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**IN GOOD CONSCIENCE**

February 13, 2018

House Criminal Justice Committee  
Ohio House of Representatives  
1 Capital Square  
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Chairman Manning, Ranking Member Celebrezze and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I urge you to oppose SB 145 and its sweeping restrictions on women's access to safe, legal abortion. Catholics for Choice serves as a voice for the vast majority of Catholics across the United States—almost two million in Ohio—who support access to comprehensive reproductive health services, including abortion. As Catholics, in full accordance with the teachings of our faith, we support each woman's ability to make deeply personal choices that are right for her and her family, including whether to become or remain pregnant, according to her own beliefs and conscience.

Since 2010, Ohio has enacted 20 different restrictions on the constitutional right to abortion. State leaders have placed increasingly burdensome requirements on the women of Ohio, mandating state-directed counseling, requiring medically unnecessary ultrasound procedures, placing arbitrary waiting periods and gestational limits on eligibility and, most recently, policing women's very motivations for seeking care. Taken together, these actions send a clear message: this body believes that the women of Ohio cannot be trusted to make their own moral decisions.

As Catholics, we could not object more strenuously. Central to our faith is the belief that the individual conscience of each person is the keystone of moral decision making. Because each woman is a moral agent deserving of dignity and respect, we believe that it is neither our role—nor the government's—to stand in judgment of or interfere with a woman making conscience-based decisions for herself and her family. Only she can know her unique circumstances well enough to make the choice that is right for her, according to her beliefs and values.

The bill before you today, SB 145, would ban the safest and most common procedure for late abortions. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), the dilation and evacuation (D&E) procedure is the "predominant approach to abortion after 13 weeks," and it is "evidence-based and medically preferred because it results in the fewest complications for women compared to alternative procedures."<sup>1</sup> SB 145 runs counter to the professional expertise of Ohio's doctors, creating unnecessary risk for your constituents, and would insert political ideology into the trusting relationship between provider and patient.

**PRESIDENT**

Jon O'Brien

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We recognize this bill for what it is: an attempt to ban abortions after 12 weeks, in an end run around women's moral autonomy and constitutional rights. SB 145 would be disastrous for Ohio women, many of whom already face significant barriers to comprehensive reproductive healthcare. Instead of improving quality or availability, the bill serves to create greater procedural barriers to treatment, drive up costs and further erode women's ability to direct their own medical care.

Our Catholic faith charges us to honor religious freedom, a cherished principle of our American democracy. Catholics celebrate the value of a pluralistic, secular democracy where every person is assured both freedom of and freedom from religion. 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 her own beliefs. Legislation like SB 145 has the practical effect of imposing one religious belief on all Ohio women by establishing as law a particular view on abortion. This bill does not reflect the religious freedom protections that are guaranteed to every individual by the federal and state constitutions, rights that are never more vital than in the private decision making of a woman and her family.

Please do not allow antichoice lobbyists to further a political agenda and take decisions about abortion away from the women who need them. No woman should be coerced into a decision that runs counter to her beliefs, including whether to become pregnant or continue a pregnancy, or prevented from receiving the best advice from her doctor. No doctor should be forced to act against their conscience and best medical opinion. The women of Ohio deserve more than to be pawns in a political game.

Again, I urge you to oppose extreme legislation, like SB 145, that interferes with a woman's access to safe healthcare options and unjustly denies her the freedom to make her own conscience-based decisions. As Catholics, we trust women and believe they and their families deserve dignity and respect for their personal, private healthcare decisions. I ask you to stand with the majority of your constituents who need and support access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion.

Please vote no on SB 145 and any further attempts to impose a particular political agenda, to the detriment of women's health and moral autonomy, on the women seeking reproductive care.

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".

Jon O'Brien  
President

<sup>1</sup> American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, "ACOG Statement Regarding Abortion Procedure Bans" (Oct. 9, 2015), <https://www.acog.org/About-ACOG/News-Room/Statements/2015/ACOG-Statement-Regarding-Abortion-Procedure-Bans>.