

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

November 8, 2011

The Honorable Patrick Quinn
Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Governor Quinn,

Thank you for acting as the voice of reason and as a model of leadership for Catholic public servants in light of the recent statements by the Illinois Catholic hierarchy. I know all too well how very troubling it can be to be attacked and maligned for the motivations that we bring to our work. It is even more personally jarring when those attacks come from leaders in our church's hierarchy. Disagreements on complex social policy issues are difficult enough without personal attacks such as those aimed at you by Cardinal George and the bishops of Illinois.

In their outcry against you and your dedication to all women's access to healthcare, the bishops have acted without due respect for our faith's teachings on the primacy of individual conscience and against the beliefs of the majority of the more than 446,000 Catholics in Illinois, as well as those of the more than 68 million Catholics in the United States.

As Catholics, and in the social justice commitment that is central to our faith, we believe, as you described, that it is important to support those who work for the common good of "the community at large." Compassion for rape victims and access to reproductive healthcare services for all women certainly reflect that commitment to the common good.

Your comments articulated another belief central to our faith—that one has the right to follow one's conscience in all matters of moral decision-making. This respect for individual conscience extends to policymakers and other public leaders, who have both an obligation to serve each of their constituents—not simply those shouting the loudest—and a right to form their decisions by following their own conscience.

Indeed, Catholics value a distinct separation between religion and government and strongly disagree with the vitriol and lack of compassion employed by the hierarchy in recent debates surrounding marriage equality, abortion and other issues of sexual and reproductive rights. Catholic voters consult their own conscience when choosing which candidates to support—only eight percent of Catholics believe that the views of the US bishops are "very important" in deciding how to vote. We know, as do you, that Catholic support for reproductive healthcare services, including abortion, is not only "reconcilable" with but supported by the central tenets of our shared faith.

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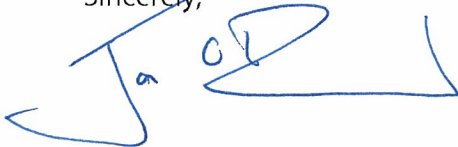
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Thank you, Governor, for advocating for the rights of all Illinois residents to live according to their individual beliefs, not those of one particular ideology. Thank you for acting as a model for Catholic public servants and for shedding light when those who attack you would only bring heat. The agenda of those who attack Catholic public servants is clearly to silence those who believe that the truth matters—and it is speaking out from a place of conscience, as you have, that will cause these intimidation techniques to fail.

We, your fellow Catholics, stand with you and thank you for standing up for all those whose voices might otherwise be drowned out by the bishops.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jon O'Brien', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon O'Brien
President