



September 28, 2021

The Honorable Carolyn B. Maloney
Chair
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable James Comer
Ranking Member
House Committee on Oversight and Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Catholics for Choice Testimony — A State of Crisis: Examining the Urgent Need to Protect and Expand Abortion Rights and Access

Dear Chairwoman Maloney, Ranking Member Comer, and Committee Members:

Catholics for Choice is a nonprofit organization that lifts up the voices of the overwhelming majority of Catholics who believe in reproductive freedom. Since 1973, we have worked in the United States and around the world to ensure that all people have access to safe and affordable reproductive healthcare services. We strive to be an expression of Catholicism as it is lived by ordinary people and to dismantle religiously-based obstructions to abortion care, contraceptive access, and comprehensive health care, particularly because these barriers disproportionately affect people of color, the poor, and the vulnerable.

For decades, ultraconservative policymakers have been working overtime, at the bidding of allies like the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), to destroy access to abortion, state by state and law by law. Indeed, since 2011, states across the country have passed nearly 500 laws blatantly designed to undermine long-held constitutional rights and to single out abortion for regulation that applies to no similar medical care. These cruel and dangerous policies restrict or outright ban abortion care; limit who and where care can be provided; force providers to perform unnecessary services and to deliver inaccurate, biased counseling; mandate waiting periods and parental interference with personal decision-making — all with the express purpose of increasing costs, decreasing the number of clinics and providers, and delaying or blocking access to care. While Texas' recently enacted Senate Bill 8 represents an extreme example of these heinous laws, it is far from the first attempt to eliminate abortion access in the United States, and it will not be the last.

Despite what the USCCB would like legislators to believe, the majority of Catholics, including many past and present theologians, feel that abortion can be a moral choice. St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, both Doctors of the Church, believed that the fetus did not become a person (or become “ensouled”) until later in the pregnancy. For much of the church’s history, popes made clear distinctions between ensouled and unensouled fetuses. Even today, although the Vatican does

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not condone abortion, it has said definitively that it does not know when a developing life becomes a person. This history demonstrates that the Catholic tradition is more than the teachings written down by popes and theologians. Catholicism is based on a deep respect for the conscience, which each person must follow above all else when making a moral decision. We value all individuals as moral agents, free to make their own personal choices about their lives, families, and futures with dignity and without political interference.

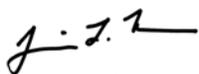
What's more, most Catholic voters support access to insurance coverage for abortion, whether through private or government-run plans, and believe that the protections of *Roe v. Wade* must be preserved and that abortion should remain legal in all or most cases. In contrast, the bishops' position — opposing abortion in every instance, even in cases of rape, incest or when it is necessary to preserve a pregnant person's health or life — is only shared by only 10% of Catholic voters.

Ultimately, as Catholics, we are called to advocate for policies that advance the human rights of those who are most vulnerable and marginalized in our society and who are most harmed by abortion restrictions. All people deserve safe healthcare services, as well as support and compassion from us — not judgment and shame. But, as a result of the ongoing, relentless attack on reproductive freedom, abortion access has already been reduced or even eliminated in large segments of the nation, particularly for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC); those working to make ends meet; members of the LGBTQI+ community; immigrants; young people; those living in rural communities; and people with disabilities. Sinful structures of systemic racism, gender inequality, economic insecurity, and immigration restrictions are antithetical to our faith tradition and to the principles of equality, liberty, and justice that our nation was founded upon.

Instead, a compassionate nation must ensure that every single person can access quality, timely medical care from trusted providers, regardless of who they are, how much they earn, or where they live. The theoretical legal right to abortion has never been enough and it is time for Congress to pass legislation that guarantees abortion is available and affordable to anyone who seeks it. Catholics for Choice unequivocally supports the Women's Health Protection Act (HR 3755) — which would guarantee providers the right to deliver abortion care, and people the right to receive that care, without medically unnecessary restrictions — and the Equal Access to Abortion Coverage in Health Insurance (EACH) Act (HR 2234) — which would end the Hyde Amendment and similar bans denying abortion coverage for those enrolled in federal health programs — as a means to this critical end.

Catholics for Choice applauds recent House passage of the Women's Health Protection Act and looks forward to working with the Committee to advance the EACH Act. Thank you for holding a hearing on this incredibly important and timely topic and for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please contact Shannon Russell, Director of Policy, at srussell@catholicsforchoice.org.

Respectfully submitted,



Jamie L. Manson
President, Catholics for Choice