
IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

May 2, 2018

The Honorable Kim Reynolds
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50319

Dear Governor Reynolds:

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I urge you to veto SF 359 and its radical restrictions on women's access to safe, legal abortion. This extreme proposal would inhibit a woman's ability to make conscience-based decisions about her pregnancy according to her own beliefs, and instead allows politicians to decide whether and when she can access abortion care. The decision to end a pregnancy must be left to each woman, in consultation with her family, doctors and any others she chooses to involve, in accordance with her personal faith beliefs and circumstances. It should not be imposed on her by state law.

For more than forty years, Catholics for Choice has served as a voice for the majority of the faithful in the Catholic church who support access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare. We strive to be an expression of Catholicism as it is lived by ordinary people, nearly half a million of whom call Iowa home. Across the world, we aim to advance sound public policy rooted in respect for individual conscience and moral autonomy. As Catholics, we recognize that each woman is a moral agent, with an incontrovertible knowledge of her unique circumstances and needs. Only she is able to make these decisions, with the people she chooses to involve. We are called to show compassion, support and respect for her choices about what is right for her and her family, according to her own beliefs and conscience.

The Iowa Catholic Conference and its conservative allies suggest that they speak for all Catholics who call this state home, but they do not. In fact, only 14 percent of Catholic voters agree with the bishops' position that abortion should be illegal in every circumstance.¹ Catholic women seek abortion care at the same rate as other women² and 99 percent of sexually experienced Catholic women have used a form of birth control that the bishops oppose.³ When asked in 2014, six in ten Catholic voters believed that abortion can be a moral choice and a majority of respondents believes it should be covered by all health insurance plans in a number of circumstances.⁴

These statistics are not surprising given Catholicism's deference to the individual conscience as the keystone of moral decision-making. It is both a gift and a responsibility that we are called upon to follow our consciences and respect the rights of others to do the same. It is not our role, nor that of our legislators, to supersede the moral autonomy of the women of Iowa as they make decisions about abortion and their own reproductive health.

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SF 359 seeks to do just that. This bill would substantially interfere with women's ability to access the care that is right for them, banning abortion at a point where many women do not yet know they are pregnant. Bans on abortion after an arbitrary gestational limit—whether six weeks, 20 weeks or otherwise—fail to consider the medical and personal circumstances of the woman. SF 359 would bind the hands of medical professionals who seek to provide comprehensive reproductive healthcare to their patients. Arbitrary gestational limits on abortion interfere with doctors' ability to use their advanced training and medical judgment to prioritize the health and wellbeing of women under their care.

Additionally, SF 359 would place duplicative and unnecessary requirements on the handling of fetal tissue following the termination of a pregnancy. This is a solution in search of a problem, adding further restrictions to an already burdensome process.

Bills like SF 359 are not about improving the lives of Iowa residents, but instead seek to manipulate women to advance a particular ideology. Such bans do not account for the economic, emotional or environmental factors that may lead a woman to seek an abortion. When a woman is denied an abortion, the consequences on her life and family can be far-reaching. It is critical that every woman have as much time as she needs to make the best decision for herself, without fear of arbitrary time restrictions. Healthcare that does not include access to later abortion does not completely serve the economic, medical or emotional needs of women as a whole.

We also know that whenever bans or other severe restrictions to abortion are enacted, those most negatively affected are women without the financial resources to access safe care elsewhere. This is an affront to our Catholic tradition of social justice, which guides us to advocate for policies that empower those marginalized in our communities. Please do not compound the difficulties of families in our communities who must overcome substantial barriers just to make ends meet. The women of Iowa, particularly those who already struggle to provide for themselves and their families, deserve more than to be pawns in a political game.

Again, I urge you to veto extreme legislation like SF 359 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. 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.

I ask you to stand with the majority of your constituents, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, who need and support access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare, including abortion. Please veto SF 359 and any further attempts to impose a particular political agenda on the reproductive health decisions of your constituents. Instead, I call upon you to enact policies that respect conscience and moral autonomy, promote access to comprehensive healthcare and bolster the self-determination of Iowa women.

Sincerely,



Jon O'Brien
President

¹ Belden Russanello Strategists, "Catholic Voters' View on Health Care Reform and Reproductive Health Care Services: A National Survey," September 2009.

² Guttmacher Institute, "Characteristics of US Abortion Patients, 2014 and Changes Since 2008," November 2014, <https://www.guttmacher.org/report/characteristics-us-abortion-patients-2014>.

³ National Survey of Family Growth 2006-2010, www.cdc.gov/nchs/nsfg.htm.

⁴ Belden Russanello Strategists, "A National Opinion Survey of Catholic Voters Conducted for Catholics for Choice, Call to Action, DignityUSA and Women's Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual (WATER)," November 2014.