

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

April 9, 2018

House Health Committee
Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Chairperson Rapp, Vice Chairperson Fabrizio and members of the Committee,

On behalf of Catholics for Choice, I strongly urge you to oppose HB 2050 and its restrictions on women's access to safe, legal abortion. Catholics for Choice serves as the voice of the majority of the 70 million Catholics in the United States—nearly two million of whom call Pennsylvania home—who support access to comprehensive reproductive healthcare. 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.

Catholic teaching regards conscience as the final moral arbiter. It is both a gift and a responsibility that in all matters of decision-making, we are called upon to follow our consciences and to respect the rights of others to do the same. It is not our place to supplant the choices of our neighbor with our own, regardless of whether we would come to the same conclusion ourselves, but to support and care for her whatever decision she makes.

The proposal before you today seeks to do just that. Bans on abortion for a particular reason—due to fetal diagnosis of Down Syndrome, as in HB 2050, or any other proposed restriction—only serve to shame, judge and punish women for their deeply personal decisions. Women are moral agents, and they alone know their unique circumstances. When a woman is hindered from pursuing the healthcare that is right for her, the consequences on her life and her family can be far-reaching. It is not the role of our lawmakers to assign value to her choices, but instead to grant each woman the dignity and respect to follow her conscience when deciding whether and when to become a parent.

Catholics support policies that enable people to make decisions about their future and the future of their families. This legislation will unjustly hinder the consciences of women who seek reproductive health services while doing nothing to actually improve the lives of Pennsylvania residents living with disabilities. Instead, it would negatively affect women with few resources to access safe care elsewhere, such as those with lower income and those living in rural areas.

Our faith calls upon us to advocate for policies that empower the most marginalized in our communities. We stand with women in difficult situations, and therefore must oppose policies, such as reason-specific abortion bans, that will disproportionately and unjustly compound the difficulties of families in our communities that are already struggling to make ends meet.

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Finally, freedom of belief is a core principle of our American democracy. Religious freedom is an expansive rather than restrictive idea, encompassing both the 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. True religious freedom requires us to respect all people's reproductive health decisions, Catholic and non-Catholic alike, based on their religious beliefs and moral convictions.

Legislation such as HB 2050 that would limit access to abortion care has the practical effect of imposing one particular religious belief on all people, which does not reflect the religious freedom protections that are guaranteed to every individual by the Constitution. The proper role of government in the United States is not to privilege one set of religious views over others, but to protect each person's right and ability to make decisions according to their own beliefs and values.

Again, I urge you to oppose extreme proposals, like HB 2050, and any similar reason-specific bans on abortion. Such legislation blocks a woman's access to safe healthcare options and unjustly denies her the freedom to make decisions according to her own beliefs and conscience. Instead, we ask that you support policies that show compassion for women and families, no matter their circumstances, and respect for every individual's moral decision-making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jon O'Brien". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and "O".

Jon O'Brien
President