

# CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

June 23, 2014

Testimony of Katie Breslin  
Domestic Program Associate, 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 members of the committee, for the opportunity to speak. My name is Katie Breslin, and I am the domestic program associate at Catholics for Choice. It is my honor to deliver oral testimony on behalf of two Catholic women. Both of these women live in DC. Until recently, both worked for employers in the District that restricted their rights to make their own reproductive healthcare decisions. They are unable to be here in person today, but they feel strongly that this committee needs to hear their stories in order to understand who this bill will protect from discrimination in the future.

First, Margaret had this to share:

"As a Catholic woman, I urge you to pass this legislation to ensure that women have safe access to birth control and other reproductive health needs. I have been an employee at a Catholic church in Washington, DC, and were I to still be employed by the Archdiocese of Washington, I would not have had the freedom to make this statement to you, for fear of losing my job. So I feel the need to say this on behalf of the women employed by religious institutions who fear getting fired for using reproductive health services, and on behalf of the women and men who fear voicing support for reproductive health rights.

"This legislation is an important step in ensuring that DC's workforce is safe from employment discrimination when making decisions based on health needs that an employer might disagree with. Employers have no right to exert their influence on their employees' healthcare decisions, but in the case of some institutions in our city, that is sadly the current reality."

Margaret is not the only one to feel this way. Another Katie from DC wished to share this:

"My name is Katie. I'm 29 years old and I'm a proud third-generation Washingtonian. I'm Catholic and have worked in Catholic institutions for most of my working life. I wanted to begin using birth control two years ago, and was surprised to learn that my Catholic health insurance plan did not cover it. So naturally, I cheered at the passing of the Affordable Care Act, which promised free contraceptive coverage for all women. But my joy turned to disappointment when I learned that certain religious employers were allowed a so-called "religious liberty" exemption, meaning they would not have to cover contraceptives.

"Yes, I'm one of the 99 percent of sexually active Catholics who has used contraceptives. And because of loopholes, I had to pay out of pocket for what should be a basic healthcare right.

"That's why I support this bill. I know what it's like to have a healthcare decision made for me because of someone else's interpretation of our faith. I'm not sure when federal protections

will be in place for women like me, so I commend the DC City Council's effort to protect the conscience rights of Washingtonians who want to work without fear.

"I cannot be here to deliver this testimony in person because it's literally my first day at a new job here in DC. After 5 years of Catholic employment, I have moved to a secular workplace. As this testimony is read, I may be in a human resources training where I am learning about the various health insurance options and picking a plan that meets my needs. I don't know which one I'll choose, but I know that all of them will meet my basic healthcare need for contraception. I await the day when all women will be able to make that choice without interference from their boss. Until then, thank you, City Council, for taking a small step toward protecting DC employees like me."

Thank you, members of the council, on behalf of myself, Margaret, and Katie, for the opportunity to give voice to the workers whom this critical legislation would help to protect. I, and the two women I represent today, urge you to pass it.