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**IN GOOD CONSCIENCE**

February 1, 2018

Florida Constitution Revision Commission  
Declaration of Rights Committee  
400 S. Monroe St.  
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Via Email: Tashiba Robinson, [tashiba.robinson@flcrc.gov](mailto:tashiba.robinson@flcrc.gov)

**RE: Proposed Revision to Article 1, Section 23, of the Florida Constitution**

Dear Commissioner Carlton, Commissioner Stemberger and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I urge you to oppose the proposed amendment to Art. I, Sec. 23, of the Florida Constitution, introduced by Commissioner Stemberger on October 18, 2017. Catholics for Choice serves as the voice for Catholics who believe our faith's teachings demand that every individual must follow their own conscience and respect others' right to do the same. We stand with the majority of the 70 million Catholics in the United States—over two million Catholics in Florida—who support access to reproductive health services, including abortion.

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 their medical providers, loved ones or clergy they choose to involve. Men and women of Florida have the right to make their own conscience-based decisions about when and where they receive these services, without interference from outside interests.

There are few decisions more fundamental to a woman's private life than whether and when to become a parent. The voters of Florida recognized the need for privacy in these matters by adopting the current form of the amendment in 1980. They rejected politicians' attempt to weaken the privacy clause in 2006. The Florida Supreme Court noted that the provision "was intentionally phrased in strong terms . . . in order to make the privacy right as strong as possible."<sup>1</sup> Florida women's drive to make their own moral decisions about their reproductive health has not changed in the past 37 years. Their right to privacy in doing so should not either.

Catholics for Choice recognizes that people in this country have differing religious and moral views on issues of pregnancy and parenting, including abortion. Freedom of belief is a core principle of our American democracy. Therefore, we consistently affirm the promise of the US Constitution—both freedom of and freedom from religion. Each woman should have the ability to follow her own conscience in deciding whether to continue a pregnancy because only she can know the circumstances informing her choice. Proposals like the privacy amendment before you today would open the door to imposing one particular religious belief on all people, in violation of our most fundamental rights.

**PRESIDENT**

Jon O'Brien

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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. Few decisions are as personal as choosing to continue a pregnancy or seek an abortion. We urge you to ensure that protections guaranteed under Florida's privacy clause continue to protect a woman's most private decisions regarding her own body.

We call upon you to oppose the proposal before you today and to preserve the rights of Florida women to act as the primary moral agents in their lives.

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, Catholics for Choice

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<sup>1</sup> Winfield v. Div. of Pari-Mutuel Wagering, Dept. of Bus. Regulation, 477 So. 2d 544, 548 (Fla. 1985).