

December 14, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman, US Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-128, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Vice Chairwoman, US Senate Committee on Appropriations
S-146A, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers
Chairman, US House Committee on Appropriations
H-305, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, US House Committee on Appropriations
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Cochran, Vice Chairwoman Mikulski, Chairman Rogers, and Ranking Member Lowey:

We, the undersigned faith-based organizations and faith-centered communities dedicated to promoting and protecting sexual and reproductive health and rights, strongly oppose the inclusion of the Abortion Non-Discrimination Act (ANDA), or similar language, in any year-end funding bill.

Our organizations and communities represent millions of people of faith. We believe access to healthcare is a basic human right. We affirm women as moral agents who have the capacity, right and responsibility to make their own decisions about sexuality, reproduction and their families. We support access to abortion, contraception and other reproductive health services, and oppose public policies that impose belief by religious fiat.

While we agree religious voices and traditions are a vital part of public discourse, we recognize the pluralistic society in which we live. Conservative faith voices, such as the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, are not representative of the vast majority of people of faith from the wide diversity of religious traditions. Americans strongly reject the use of religion as a tool to limit access to healthcare, and abortion specifically—six in ten Americans think it's wrong to allow a faith-based hospital to refuse an abortion necessary to protect a woman's health. Additionally, eight in ten Americans disagree that the law should allow companies or institutions to use religious beliefs to decide whether to offer a service to some people and not others. ANDA would privilege the interests and bottom line of institutions over the health and well-being of those in need of care.

As people of faith, we value compassion and respect conscience. We strongly believe that an individual health worker's right to refuse to provide certain services must not infringe on a woman's right to access the healthcare she needs. Restrictions on women's healthcare options, such as those proposed by ANDA, endanger women's lives. ANDA would allow a faith-based medical facility to turn away a woman in a life-threatening situation who needs emergency abortion care, and it would allow a healthcare provider to refuse to give a woman complete information about her health situation, including whether abortion is a treatment option.

Cloaked in the false pretense of protecting religious liberty and conscience, the provisions of ANDA would hinder people's ability to follow their own moral codes, consciences and beliefs; it would curtail both the healthcare professionals who want to provide the best quality care in good faith and the patients seeking the medical services they need.

*For additional information, please contact Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe with Catholics for Choice
shratcliffe@catholicsforchoice.org or (202)986-6093.*

Religious freedom does honor individual conscience, but we believe ANDA goes too far. It would broadly expand religious refusals to allow institutions—beyond individual healthcare providers—to refuse to perform, participate in, pay for, or refer for abortion service, disregarding the beliefs and conscience of patients, as well as the medical professionals who want to provide necessary care.

We urge you to reject any effort to include any version of this destructive language in the FY2016 spending package.

Sincerely,

A Critical Mass: Women Celebrating Eucharist
California Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Catholics for Choice
Chicago Women-Church
Clergy Advocacy Board of Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Colorado Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Concerned Clergy for Choice
CORPUS
Jewish Women International
Kentucky Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Methodist Federation for Social Action
Muslims for Progressive Values
National Coalition of American Nuns (NCAN)
National Council of Jewish Women
New Mexico Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Presbyterian Feminist Agenda Network
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice Connecticut
Religious Institute
Society for Humanistic Judaism
Unitarian Universalist Association
Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation
Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics, and Ritual (WATER)

cc: Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid
Speaker of the House Paul Ryan
House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi