
IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

December 4, 2017

House Health Committee
Ohio House of Representatives
1 Capitol Square
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Huffman, Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I urge you to oppose HB 258 and its harsh restrictions on women's access to safe, legal abortion. Catholics for Choice serves as a voice for the vast majority of Catholics across the United States—almost two million in Ohio—who support access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including abortion. As Catholics, in full accordance with the teachings of our faith, we shape and advance sexual and reproductive ethics that are based on justice, reflect a commitment to women's well-being and respect and affirm the capacity of women to make moral decisions about their lives. We support each woman's ability to make deeply personal choices that are right for her and her family, including whether to become or remain pregnant, according to her own beliefs and conscience.

HB 258 would be disastrous for Ohio women. This bill would ban abortion as early as six weeks, before many women even know they are pregnant, in a callous attempt to restrict women's reproductive decision making. Instead of respecting women's consciences, as our Catholic faith compels us to do, HB 258 would allow politicians to decide whether and when a woman can access abortion care. Because each woman is a moral agent, deserving of dignity and respect, we believe that it is neither our role—nor the government's—to stand in judgment or interfere with a woman making this decision for herself and her family. It is critical that every woman has as much time as she needs to seek care, in consultation with her doctor and without the fear of artificial deadlines.

Ohio women already face significant barriers to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, and HB 258 will only exacerbate this crisis. Instead of improving quality or availability, the bill serves to create greater procedural barriers to care, drive up costs and undermine the trusting relationship between doctor and patient. This should come as no surprise—the ultimate purpose of this bill is to restrict women's ability to exercise their constitutional right to abortion.

Please do not allow anti-choice lobbyists to take decisions about abortion away from the women who need them to further a political agenda. No woman should be coerced into a decision that runs counter to her own conscience or prevented from receiving the best advice from her doctor. No doctor should be forced to order unnecessary tests or act against their conscience and best medical opinion. The women of Ohio deserve more than to be pawns in a political game.

PRESIDENT

Jon O'Brien

**BOARD OF
DIRECTORS**

Daniel A. Dombrowski, *Chair*

Dawne Deppe

Janet Gallagher

Anka Grzywacz

Uta Landy

John Lesch

Kate Ott

Anthony Padovano

Victor Reyes

Denise Shannon

Marisa Spalding

Rosemary Radford Ruether,
Emerita

Our Catholic faith charges us to honor religious freedom, a cherished principle of our American democracy. Catholics celebrate the value of a pluralistic, secular democracy where every person is assured both freedom of and freedom from religion. Legislation like HB 258 has the practical effect of imposing one religious belief on all Ohio women by establishing a particular view on abortion as law. The proper role of government in the United States is not to privilege one set of religious views over others but to protect each person's right and ability to make decisions according to her own beliefs. This bill does not reflect the religious freedom protections that are guaranteed to every individual by the federal and state constitutions, rights that are never more vital than in the private decision making of a woman and her family.

Again, I urge you to oppose extreme legislation, like HB 258, that interferes with a woman's access to safe healthcare options and unjustly denies her the freedom to make her own conscience-based decisions. As Catholics, we trust women and believe they and their families deserve dignity and respect for their personal, private healthcare decisions. I ask you to stand with the majority of your constituents who need and support access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion.

I urge you to reject HB 258 and all such attempts to encode any one set of beliefs into state law.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and "O".

Jon O'Brien
President