

November 13, 2017

Ohio Senate
Health, Human Services and Medicaid Committee
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Burke, Vice Chairperson Beagle and members of the Committee,

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I urge you to oppose SB 164 and its restrictions on women's access to safe, legal abortion. Catholics for Choice serves as the voice of the majority of the 70 million Catholics in the United States—nearly two million Catholics in Ohio—who support access to reproductive health services. Catholics, in full accordance with the teachings of our faith, support the right of all people to follow their own consciences when making critical moral decisions, including decisions about reproductive healthcare. Catholics agree with the majority of Americans who want healthcare decisions to be made by patients, according to their own consciences and in consultation with trusted medical professionals. Women are moral agents, and they alone know their unique circumstances and the results of their actions. Therefore, each woman must be allowed and encouraged to make the decision that is right for her and for her family, including whether to become pregnant or to remain pregnant, according to her own beliefs and conscience.

The proposal you are considering is extreme. SB 164 would interfere with a woman's access to safe healthcare options and unjustly deny her the freedom to make personal, private decisions about her reproductive healthcare. The women of Ohio have the right to make their own conscience-based decisions, including decisions about whether to continue a pregnancy, no matter the reasons. Bans on abortion for a particular reason—due to fetal anomaly, as in SB 164, or any other proposed restriction—only serve to shame, judge and punish women while forcing medical providers to interrogate their patients seeking care.

When a woman is denied an abortion, the consequences on her life and her family can be far-reaching. It is not the role of our lawmakers to assign value to a woman's choices, but instead to grant her the dignity and respect to follow her conscience and make the choice that is right for her, her health and her family.

Catholics support policies that enable people to make decisions about their future and the future of their families. This legislation will unjustly hinder the consciences of women who seek reproductive health services while doing nothing to actually improve the lives of Ohioans living with disabilities. The majority of the nearly two million Ohio Catholics expect their elected officials to stand up for the conscience of every individual who will suffer if this legislation is allowed to pass.

PRESIDENT

Jon O'Brien

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We are called as Catholics to advocate for policies that empower the most marginalized in our communities. Whenever bans or other severe restrictions to abortion are enacted, those most negatively affected are women without the resources to access safe care elsewhere, such as those with lower income and those living in rural areas. We stand with women in difficult situations, and therefore we oppose policies, such as reason-specific abortion bans, that will disproportionately and unjustly compound the difficulties of families in our communities that are already struggling to make ends meet.

Freedom of belief is a core principle of our American democracy. However, legislation such as SB 164 that would limit access to abortion care has the practical effect of imposing one particular religious belief on all people, which does not reflect the religious freedom protections that are guaranteed to every individual by the Constitution. 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 and values.

Again, we urge you to oppose extreme legislation, like S, and any similar reason-specific bans on abortion. Such legislation blocks a woman's access to safe healthcare options and unjustly denies her the freedom to make decisions according to her own beliefs and conscience. Instead, we ask that you support policies that show compassion for women and families, no matter their circumstances, and respect for every individual's moral decision-making.

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