

# CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

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Testimony of David Nolan  
Communications Director, Catholics for Choice  
To the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety  
Public Hearing Regarding "Bill 20-790, Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Act of 2014"

Thank you, Chairman Wells and honored Councilmembers, for the opportunity to speak today. My name is David Nolan, and I am the director of communications at Catholics for Choice, a faith-based organization headquartered here in the District of Columbia. On behalf of Catholics for Choice, which serves as a voice for the majority of Catholics on issues of reproductive rights, and on my own behalf as a 15-year DC resident, I am here to register strong support for Bill 20-790, the Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Amendment Act.

As an employer in the District, Catholics for Choice wholeheartedly supports this bill's goal of ensuring that all workers are able to make their own reproductive health decisions without fear of retribution from their employers. Working as I do at a faith-based organization that respects the ability of all people to make reproductive healthcare decisions according to their own consciences, our workers already enjoy this right. We firmly believe, however, that no worker should be left without this basic acknowledgment of their human dignity.

The majority of Catholics agree. According to polling, 91 percent of US Catholic voters believe that a company should not be allowed to fire an unmarried, pregnant employee because of the owners' religious beliefs. Meanwhile, 99 percent of sexually experienced Catholic women have used birth control—and deserve protection from being fired for making this conscience-based decision. The Reproductive Health Non-Discrimination Amendment Act would protect workers from these kinds of discrimination and others.

Our support for this bill is grounded in our Catholic faith. As Catholics, we believe that every person has an ability and obligation to follow his or her own conscience when making critical moral decisions, including decisions about reproductive healthcare. Conscience may be guided but never coerced, and one cannot use one's conscience to trample on the rights of others. Workers therefore have a conscience-based right to make reproductive healthcare decisions without interference by their employers. As Catholics, we also believe in social justice and human dignity for all people—no worker should be relegated to second-class status just because of where she works. We also believe, in accordance with our Catholic tradition, that religious freedom has two sides: freedom of religion, and freedom from religion. Employers have a right to their beliefs, but they do not have a right to use those beliefs to interfere with the exercise of another's conscience.

This kind of discrimination against employees, unfortunately, is not a vestige of the past. At Catholics for Choice, we have had the dubious honor of hearing the stories of women working for other employers in the District and throughout the country who have faced this kind of discrimination. You may hear or read several of their stories today. Right now, the rights of women workers also hang in the balance as the Supreme Court will rule on whether corporations can deny their employees basic health coverage.

This bill would help to ensure that workers in DC do not need to fear that their personal reproductive healthcare decisions will become grounds for retribution by their bosses, and it will guarantee that no matter what happens at a national level, DC residents will still have the freedom of conscience guaranteed to them by our Constitution and supported by our Catholic faith.

At Catholics for Choice, we have supported members of this council each time you stood up against infringements on women's autonomy and for the wishes of your constituents. This bill represents another opportunity for the Council to demonstrate true leadership when it comes to respecting women's consciences, workers' rights and social justice for all people.