

June 2, 2020

Tennessee State Capitol
House Standing Committee on Health
425 5th Avenue North Cordell Hull Bldg.
Nashville, TN 37243

Dear Committee Chairs Terry and Helton and Members of the Committee:

We respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HB2263/SB2196. These measures are a violation of the core principles of our Catholic faith, namely the primacy of conscience, the call to social justice and the respect for religious freedom.

Tennessee is home to more than 200,000 Catholics. Decades of polling confirm that a solid majority of Catholics believe abortion should be legal in the United States and can be a moral choice. And the Catholics in Tennessee agree.

Catholics for Choice serves as the voice for the majority of faithful Catholics who believe our tradition supports a woman's right to follow her conscience on important moral matters, such as deciding when and whether to continue a pregnancy. We work across the United States and around to world to ensure that all people have access to safe and affordable reproductive healthcare services, in full accordance with the teachings of our faith. We strive to be an expression of Catholicism as it is lived by ordinary people, representing the majority of Catholics who support public policy that ensures the right of individuals to make conscience-based decisions about their reproductive health, not legislative measures that curtail it.

Catholics oppose legislation such as HB2263/SB2196 because they interfere with a woman's ability to exercise her conscience and thus undercut her moral agency. This should come as no surprise when we consider that Catholic women seek abortion and contraception at rates identical to women of other faiths or of no particular faith. There is no place for paternalistic bills like these which substitute the judgement of politicians or the church hierarchy in place of the moral agency of individuals.

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At the heart of church teachings on moral matters is a deep regard for an individual's conscience. Catholic teaching regards conscience as the final arbiter in any moral decision. It is both a gift and a responsibility that we are called to always follow our conscience above all else and to respect the right of others to do the same.

It is therefore morally repugnant to Catholics to force someone to give birth against their will. Catholics can, in good conscience, support access to abortion and affirm that abortion can be a moral choice. Indeed, many of us do.

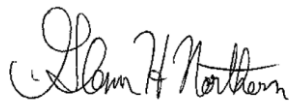
Our core Catholic principle of social justice compels us to advocate for equitable policies that enable every individual to receive the healthcare they need—including abortion. We believe that we must support every woman as she acts as her own moral agent over deeply consequential decisions around pregnancy. It is not our place to judge or condemn women seeking care but rather it is our duty to show compassion and respect for their conscience-based decisions.

Catholics are called to respect religious pluralism and religious freedom. Religious freedom is an expansive rather than restrictive idea encompassing both freedom of religion and freedom from religion. We ask you to appreciate the breadth of Catholic opinion on these issues and not be deceived by the false claims of those who pretend to speak for all Catholics in Tennessee. Be assured, Catholics support access to the full range of reproductive health services.

On behalf of Catholics for Choice and the majority of Catholics in Tennessee, I urge you to reject HB2263/SB2196 as a sign of your commitment to the moral autonomy of all who reside in Tennessee. We, and they, hope that you will heed these voices and oppose measures that would stymie access to abortion.

It is what your Catholic constituents want from their representatives and it is the right thing to do.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Glenn Northern". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Glenn Northern
Domestic Program Director