

# CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

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## IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

April 8, 2019

Ohio House Health Committee  
1 Capitol Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Merrin, Vice Chairman Manning and Members of the Committee:

My name is Gaby Garcia-Vera and I represent Catholics for Choice. I urge you to oppose SB 23 as it poses a harsh restriction on women's access to safe, legal abortion in Ohio.

For more than forty years, Catholics for Choice has served as a voice for the majority of Catholics—including nearly 2 million Catholics in Ohio—who support access to comprehensive reproductive care, including abortion. We advocate for policies that allow each individual the freedom to make their own moral decisions about their health and their lives.

Catholic teaching reveres individual conscience as the final arbiter in moral decision-making. As Catholics, we are called by our faith to follow our consciences when we make moral decisions about our lives. We also deeply respect the right of others to do the same. Catholics support each woman's ability to make personal choices that are right for herself and her family, including whether to become or remain pregnant, according to her own beliefs and based on her own conscience. Rather than respecting women's consciences, as our Catholic faith compels us to do, SB 23 would allow politicians to decide whether and when a woman can access abortion care.

Many women in Ohio already face significant barriers to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, and SB 23 would only exacerbate this crisis and further harm the most vulnerable of our neighbors. The bill serves to create greater procedural barriers to care, drive up costs and undermine the trusting relationship between doctor and patient. 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 to interfere with a woman making this decision for herself and her family. It is critical that every woman has the time she needs to make her best decision, in consultation with her doctor and without the fear of artificial deadlines.

The women of Ohio deserve better than to be pawns in a political game. 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 their 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.

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Our Catholic faith charges us to honor religious freedom. Catholics celebrate the value of a pluralistic, secular democracy where every person is assured both freedom of and freedom from religion. To be complete, religious freedom must have both sides—it is meant to be an expansive principle, not a restrictive one.

Legislation like SB 23 has the practical effect of imposing one religious belief on all Ohio women by establishing one particular view on abortion as law. Religious freedom is not about telling people what they can and cannot believe or practice, but rather about respecting an individual's right to follow his or her own conscience in religious beliefs and practices, as well as in moral decisions.

I urge you to oppose extremist legislation, like SB 23, that criminalizes physicians, 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 and private healthcare decisions. I ask you to stand with the majority of your constituents, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, who support access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion.

We ask you to reject SB 23 and any such legislation that would criminalize physicians and create harsh restrictions on women's access to safe, legal abortion care.

Sincerely,

Gaby Garcia-Vera  
Domestic States Manager  
Catholics for Choice