

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

May 13, 2015

Dear Member of Congress,

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 Rep. Trent Franks (R-AZ). This extreme legislation would block a woman's access to safe healthcare 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 being 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 this 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 lawmakers must 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. It is critical that every woman has as much time as she needs to make the right decision for herself and her family.

Bans on abortion after an arbitrary gestational limit—whether 20 weeks as HR 36 imposes, or any other number of weeks—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 health, economic security and well-being. Healthcare that does not include access to later abortion does not completely 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 that 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, 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.

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Again, we urge you to oppose this extreme legislation, and any bans on abortion based on arbitrary gestational limits, like HR 36. 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 religious liberty.

In faith,

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

For more information please contact Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe, Catholics for Choice, at shratcliffe@catholicsforchoice.org or (202)986-6093, or Amy Cotton, National Council of Jewish Women, at amy@ncjwdc.org or (202)296-2558 x7.