th Guam Legislature
Chair of Committee on Rules
All Committee on Rules members

Guam Congress Building
163 Chalan Santo Papa
Hagatña, Guam, 96910

Subject: Request placing The Guam Heartbeat Act of 2022
in December 2022 Legislative Agenda

Dear Vice-Speaker Barnes:

Congratulations and may our dear Lord bless you during your new term of office.

I write to you in light of my responsibilities as Vicar General of the Archdiocese of Agaña and the duty of not just the Church, but of all humanity to protect the lives of all people, especially the frail, elderly, sick, and unborn children.

I write to you in prayer, to express our concern with your recently stated position that you will not support Bill 29-36, “The Guam Heartbeat Act of 2022” to go before all senators for immediate action, with each of them voting for or against the act. We pray that you will reverse your position.

The Guam Legislature held four public hearings that provided all members of our community opportunities to express their support or opposition to Bill 29-36. Numerous members of the Guam Catholic Pro-life Committee, other Catholics and faithful of other local Christian churches invested their time, sharing moving testimony against abortion while supporting The Guam Heartbeat Act. Hundreds shared their support of the act through live testimony at the legislative hall and by written messages. The opposing side was also well represented.

Archbishop Michael J. Byrnes submitted a written message supporting The Guam Heartbeat Act which I read out loud during the May 4, 2022 public hearing.

It has been more than six months since the public provided input. You have said that The Guam Heartbeat Act presents important issues. Believing this then, please allow all senators of the 36th Guam Legislature to vote as each of them is required to do under the Organic Act.

In a recent news article on the subject, you said:

- "...some issues are so divisive that taking them up after an election has passed will seem politically convenient"
- "Given the importance of the issue, I think it should be considered by more than a lame-duck body. I will not support its movement to the floor for that reason."

In that same news article Vice-Speaker Barnes, Speaker Therese Terlaje is also quoted:

- ... the Organic Act allows "duly elected senators" to "consider all lawful subjects in its sessions until the next inauguration."

The Catholic Church is often errantly criticized by those who say, "The church should stay out of political matters." Rather, Catholics and other Christians are citizens of our beautiful country. As citizens, the Church and its people have a right and responsibility to contribute to the common good of our society. We help the common good of our communities by practicing our right to free speech and helping to shape public policy through dialogue and active community involvement.

Pope Francis said, "We need to participate for the common good. Sometimes we hear: a good Catholic is not interested in politics. This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader can govern."

From the Church's view and that of our citizen Catholics, you diminish the importance and duty of each of your colleagues in the outgoing 36th Guam Legislature when you attempt to nullify their votes and fail to recognize that they are duly elected, sworn officials until the very final moment of their terms in office. Please think of all the hours spent by the people who testified live or who provided written testimony and the senators who were present to listen or read the input.

Archbishop Byrnes, who is currently off-island on medical leave once described being amid 200 Catholics and Evangelicals who gathered at Paseo Stadium for a Pro-Life rally in July of 2019.

One of the speakers was a National Guard Chaplain and pastor of Temple Baptist Church who reflected on some of his expectations when assigned to Guam in 2008. In a written message Archbishop Byrnes described how the Baptist chaplain recounted that, knowing that Guam was a predominantly Catholic island, he expected that the practice of abortion on the island would be practically non-existent. The chaplain thought abortion would be one less social ill he would have to deal with. Rather, the chaplain was greatly surprised at the reality.

Referring to the book of Exodus, Archbishop Byrnes likened the prevalence or acceptance of abortion on Guam to the hardness of heart of Pharaoh who refused to let the enslaved Hebrews return to their homeland after 400 years of servitude. He had no apparent capacity for mercy.

The archbishop also spoke of how Jesus reproved the Pharisees of hardness of heart, as they objected to the mercy of Jesus to cure a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. When Jesus appeared to the 11 disciples on Easter Sunday, he “rebuked them for their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they had not believed those who saw him after he had risen” (Mark 16:14).

Thus, the archbishop offered this guidance to the people of Guam:

“How do we deal with such a malaise as hardness of heart? I propose, as a beginning, that we recover the gift of the Holy Spirit, ‘the fear of the Lord.’ Fear of the Lord is comprised of two key facets: the most obvious one springs from the reality of final judgment by God at the end of our lives. Contrary to popular attitudes, there is a heaven, and there is a hell; and where we go depends on the cumulative choices we make throughout our lives.

Fear of the Lord, on the other hand, is a gift of continual awareness of the Presence of loving Father. By living in that awareness of such a Father, we are drawn to that same kind of charity for our fellow human beings.

We have hardened our hearts even to the point of tolerating the notion that were an aborted baby to survive delivery the doctors should ‘make the child comfortable’ until they died. In the Judgment we will be judged according to how we treat ‘the least of my brethren.’ We have cause to fear.”

Vice-Speaker Barnes, all members of the 36th Guam Legislature, and all people, in humility let us please examine our consciences and place at our highest priority, the most vulnerable children in the womb – “the least of my brethren”.

Harden not our hearts.

We implore you to let Bill 29-36 be placed on the final agenda of the 36th Guam Legislature and for all members to support this move. This bill has been substantially vetted by the 36th Guam Legislature and we understand that hundreds, if not thousands of testimonies were submitted to the legislative Committee on Health.

In closing, we are also concerned that when the 37th Guam Legislature is inaugurated “The Guam Heartbeat Act of 2022” may never come before our people’s elected senators to vote for or against it.

May the Holy Spirit embolden and guide you with this decision we request of you.


Father Romeo Conyocar
Vicar General, Archdiocese of Agaña

Cc: All Senators of the 36th Guam Legislature
All Media