

November 1, 2017

US House of Representatives
Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee on the Constitution and Civil Justice
2237 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Opposition for the record on HR 490, the Heartbeat Protection Act of 2017

Dear Chairman King, Ranking Member Cohen and Members of the Subcommittee,

For more than 40 years, Catholics for Choice has served as a voice for Catholics who believe that our tradition supports a woman's moral and legal right to follow her conscience on matters of personal decision-making, including decisions about abortion. Throughout the world, we strive to be an expression of Catholicism as it is lived by ordinary people. As Catholics, we are called by our faith to follow our conscience in moral decisions and to respect the rights of others to do the same. We represent the majority of the 70 million Catholics in the United States who support access to reproductive health services. Six in ten Catholics believe abortion can be a moral choice and more than eight in ten Catholics support legal abortion in some cases.

I write because we are gravely concerned about the bill you are considering today, HR 490, which would be disastrous for women. HR 490 would ban abortion as early as six weeks in a callous attempt to prevent women from making their own decisions about whether to continue a pregnancy. Instead of respecting women's consciences, as our Catholic faith compels us to do, HR 490 would allow politicians to decide when and whether a woman can access abortion care. We support women in their reproductive decision making because each woman is a moral agent who deserves dignity and respect. We believe that it is neither our role—nor the government's—to stand in judgment or interfere with a woman making this decision for herself and her family, based on her conscience.

Bans on abortion based on an arbitrary gestational limit, such as HR 490, strip women of their conscience, autonomy and moral agency. These bans are quite simply wrong. Only women can know the circumstances of their lives well enough to make the decision that is best for them. It is critical that every woman has as much time as she needs to make the best decision for herself and her family in consultation with her doctor and without the fear of arbitrary time restrictions.

Our Catholic faith also charges us to honor religious freedom, a cherished principle of our American democracy. Catholics celebrate the value of a pluralistic, secular democracy where each person is free to believe as she wills but where no religion or belief system is allowed to be imposed on everyone else.

PRESIDENT

Jon O'Brien

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Legislation such as HR 490 that limits access to abortion care based on one set of beliefs has the practical effect of imposing that one religious belief on all people. It does not reflect the religious freedom protections that are guaranteed to every individual by the US Constitution. We believe that religious freedom and moral autonomy must exist simultaneously and are never more vital than in the private decision making of a woman and her family.

Catholics across the country support access to the full range of reproductive health services, including abortion. We call upon members to reject HR 490 and any such attempts to encode any one set of beliefs into public law.

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