

# CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

April 14, 2011

The Honorable Lincoln D. Chafee  
Office of the Governor  
222 State House  
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Governor Chafee,

I write you today to urge you to publicly voice your opposition to pending legislation being debated by the Rhode Island legislature which would ban abortion coverage in the new healthcare insurance exchange. Should this legislation pass, it will make it more difficult for women in Rhode Island to access coverage for an important reproductive healthcare service. You and members of your administration have been champions of reproductive healthcare in Rhode Island. Your voice is essential now more than ever in vocally supporting women in Rhode Island, especially the poorest and most vulnerable, and especially during these difficult economic times. I hope you will continue to do so by use of your veto power, should the legislation come to you for final passage into law.

According to our Catholic tradition, individual conscience is the final arbiter in matters of moral decision making. Reflecting this, the majority of Catholics support public policies that enable women and men to make their own decisions about whether and when to have children. Catholics oppose measures such as SB 87 that would infringe upon the ability of each individual to follow his or her own conscience.

Our Catholic social justice tradition also calls us to advocate for the poor and marginalized. As a result, the majority of Catholics support safe, affordable access to the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion. Pending legislation, which will require women to use their own dollars to purchase additional "riders" covering abortion, will place particularly harsh financial burdens on Rhode Island's poorest women, whose limited resources may leave them unable to pay for separate coverage.

You may have recently heard from some conservative Catholics, including those from the Diocese of Providence, claiming to speak on behalf of all Catholics in Rhode Island on issues related to insurance coverage for abortion. I write today to assure you that they are not representative of your Catholic constituents.

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When asked, the majority of Catholic voters across the US indicated that they believe health insurance—whether private or government-run—should cover abortion in cases of life endangerment to a woman (84%), rape or incest (76%), when a pregnancy poses long-term health risks to a woman (73%), when test results show severe fetal abnormalities (66%) and whenever a woman and her doctor decide it is appropriate (50%). In fact, only 14% of Catholics agree with the Vatican's position that abortion should be illegal.

In 2009, the majority of Catholic voters (68 percent) indicated that they disagreed with the US bishops' claim that Catholics should oppose healthcare reform if it included coverage for abortion. The majority of Catholics also objected to their bishop having much of an influence on how their representatives voted on healthcare reform and were twice as likely to view their member of Congress less favorably if he or she voted for a bill that made it more difficult for women to obtain insurance that covered abortion.

Rhode Island, founded on the principal of separation of church and state, cannot and should not cave to the demands of those seeking to legislate their personal beliefs on the entire populace. Rather, the state must continue its tradition of allowing women and men to make moral decisions about their own lives according to their own individual consciences.

Catholics in Rhode Island and across the country support access to the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion. We, and they, hope that you will have the courage to oppose measures that would reduce access to reproductive healthcare services and ask you to continue supporting policies that allow men and women to make their own decisions regarding their reproductive health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon O'Brien', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon O'Brien

Enclosure:     *The Facts Tell the Story: Catholics and Choice*, Catholics for Choice, 2011.  
                  "Catholics Support Coverage for Reproductive Health," Catholics for Choice, 2011.

cc:     Lt. Governor Elizabeth Roberts