

November 14, 2017

Florida House of Representatives
Committee on Health and Human Services
The Capitol
Tallahassee, FL 32399-1300

Dear Chairman Cummings, Vice Chairman Santiago and members of the Committee:

Catholics for Choice serves as the voice of the majority of the 70 million Catholics in the United States—more than two million Catholics in Florida—who support access to comprehensive reproductive health services. On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I urge you to oppose HB 41 as it is an attempt to establish Crisis Pregnancy Centers as legitimate reproductive wellness centers. Catholics, in full accordance with the teachings of our faith, support the right of all people to follow their own consciences when making critical moral decisions, including decisions about reproductive healthcare. Catholics agree with the majority of Americans who want healthcare decisions to be made by patients, according to their own consciences and in consultation with trusted medical professionals.

Crisis Pregnancy Centers (CPCs) are counseling centers which advertise as women's health clinics while failing to provide comprehensive, evidence-based medical care. In recent years, anti-abortion Florida lawmakers have funneled funding to support CPCs with taxpayer dollars. HB 41 would provide permanent funding to the more than 120 CPCs across the state of Florida many of which are often run by ideological organizations rather than medical professionals. Most CPCs oppose abortion outright and some oppose certain forms of contraception. These facilities not only refuse to provide comprehensive counseling or referrals for necessary reproductive care, but use deceptive advertising and manipulative practices to confuse women about what types of services they provide. Instead, CPCs offer incomplete or medically inaccurate information with the goal of dissuading women from getting the healthcare they choose, and need.

Florida women have the right to make their own conscience-based reproductive healthcare decisions without interference from those seeking to shame, judge or mislead them. Women seeking reproductive healthcare options already face significant barriers to access in Florida and should not have to navigate the intentionally deceptive practices of CPCs as well. Rather than direct state funding towards CPCs that promote childbirth as the only option, we encourage the Committee to hold providers accountable. We ask you to support facilities that ensure women receive comprehensive, medically accurate information about the full spectrum of reproductive healthcare options, including contraception, pregnancy care and abortion.

PRESIDENT

Jon O'Brien

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Legislation like HB 41 interferes with a woman's access to safe healthcare options and unjustly impedes her freedom to make decisions according to her own beliefs and conscience. Religious freedom is not about telling people what they can and cannot believe or practice but about giving people the space to follow their own consciences. Freedom of belief is a core principle of our American democracy. By providing state funding to ideologically based facilities, legislation such as HB 41 has the practical effect of imposing one particular religious belief on all women who enter a CPC seeking care.

We urge you to oppose legislation like HR 41 that serves as a state endorsement of facilities that shame or mislead Florida women. Instead, please support policies that show compassion for women and families, no matter their circumstances, and respect for every individual's moral decision-making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and "O".

Jon O'Brien
President