

Thirty Faith-Based and National Religious Groups Call on Congress to Oppose HR 36

January 22, 2015

United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative,

We, the undersigned national faith-based and religious groups, urge you to oppose HR 36, as it would mean a ban on abortion care based on arbitrary gestational limits. We stand united across our faith traditions in opposing HR 36, sponsored by Representative Trent Franks (R-AZ). This is extreme legislation that would block a woman's access to safe health care and deny her the ability to make decisions according to her own beliefs and conscience. The decision to end a pregnancy must be left to an individual woman in consultation with her family, doctors, and any others she chooses to involve in keeping with her personal faith beliefs, rather than be imposed on her by federal law.

The religious values that guide our organizations call us to demonstrate compassion for any woman or family facing difficult circumstances related to pregnancy. As a woman makes a decision for herself and her family, we believe that it is neither our role — nor the government's — to stand in judgment. Our religious values call us to offer compassion, support, and respect for a woman and her family facing this decision. Our role must be to ensure that every person has safe and legal access to whatever care she feels is necessary and best in her situation. Each woman is a moral agent who deserves dignity and respect. If she needs more time to make a pregnancy decision, it is more important that she make the right decision for herself and her family than that she make a hasty one.

A ban on abortion after an arbitrary gestational limit, such as HR 36, will only make a challenging situation worse. Indeed, when a woman is denied a later abortion, the consequences on her life and her family can be far-reaching, impacting their health, economic security, and well-being. Health care that does not include access to later abortion does not serve the economic, medical, or emotional needs of women or our society as a whole.

Our religious values also compel us 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 financial resources to access safe care elsewhere. We stand with women who find themselves in difficult situations and therefore oppose policies, such as later abortion bans, that will disproportionately and unjustly compound the difficulties of families in our communities who are already struggling to make ends meet.

Naturally, people in this country have differing religious views on issues of pregnancy and parenting, including abortion. Freedom of belief is a core principle of our American democracy. However, legislation, such as HR 36, that would limit access to abortion care has the practical effect of imposing one particular religious belief on all people, and thus represents a gross violation of the liberty to which every American is entitled 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 this extreme legislation and any bans on abortion based on arbitrary gestational limits, such as HR 36. Such legislation blocks a woman's access to safe health care 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 religious liberty.

In faith,

A Critical Mass: Women Celebrating Eucharist
Anti-Defamation League
Bend the Arc Jewish Action
Catholics for Choice
Clergy Advocacy Board of Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Concerned Clergy for Choice
CORPUS
Disciples for Choice
Disciples Justice Action Network
Episcopal Women's Caucus
Global Justice Institute
Hadassah, The Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc.
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Jewish Women International
Keshet
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC)
Muslims for Progressive Values
National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN)
National Council of Jewish Women
Presbyterian Voices for Justice
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College and Jewish Reconstructionist Communities
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Religious Institute, Inc.
Society for Humanistic Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)
Women's League for Conservative Judaism

For more information, contact Amy Cotton, National Council of Jewish Women, at amy@ncjwdc.org or (202)296-2588 x7 or Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe, Catholics for Choice, at shutchinson@catholicsforchoice.org or (202)986-6093.