MEMORANDUM OF OPPOSITION

Re: A.497-A Paulin / S.3134-A Krueger
In Relation to Vaccines for Minors Without Parental Knowledge

The above-referenced legislation would allow health practitioners to administer vaccines against sexually transmitted diseases to children without parental knowledge or consent. Because this proposal would seriously undermine parental authority, the New York State Catholic Conference opposes it and urges that it be defeated.

This bill is aimed at the vaccine known as Gardasil, which protects against certain strains of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). It would enable a child of any age, male or female, to receive vaccinations without any parental oversight. It would continue a dangerous trend in statute and judicial decree of whittling away the rights of parents to be involved in the health-care decisions of their children.

The Catholic Church believes that immunizing against disease is an important and morally responsible action. The prevalence of HPV in the reproductive age population makes exposure to the virus possible, even in a monogamous marriage, due to the possibility of a spouse’s exposure prior to marriage. We also live in a society where sexual assault remains a threat to young women who deserve to be protected from the effects of exposure to HPV.

We believe that HPV vaccination can be a responsible and morally acceptable method of protection against cervical cancer and we support the right of parents to choose the vaccine for their daughters. However, addressing the subject of sexually transmitted disease is part of a parent’s indispensable task of teaching their children about sexuality and protecting their health and safety. Government policy must not pressure or undermine parental authority in this area.

HPV vaccinations are not without risk. Teens and pre-teens are often not aware of allergies, contraindications, and other aspects of their medical histories. To date, the federal HHS National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program has awarded close to $6 million to victims in claims made against the HPV vaccine. Removing parents from the decision to vaccinate is dangerous public health policy.

We would note that the legislature regularly advances proposals designed to protect parental rights and safeguard the well-being of minors, such as S.3135 Krueger which criminalizes the sale of over-the-counter weight loss supplements to persons under the age of 18. New York State government has been aggressive in enacting new laws to increase the level of parental involvement in children’s health decisions: Chapter 270 of 2012 requires parental consent before a minor can receive a body piercing and Chapter 105 of 2012 prevents a minor from tanning at a tanning salon.

We strongly believe HPV immunization ought to be maintained as the prerogative of parents, in consultation with their children’s physician, and therefore oppose A.497-A / S.3134-A. For the well-being of children and the protection of parents’ rights, we urge that it be defeated.

6/2/14