

CATHOLICS FOR CHOICE

IN GOOD CONSCIENCE

January 21, 2020

Kansas State Capitol
House Federal and State Affairs Committee and Senate Judiciary Committee
300 SW 10th St.
Topeka, Kansas 66612

Dear Committee Chairs Barker and Wilborn, Ranking Members Ruiz and Miller and Members of the Committees:

We respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to HCR 5019 and SCR 1613. These measures are a violation of the core principles our Catholic faith teaches, namely the primacy of conscience, the imperative for social justice and the respect for religious freedom.

Kansas is home to more than 400,000 Catholics, making up 14% of the state's population. Decades of polling tells us that a solid majority of Catholics believe that abortion should be legal in the United States and six in 10 Catholics believe abortion can be a moral choice. And the Catholics in Kansas 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 the 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 HCR 5019 and SCR 1613 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.

Catholic teachings on moral decision-making and abortion are complex. In Catholic theology there is room for the acceptance of policies that favor access to the full range of reproductive health options, including contraception and abortion. Moreover, Catholic teachings on abortion have changed over time. The actual history of abortion teaching and dissent within the church demonstrates shifting emphasis, reasoning, prominence and attention. In fact, through most of history the church largely ignored abortion.

At the heart of church teachings on moral matters is a deep regard for an individual's conscience. The Catechism states that "a human being must always obey the certain judgment of his 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.

ACTING PRESIDENT

Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe

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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. The Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom reinforced the call for Catholics to respect the positions of people of other faiths. When the church hierarchy uses its influence to push legislation that would affect all Kansas residents, they contravene both the Vatican's declaration and the US Constitution's First Amendment. This is particularly significant given that the Catholic hierarchy's positions on health policies, including abortion, are more conservative than those of other major faith groups—and most Catholics do not support the Vatican's position on abortion.

Church teachings, tradition and core Catholic tenets—including the primacy of conscience, the role of the faithful in defining legitimate laws and norms, and support for the separation of church and state—leave room for supporting a more liberal position on abortion. Catholics can, in good conscience, support access to abortion and affirm that abortion can be a moral choice. Indeed, many of us do.

We ask you to appreciate the breadth of Catholic opinion on these issues and not be deceived by the false claims of those who claim to speak for all in Kansas—be it the Kansas Catholic Conference, their conservative allies or anti-choice interest groups. 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 Kansas, I urge you to reject HCR 5019 and SCR 1613 as a sign of your commitment to the moral autonomy of all Kansans. 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 blue ink, appearing to read "Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Sara Hutchinson Ratcliffe
Acting President