

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

January 8, 2014

US House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary
Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice
H2-362 Ford House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Franks, Ranking Member Nadler and Members of the Subcommittee:

I write to strongly encourage you and your fellow subcommittee members to oppose HR 7, the "No Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act" sponsored by Representative Chris Smith (R-NJ), which is being heard in subcommittee today. For 40 years, Catholics for Choice has served as a voice for Catholics who believe that our faith's teachings demand that every individual must follow his or her own conscience—and respect others' right to do the same. We stand with the majority of the more than 70 million Catholics in the United States who support access to reproductive healthcare services for themselves and their neighbors and who oppose to this harsh and restrictive bill.

American Catholics, in full accordance with the teachings of our faith, support the right of women and men to follow their own consciences when making critical moral decisions, including decisions about reproductive healthcare. In doing so, Catholics stand with the majority of Americans, who want healthcare decisions to be made by patients, according to their own consciences and in consultation with the medical professionals, loved ones or clergy they choose to involve—not restricted by legislators without knowledge of the personal circumstances involved. Catholics expect our elected officials to stand up for the conscience of every individual, including the millions of women who will suffer if this legislation is allowed to pass.

Nationwide, when Catholic voters considered healthcare reform in 2009, a majority supported health insurance coverage (either public or private) for abortion in most circumstances: when a pregnancy poses a threat to the life of a woman (84 percent); when a pregnancy is due to rape or incest (76 percent); when a pregnancy poses long-term health risks for a woman (73 percent); when test results show a fetus has a severe abnormal condition (66 percent); and whenever a woman and her doctor decide it is appropriate (50 percent).ⁱ In Florida a 2012 state constitutional amendment seeking to impose some of the same restrictions as HR 7 at the state level was soundly defeated by a strong majority (55 percent).ⁱⁱ According to exit polling, this included approximately 1 million Florida Catholics.ⁱⁱⁱ

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In contrast to this public support for protecting access to these services, HR 7 instead disrespects women's consciences and religious liberty rights, particularly those of lower-income and marginalized women. Contrary to our Catholic social justice tradition, this legislation would permanently impose unreasonable obstacles to safe and legal healthcare for American women who access care through our nation's safety net programs. These include women serving in the military or from military families, women who seek care through the Indian Health Service and women whose insurance is in any way affiliated with the federal government. Placing additional delays and burdens before these women is unjust and demonstrates a cruel disregard for women's human dignity.

In addition to its assault on the dignity and conscience rights of families struggling to make ends meet, this legislation would unjustly hinder the consciences of women who wish to purchase health insurance for comprehensive reproductive healthcare, or to use their private health spending accounts to cover the cost of abortion care, penalizing them simply on the basis of how they receive their insurance. If adopted, HR 7 would also inappropriately interfere with the budgetary autonomy of the District of Columbia and intrude upon the consciences of all women living or seeking medical care in DC.

Most importantly, HR 7 does not answer the problem it purports to resolve. The bill will create more challenges, hurdles and barriers for American women and cost American taxpayers—your constituents—more in uncompensated healthcare costs that result when people cannot access safe, affordable and reliable healthcare when they need it.

This legislation attempts to use our nation's tax and health insurance systems as bludgeons with which to impose the personal views of its sponsor upon all American women. Congress should have no part in compounding the difficulties of women's lives in service of a political agenda and should instead respect each woman's right to follow her conscience, no matter how she accesses healthcare or insurance.

The stance of two witnesses from whom you will hear today is not shared by the majority of Catholics in the United States. The bishops' position—opposing abortion in every instance, even in cases of rape, incest or when an abortion is necessary to preserve a woman's health or life—is shared by fewer than 15 percent of American Catholic voters,^{iv} and according to the bishops' own polling, by only 11 percent of the American populace. Those supporting this bill do so because it furthers their ultimate goal of making it impossible for women who need abortions to receive the care they need. The bishops have failed to convince Catholics in the pews of the value of their anti-reproductive health agenda, and are now seeking to use civil law to impose their beliefs upon all people.

Catholics support healthcare that is both accessible and comprehensive. Our Catholic social justice tradition encourages us to advocate for the poor, and our intellectual tradition requires our respect for the conscience-based decisions people make about their lives, including decisions about reproductive health. Our commitment to religious liberty further requires that we respect the right of individuals to follow their own beliefs and practices, without having others' beliefs forced upon them.

As a result, Catholics support policies that enable women to make decisions about their future and the future of their families, each according to her own conscience or faith tradition, and no matter how they receive their insurance. Large majorities of Catholic voters support access to and coverage for abortion—either in private- or government-run health systems. Catholic support for reproductive healthcare is grounded in the core principles of Catholicism, which respect the moral agency of all people and their right to follow their consciences on all matters.

I ask you to appreciate the breadth of Catholic opinion on these issues and not be taken in by false claims about this bill's intent or about what Catholics truly believe. I urge you to oppose HR 7 and to speak out for those who would suffer if this bill's uncompromising agenda is enacted into civil law. Now more than ever, your voice is critical to preserve our freedom.

Sincerely,



Jon O'Brien
President

ⁱ Belden Russonello & Stewart, "Catholic Voters' Views on Health Care Reform and Reproductive Health Care Services: A National Opinion Survey of Catholic Voters," September 2009.

ⁱⁱ CNN Politics America's Choice 2012 Election Center, "Florida Amendment 6: No Public Funds for Abortion," <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/state/FL/ballot/02>.

ⁱⁱⁱ CNN Politics America's Choice 2012 Election Center, Florida Presidential Election Results <http://www.cnn.com/election/2012/results/state/FL/president>.

^{iv} Belden Russonello & Stewart, "Catholic Voters' Views on Health Care Reform and Reproductive Health Care Services: A National Opinion Survey of Catholic Voters," September 2009.