

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

June 17, 2019

Joint Committee on the Judiciary
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02111

Dear Chairperson Eldridge, Chairperson Cronin and members of the Committees,

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I wish to express our strong support for the ROE Act. Throughout the world, we strive to be an expression of Catholicism as it is lived by ordinary people and to advance sound public policy rooted in true religious liberty. We are proud to join our partners in support of the ROE Act because we care about the people of Massachusetts, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, and trust them to make their own conscience-based decisions.

Nearly 2.8 million Catholics call Massachusetts home, making up 41% of the state's total population. Catholics support each woman's ability to choose the reproductive healthcare that is right for her. A majority of Catholics believe that abortion should be legal in the United States, and six in ten Catholics believe abortion can be a moral choice. It should come as no surprise that these beliefs are reflected in practice, as Catholic women access abortion and contraception at rates identical to those of other faiths and those who do not identify with any particular faith.

Catholic teaching regards our conscience as the final arbiter in any moral decision each of us must make. We regard it as both a gift and a responsibility in that we are called to follow our conscience and to respect the right of others to do the same. It is neither our place nor that of our legislators to supplant the moral discernment of our neighbor. It is disappointing that some people seem willing to negotiate over the rights of others, rather than adhering to the principle that they ought not to interfere with a woman's ability to make the decisions that are best for her and her family. The ROE Act would protect every Massachusetts woman's right to safe, legal abortion. I hope you will work to protect individual conscience and stand up for the women of Massachusetts.

Opponents of the ROE Act have circulated much misinformation about the effects of the bill, using our churches and town meetings as platforms for spreading ghastly lies about this legislation and the brave moral leaders who support it. To be clear, the ROE Act would acknowledge the inherent dignity of each person by ensuring equitable access to reproductive healthcare services—including abortion—for all the people of Massachusetts, regardless of their individual situations and of what happens nationally. If *Roe v. Wade* is further weakened by the Supreme Court it is the poor, rural, young and people of color who will suffer the most.

(more)

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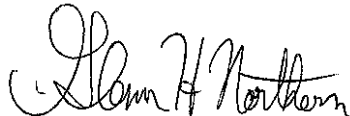
In keeping with the Catholic social-justice tradition which calls us to advocate for the most marginalized in our society, we beseech this committee to stand affirmatively for the moral autonomy of all Massachusetts women seeking to make deeply personal decisions about their reproductive futures according to their own conscience, by passing the ROE Act.

Few decisions are more personal than choosing whether and when to become a parent. True religious freedom requires us to respect each person's reproductive health decisions that they make based on their own religious beliefs and moral convictions. I urge you to resist the pressure and intimidation from a vocal minority—be it the Massachusetts Catholic Conference or anti-choice groups spreading misinformation about the ROE Act—seeking your help in restricting the moral autonomy of their neighbors.

Our Catholic faith charges us to respect religious pluralism and religious freedom. Religious freedom is an expansive rather than restrictive idea, encompassing both freedom of and freedom from religion. It is not about telling people what they can and cannot believe or practice, but rather about respecting each person's right to live according to their own values and precepts. The ROE Act would codify these principles of reproductive freedom into state law, thus safeguarding against harmful restrictions on abortion care and attacks on religious liberty in the Commonwealth.

The proper role of government in this country is not to privilege one set of religious views over others, but rather to protect each person's right to make decisions according to their own beliefs and values, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. During this time when so many of our rights are under attack, Massachusetts has an opportunity to be on the right side of history and prove to its residents that their livelihood matters to their representatives. On behalf of Catholics for Choice and the majority of Catholics in the Commonwealth, we urge this committee to support the ROE Act in recognition of women's moral autonomy and capacity for self-determination. It is the right thing to do.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Glenn Northern". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Glenn Northern
Domestic Program Director